

## Benefits of Volunteering for Teens

### What encourages youth to volunteer?

Youth become involved in volunteer work for various reasons. Youth volunteers surveyed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics mention the following factors as encouraging them to become involved:

- a) *They were approached/asked by an organization.* Approximately 40 percent of youth volunteers say that they became involved simply because they were approached by an organization. In other words, simply exposing youth to opportunities, perhaps having them talk to recruiters, can often lead to volunteerism.
- b) *They were asked by someone in a school or organization they are involved in.* Approximately 21 percent of youth get involved because people in school ask them. Schools and other organizations in which youth are involved can be effective tools to involve youth in volunteer efforts. School officials should be aware of this, and consider inviting recruiters to talk to students.
- c) *They were asked by relatives or friends.* Approximately 16.5 percent of youth volunteers report that they became involved because they were asked by people they knew, particularly by friends and family. Directly communicating an expectation for service, or providing direct communication, can encourage youth to volunteer.

### Action steps for parents and educators

Becoming involved in causes that help other people is an essential component of positive youth development. The experience of volunteering provides youth with the social and practical skills that can help them succeed in life, and get them engaged and more invested in their own communities. While youth today are engaged in a host of activities such as sports and other endeavors, volunteerism can help youth in many unique ways and have innumerable benefits for development. Below are some suggestions on how parents, educators and other adults can encourage youth to volunteer.

1. *Provide youth with information about volunteer opportunities.* One of the top reasons that youth do not volunteer is very simple — they do not have the information about opportunities. Parents and involved adults should help youth find opportunities in their own communities, schools, local organizations and churches. It might just take a few phone calls, visits to volunteer sites, or even searches on the internet to receive more information. Adults should also help youth consider their choices. This includes studying available information to make sure that the activities are safe, lead by competent people, that experiences offered are engaging, and that activities are well organized.
2. *Invite/Ask/Encourage youth to volunteer.* After finding information about volunteer opportunities, it is also important to invite the youth to volunteer, or to directly communicate expectations for service to others. Many youth report that they did not think of volunteering because nobody ever asked them.
3. *Help youth work through practical barriers.* Go through the practical issues and logistics of how the child/youth could actually volunteer. Help them think about and work through issues such as scheduling, transportation, how to put in an application (if there is one), and other steps entailed in volunteering. For instance, the top reason youth do not volunteer is lack of time. Parents can help youth structure their time better, and consider the amount of time they might

want to commit to volunteer work.

4. *Help youth find an opportunity that fits his or her interest/skills.* Many youth drop out of volunteering because the activity is too hard, too easy or simply uninteresting. There are a host of opportunities that can match each person's interests and skills. Consider whether the potential volunteer enjoys face-to-face interactions (e.g., mentoring) or solitary activities (e.g., community gardening). Also, try to help youth find volunteer opportunities that are age-appropriate.

5. *Alert youth to the rewards of volunteering.* While the essence of volunteering is really to provide service without rewards, there are some tangible benefits that youth can get out of volunteering. Alert youth to these practical benefits. For instance, point out to youth that they can gain skills that might improve their marketability, and that volunteer activities enhance their resume. These benefits might make them more attractive to future employers or colleges. Many schools also have service learning components, so youth might actually get school credit for their services.

6. *Be a role model.* It goes without saying that parents and other adults can encourage youth to volunteer by being volunteers themselves. Getting youth to volunteer is more effective if the person asking sets a good example. If the person asking is a volunteer or volunteered in the past, youth are more encouraged to volunteer.

7. *Make it a family event.* Parents are always looking for ways to have family time, and to find activities that the whole family can do together. Finding a volunteer activity, or even starting their own, could be a great opportunity for a family to be involved in something together. Perhaps a family can think of something to do each month to help others.

Resource: <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/g1750/build/>

## **Youth Helping America:**

The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering The Corporation for National and Community Service, in collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau and the nonprofit coalition Independent Sector, in early 2005 conducted the first major federal survey of volunteering by teenagers in more than a decade. The survey collected information on the volunteering habits of youth between the ages of 12 and 18. A new Corporation study based on the survey, titled “Youth Helping America,” looks at the state of youth volunteering and the connections between youth volunteering and the primary social institutions to which teenagers are exposed – family, religious congregations, and schools. Among other findings, the analysis shows that:

### **If Family Members Volunteer, Youth Will Too**

- A youth from a family where at least one parent volunteers is almost twice as likely to volunteer as a youth with no family members who volunteer – and nearly three times as likely to volunteer on a regular basis.
- Among youth who are in families where both parents and siblings volunteer, 86 % volunteer themselves, and 47 % are regular volunteers. Only 14 % do not volunteer themselves.
- 64 % of non-volunteers reported that no one in their family volunteers.

### **Youth Volunteers Succeed Academically**

- Approximately 10.6 million youth – or 38 % of the youth population – have engaged in community service as part of a school activity.
- 65 % of youth who participate in service as part of a school activity are also engaged in the service learning related activities of planning and/or writing about the service project in class.
- 55 % of those enrolled in school participate in volunteer activities, compared to 26 % of those not enrolled in school.
- High school students are more likely to volunteer than junior high school students, 58 % to 48 %.
- Students who report doing better in school are more likely to be volunteers than students who report doing less well, and are also more likely to have been involved in community service as part of a school activity.
- Only 5 % of youth attribute their volunteer activities to a school requirement.

## **CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE**

The Corporation for National and Community Service provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country through three programs: Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America. Together with USA Freedom Corps, the Corporation is working to foster a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility in America.

Resource: [http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/05\\_1130\\_LSA\\_YHA\\_SI\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/05_1130_LSA_YHA_SI_factsheet.pdf)

## **Benefits of volunteering:**

A fact sheet by Davila and Mora investigates the effect of school required community service on academic performance. The authors found positive links between the two, providing solid research for community service advocates.

- Students who participated in school required community service were 22 percentage points more likely to graduate from college than those that did not and were more likely to have improved their Reading, Math, Science, and History scores.
- Similarly, students who performed voluntary community service were 19 percentage points more likely to graduate from college than those that did not.

How to encourage young people to volunteer:

Invitations please...

Being asked is the top reason motivating young people to volunteer (closely followed by “because it makes me feel good.”) In 2006, political organizations were also the most likely to recruit their volunteers by reaching out to them. In the other groups, young volunteers tended to make the initial contact.

Role Models...

Young people who grow up in a household where someone volunteers are twice as likely to volunteer regularly, to be an active member of a group, and are more likely to follow politics and vote.

Let's Discuss!

Young people who discuss a volunteer experience are twice as likely as others to volunteer regularly. And, they are also 16 percentage points more likely to try to influence someone's vote!

Resource: <http://www.civicyouth.org/quick-facts/volunteeringcommunity-service/>

### **Personal Benefits to the Youth Who Volunteer**

1. Youth who volunteer just one hour or more a week are 50% less likely to abuse alcohol, cigarettes, become pregnant, or engage other destructive behavior.
2. Teens say the benefits received from volunteering are: Learning to respect others; learning to be helpful and kind; learning to understand people who are different; developing leadership skills, becoming more patient, and better understanding of citizenship.
3. Youth who volunteer are more likely to do well in school, graduate and vote.

### **Future Benefits**

The skills and developmental assets gained by young people who volunteer early in life translate to future benefits for them personally, and for society.

1. Young people involved in community service are more likely to have a strong work ethic as an adult.
2. Youth who volunteer are three times more likely to volunteer as adults.
3. Eighty-one percent of Americans who have volunteer experiences when they are young give to charitable organizations as adults.

### **There are some ways that adults working with youth can encourage them towards volunteering:**

1. Ask them to volunteer
2. Encourage youth to get involved in volunteering at an early age
3. Encourage children and young adults to participate in community groups, faith based organizations, student government, and school projects
4. Encourage a positive self image so that young people are able to help others and
5. Be a mentor in your community
6. Provide young people with opportunities to take courses that include and even require community service.

Young people volunteering for their communities is a tremendous win-win situation for the young volunteers, the organizations and communities they serve. The benefits are reaped now, and in the future.

### **Resource:**

<http://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/files/cd/2003/fs0323.pdf>

## Five Great Reasons for High School Students to Volunteer

Volunteer work presents a great opportunity for teenagers to prepare for the future, as well as to improve their communities. In addition to boosting socializing skills and awareness of local organizations and social issues, high school students who volunteer often may have an advantage over their peers when headed off to college.

### 1. Gaining New Skills

With each new volunteer activity comes training. These skills may seem basic or trivial at the time of training, but may also provide building blocks for future success. For example, by managing the receipt, sorting and distribution of donations from community sponsored school supply drives, teens might learn how to use spreadsheets to keep track of inventory. These skills are a great foundation for a job in management, accounting, or running a small business.

### 2. Adding to the Resume

If a teen's pre-college resume is limited to summer employment at the local pizza place and basic computer skills, it might be time to add a few lines. Commitment to community volunteer work over time shows that a teen is willing to work for something without monetary compensation--much like a college internship, apprenticeship or job shadow experience--which may be a requirement of college programs.

### 3. Giving Time

One of the most selfless acts anyone can do is donate their time and talents. Teens who are busy with after-school sports or work to help support their families and still make time to volunteer on evenings or weekends show outstanding character and resolve to make a difference. High school students are particularly well-suited to find time to **mentor younger youth**, connect with residents at a senior center or assist with one-time special events held on weekends.

### 4. Showing Responsibility

Just like going to a job, committing to a volunteer position shows responsibility. Teens working on becoming more reliable should get involved in volunteer programs relating to their hobbies to naturally build responsibility. For example, teens who love to read can find volunteer opportunities with a local library and teens who enjoy sports can coach athletics at an after-school program for children.

### 5. Earning Credits

Some high schools mandate a specific number of community volunteer work hours before a student is eligible for graduation. Many volunteer opportunities can translate to high school or college credits. It is important to discuss these opportunities with guidance counselors and administrators before beginning volunteer work.

Resource: <http://www.unitedway.org/blog/entry/five-great-reasons-for-high-school-students-to-volunteer/>