

11-1-2005

Issue Brief: Youth Helping America: The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering

Corporation for National and Community Service

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Recommended Citation

Community Service, Corporation for National and, "Issue Brief: Youth Helping America: The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering" (2005). *Service Learning, General*. 276.

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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:

◆ 55 Percent of Youth Volunteer

- An estimated 15.5 million youth – or 55 percent of youth ages 12 to 18 – participate in volunteer activities; the teen volunteering rate is nearly twice the adult volunteering rate of 29 percent.
- Youth contribute more than 1.3 billion hours of community service each year.
- The typical youth volunteer contributes 29 hours per year, while adult volunteers typically serve 52 hours per year.
- 39 percent of teen volunteers are "regular" volunteers, defined as those who volunteer at least 12 weeks per year. That compares with 55 percent of adult volunteers who can be classified as "regular."

◆ Three-Fourths of Youth Who Volunteer Do So Through Religious, School, or Youth Organizations

- 64 percent of teenagers who volunteer do so primarily through a religious organization, a school-

based group, or a youth leadership organization such as 4H or Scouts, while 74 percent volunteer to at least some extent through these institutions.

- Youth are most likely to volunteer through a religious organization, with 34 percent of teens reporting that a religious organization was the main organization with which they volunteer. This compares with 18 percent for school-based groups and 12 percent for youth leadership organizations.

◆ Youth Volunteers Succeed Academically

- Approximately 10.6 million youth – or 38 percent of the youth population – have engaged in community service as part of a school activity.
- 65 percent 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.

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- 55 percent of those enrolled in school participate in volunteer activities, compared to 26 percent of those not enrolled in school.
- High school students are more likely to volunteer than junior high school students, 58 percent to 48 percent.
- 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 percent of youth attribute their volunteer activities to a school requirement.

◆ 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 percent volunteer themselves, and 47 percent are regular volunteers. Only 14 percent do not volunteer themselves.
- 64 percent of non-volunteers reported that no one in their family volunteers.

◆ Religious Attendance Has a Strong Link to Youth Volunteering

- Among youth who attend religious services regularly – defined, generally, as once a week – 64 percent also volunteer,

while only 41 percent of those who do not attend religious services volunteer.

- Youth who attend religious services regularly are nearly twice as likely to be regular volunteers as youth who do not attend religious services at all.
- Among teens who regularly attend religious services, 47 percent volunteer primarily with a religious congregation, 8 percent with a faith-based group that is not a religious congregation, and 45 percent with a secular organization.

RESEARCH DESIGN

- National telephone survey of 3,178 American youth between the ages of 12 and 18
- Conducted January-March 2005
- Sample of 11,000 households chosen randomly from “universe” of households that had recently finished participating in the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Current Population Survey
- Overall response rate of 44 percent

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November 2005