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Rural Youth More Likely To Be Idle: New Carsey Institute Fact Sheet

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DURHAM, N.H. - A new fact sheet from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire finds that young adults (18-24) living in rural areas are more likely to be idle—not in school, the labor force, or the Armed Forces—than their urban counterparts. Among rural high school dropouts and racial-ethnic minorities, rates of idleness are even more pronounced.

"The transition to adulthood has become more difficult for recent cohorts of American youth; today's economy demands more education for youth to achieve economic independence. Idle youth are not gaining the education or work experience they need and their route to adulthood will likely be longer, more difficult, and may have fewer rewards," says Anastasia Snyder, who co-authored the fact sheet with Diane McLaughlin. "Idleness among youth is a serious problem that affects the likelihood of their future success as productive adults." Snyder is associate professor of human development and family science at Ohio State University; McLaughlin is associate professor of rural sociology and demography at Penn State University.

Using 2006 Current Population Survey data, the fact sheet finds that 12 percent of rural youth are idle, compared to 10 percent of urban youth. Among high school dropouts, rates rise dramatically: In both rural and urban areas, three times as many high school dropouts are idle compared to their peers who graduated. In rural areas, rates of idleness rise sharply for high school dropouts who are non-Hispanic blacks (50 percent), from low-income families (49 percent) or from the Northeast (45 percent).

Rates of idleness among racial-ethnic minorities in rural areas are particularly high: 17 percent of rural blacks are idle, compared to 14 percent of urban blacks; 19 percent of rural Hispanics are idle (15 percent of urban Hispanics); and 23 percent of "other" racial groups, such as American Indians, in rural areas are idle, more than double the 10 percent of urban youth in this racial-ethnic category.
The fact sheet, which the authors describe as providing "only a snapshot of young adult idleness," points to the need for programs to get idle youth back on a track to productive adulthood. The authors recommend education policies to reduce school dropout rates and re-enroll those who have dropped out of high school, as well as job training programs that provide marketable skills and include GED equivalency. The fact sheet also notes the unique barriers facing black youth in rural schools and labor markets.

"Variation in idleness across rural and urban areas and by region signals the importance of local and regional education systems and labor markets in reducing idleness," the authors write.

For a copy of the fact sheet, go to: http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/documents/SnyderIdleYouthFS08.pdf.

For more information about the Carsey Institute, go to www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu.

The Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire conducts research and analysis on the challenges facing families and communities in New Hampshire, New England, and the nation. The Carsey Institute sponsors independent, interdisciplinary research that documents trends and conditions affecting families and communities, providing valuable information and analysis to policymakers, practitioners, the media, and the general public. Through this work, the Carsey Institute contributes to public dialogue on policies that encourage social mobility and sustain healthy, equitable communities.

The Carsey Institute was established in May 2002 through a generous gift from UNH alumna and noted television producer Marcy Carsey.

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