

Extension Update

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Volunteering Can Benefit Youth and Society

Most youth in the United States are healthy, happy, and productive members of society. In fact, the majority of youth in the country engage in some form of volunteer activity and they see the value in the work they do to help others.

When youth volunteer, benefits are reaped by almost everyone involved – the targeted population, the community, and the volunteers themselves.

Volunteers help lower operational costs of organizations, like the 4-H program, museums, zoos, and food banks. This allows organizations to make services available to larger audiences.

Volunteering also has positive effects on the community. Youth who are involved promote community togetherness and positive citizenship. Youth volunteers feel more connected to their respective communities and tend to stay in or return to those communities.

Experts agree that youth volunteerism provides opportunities for youth to learn new skills and valuable work experience. This enhances work marketability and increases chances for college success. Volunteer work provides opportunities to develop friendships and meaningful relationships, often with like-minded peers and adults.

The experience of volunteerism can help develop many social skills – compassion, leadership, confidence, self-esteem, plus the realization that you can make a difference.

While volunteering has many benefits, it can be time consuming and exhausting for some youth who are already extremely busy. To keep youth involved and to encourage volunteerism,

allow them the ability to take time off if needed and keep scheduled hours short and flexible.

Matching volunteers to their interests and talents is also a great way to keep volunteers in a program. Youth look forward to volunteering if it is fun and allows them to work on skills that are beneficial to them.

Ideas on how parents, educators, and community leaders can encourage youth to volunteer include:

- Provide youth with information on volunteer opportunities.
- Invite, ask, and encourage youth to volunteer.
- Help youth work through practical barriers. Help them work through scheduling, transportation, completing an application, and other steps in volunteering.
- Help youth find an opportunity that fits his or her interests and skills.
- Alert youth to the rewards of volunteering. Point out to youth that volunteer activities enhance their scholarship applications and resume. They can also gain skills that might improve their job marketability, plus it feels good to help others.
- Be a great role model. Parents and other adults who encourage youth to volunteer are more effective if they themselves volunteer.

Being 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 gets them engaged and more invested in their communities.

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