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Baby-sitting: A way kids can earn cash

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MERIDEN - Local teens and tweens are taking responsibility and thinking about ways to make money over the summer, and in a poor job market, the skills they learn could help them in the future as well as now.

Though they may be too young now to apply for a job at McDonald's or a grocery store, they are capable of being baby sitters.

Eleven young people enrolled recently in an American Red Cross Baby-sitting Class at the Meriden YMCA. For several hours, the class of males and females learned the ins and outs of being a good sitter. YMCA fitness director Carrie Marquardt led the class.

Students watched an informational video, took notes and then answered Marquardt's questions on preparing meals and bottles for children. Using a doll and a disposable diaper, students practiced how to change a diaper. The class also taught the students leadership skills, how to handle emergency situations, first aid and how to care for children of all ages.

Gabby Gonzalez, 13, said she took the baby-sitting class because she wanted a summer job and the chance to make some money. She has seen her mother change diapers and thinks "it's kind of easy." Gonzalez said she's aware of the work involved, but is ready to take on the task.

Marquardt said the class is offered three times per year to 10 to 15 youths ages 11 to 15. The smaller the class, the better, she said. Students leave the class with a certificate and the confidence to watch children, she said.

"It is a huge responsibility," Marquardt said. "It's OK if they're not ready to baby-sit for an infant."

Robert Fort, marketing director at Workforce Alliance, said it's a difficult time for young people to obtain a job. It's made even more challenging because older people are willing to take on jobs teens used to have, he said.

The Pew Research Center conducted a survey in December 2011 that found that 49 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds took jobs they didn't want just to pay the bills.

"This is the worst time of unemployment for young people since World War II," Fort said.

Youths looking for baby-sitting training is good, Fort said. It's a traditional job that provides the young people with credentials and certificates, and is always in demand. According to a report conducted by the congressional Joint Economic Committee in May 2010, young workers ages 16 to 17 experience the highest rates of unemployment. Young teens only make up 1.2 percent of the workforce.

Fort said he tries to stay optimistic and tells people to just keep looking. Jobs open up, people change jobs and lose jobs.

Student Matt Vazquez, 13, answered questions and shared insights at the YMCA class.

Vazquez has younger siblings and is no novice to changing a dirty diaper. He said baby-sitting would be a good first summer job. It's a way to make some money and have some

fun, Vazquez said. He is confident he'll find some families willing to hire him. Vazquez was one of two boys in the class.

"I'm not intimidated," he said.

Marquardt said every time they offer the class, there are always a couple boys.

"They need jobs, too," she said. "They're always great."

Kallan Doyon, 10, worked with other students as they took turns changing their doll's diaper. They struggled at times and helped each other. They all successfully put the diaper on the doll.

"I always wanted to work with little kids," said Doyon, who has never been a baby sitter.

"This class is very helpful."

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Photos by Savannah Mul / Record-Journal

Above: Carrie Marquardt, fitness director at the Meriden YMCA, helps Stefanie Charpentier, 10, of Meriden, with the proper way to remove gloves after changing a diaper during a babysitting class last Wednesday. Right: Gabby Gonzalez, 13, of Meriden, uses a baby doll to learn how to properly change a diaper.