

US – Monday, April 6

# ‘Get a job’ isn’t that easy

*“Anyone who lives in the real world should know it’s hard to get a job when you can’t afford a babysitter, or shoes for that matter.”*

Say you’re a New Yorker, and you’re poor. You’re hardly alone: The latest figures show that close to one in four people in this city live without enough cash to afford basic needs, and it’s only likely to get worse as “finding a job” begins to seem like a relic of a quaint era, like buggy whips or analog cell phones.

So what, then, does it take to get yourself back on your feet, and why are so many people unable to do so? In a report last week by the nonprofit Urban Justice Center, the jobless gave some answers. There was the woman who’d worked in a restaurant but had to quit “because I had to pay the babysitter more than I earned.” The woman who said she couldn’t register for job-training programs “because they’re in English and I don’t know English.” The people who couldn’t go and interview for jobs because they couldn’t afford interview clothes. Not to mention the woman who found a job as a home health aide — a success story at last! — and was now earning a grand total of \$7.05 an hour. “I love my job,” she explained, but “what I’m earning is too little to pay rent and everything.”

Then there’s Jillian Benjamin, who told me she’d begun studying to be a caterer like her mother back in Guyana, but was forced to quit her business management class because the city insisted that she enter its unpaid “Work Experience Program.”

“They had me collating applications, stapling and putting them in a box,” she said. “I don’t know what we can learn from that or put on our resume.”

None of this should be rocket science: Anyone who lives in the real world — let alone who’s read Barbara Ehrenreich’s “Nickel and Dimed” — should know it’s hard to get a job when you can’t afford a babysitter, or shoes for that matter. City leaders, though, still hold to the notion that with enough staplers, we can solve poverty. Maybe now that we’re all together in this same, leaky boat, we can get real: Without better-paying jobs, and more support like child care, saying “get to work” is no solution.

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