

Making an hours-long commute for a chance to prove himself at internship

‘Chances don’t get handed out’

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It is 7:20 a.m., halfway into Darryl Lumpkin's two- to three-hour commute from the Far South Side to an internship at Marshall's in Evanston, where he stocks shoes for \$8.50 an hour.

"Chances don't get handed out," the 21-year-old Lumpkin says as he grips the support bars inside the rattling Purple Line. "You gotta work for your chance. ... You don't got that survival instinct, you're basically dead."

Until last December Lumpkin, whose mother died a decade ago and whose father went to prison three years ago, lived at the Open Door Youth Shelter in West Town.

Lumpkin — who quit school his junior year — said he conformed to the shelter's strict rules, which included a 6 p.m. curfew and doing chores. The shelter provided him and other job seekers with directions to every Chicago-area mall, he said. Lumpkin said he found his way to about seven or eight and applied for jobs, but each place told him the same thing: He didn't have enough experience.

"When people with degrees can't find jobs, that's where the ripple effect starts," Lumpkin said. "They take someone else's job. And then they take someone's job, and then they take someone's job. Then at the bottom, you got the people who can't get a job."

When he turned 21 last December, Lumpkin had to leave the shelter despite not having a job or a home. He spent a couple of months with a sister until he and his 20-year-old girlfriend, whom he met at the shelter, moved in with his grandmother and father, just released from prison. The house in West Pullman belongs to his 75-year-old grandmother, and Lumpkin's father cares for her. Lumpkin's girlfriend drives an hour to her job at a Kentucky Fried Chicken in the western suburbs, and her hours are opposite to Lumpkin's.

"I got to do this," he said of working at Marshall's. "Just to stay consistent, to be outside the box, to keep improving."

Lumpkin's paychecks were technically from the Youth Job Center of Evanston Inc., which has employed 72 people like him since June 2009 using funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The job center, during a three-week program, taught Lumpkin how to write his resume, dress the part and answer interview questions.

Lumpkin's internship at the Marshall's in Evanston ended March 30. Ultimately he'd like to work in health care. Job Center officials were thrilled to learn Marshall's agreed to hire Lumpkin for 15-20 hours a week at the Marshfield Plaza branch close to his home, said Crystal Malone, Lumpkin's career adviser at the job center. He is scheduled to begin work this week, according to Marshall's.

"If you work really hard and try really hard, then good things will come to you," Malone said.

jwernau@tribune.com