

AFTERSCHOOL ALERT

ISSUE BRIEF



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Afterschool, Community Service and Volunteerism

Afterschool programs provide many opportunities to engage youth in community service activities, which can teach youth valuable skills, help them realize their potential to meet community needs and foster a sense of civic responsibility. Afterschool programs also successfully recruit, train and utilize volunteers to work with youth in afterschool programs, which can help bolster community networking and garner new resources for these programs. Incorporating community service in afterschool programs is both a popular concept and a worthwhile investment.

- More than 80 percent of parents said their child would benefit from an afterschool program that offered community service or volunteering.¹
- 95 percent of teens said it is important to be involved in the community through volunteering time to community efforts.²
- 69 percent of middle schools and 81 percent of high schools involve students in community service projects. On average, about 45 percent of students are involved in community service within the schools that offer it.³
- The value of service carried out by young people on National Youth Service Day exceeds \$171 million.⁴

Youth and Communities Serving Each Other

Providing youth with opportunities to connect to their community and to demonstrate the impact they can have on local issues empowers both youth and adults to view youth as community resources rather than liabilities or risks. In fact, when young people form early connections with community groups through service activities, the groups themselves are often the beneficiaries. Young people can infuse a charity or civic group with energy and inspiration, help build awareness of the group's mission throughout the community, and help an organization garner positive press and media attention.⁵

- One of the primary goals of 4-H is to develop youth as responsible and productive citizens, which for many 4-H programs entails a community service component. Youth in 4-H programs engage in environmental service projects, tutor and mentor younger youth, create public awareness campaigns about local issues and teach elderly residents about nutrition and health. These community service opportunities demonstrate to youth and their communities that youth can be a resource for meeting community needs.

I think the most important thing I learned in 4-H is a sense of responsibility to my community, because I see how I can help others and how I can affect others.

4-H participant in Florida⁶

- Lake County YMCA's Summer of Service program "is designed to help working parents and the community by providing a high-quality, affordable summer experience for kids who are too young to work and may be too old for summer camp." The program involves its participants, ages 11 to 15, in typical summertime recreation activities such as canoeing, baseball and visiting water parks. However, youth also get to lend a hand in the community and learn about teamwork, responsibility

and citizenship by helping senior citizens and preschoolers, assisting at food pantries, cleaning parks and helping out during mealtimes at a local health care facility.

It's good to see that we can make someone else feel happy. It helps me, too, and it's better than just hanging out.

Eric Smith, 13, of Libertyville, who has built a relationship with a chess partner in his 80s.

- The Experience Corps program organizes teams of senior citizens to provide tutoring, homework assistance and other support for youth during and after school. The program, developed by Civic Ventures, garners national support from organizations such as AARP, the Corporation for National and Community Service and foundations, while also strengthening local networks of support for youth, families, schools and the senior citizens engaged in public service.⁷

Real-World Skills and a Lifetime of Service

Community service activities allow youth to develop and apply their skills and knowledge to real-life situations, enhancing their ability to become productive, contributing adult citizens. Plus, studies show that engaging youth in community service helps establish civic responsibility and public service as a lifelong habit.

- Blackfeet Youth Initiative is a cross-cultural youth program in Browning, Montana, that brings together Native American and other youth to provide service to the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. High school students work with AmeriCorps members to create and deliver a curriculum, with a community service focus, to middle school youth in an afterschool and a summer program. In addition to gaining leadership skills and improving academic and social skills, youth involved learn to appreciate and interact with people from different cultures.

[Blackfeet Youth Initiative] has completely changed my perspective on communities and cultures other than my own. I will no longer make assumptions about a group of people until I truly take the time to learn about their heritage and values. BYI has given me the opportunity to challenge myself...

-Blackfeet Youth Initiative participant⁸

- The 3:00 Project, a statewide afterschool program developed by the Georgia School-Age Care Association, offers the more than 750 participating middle school students community service opportunities from stocking food banks to performing puppet shows on substance abuse for younger youth. The program reports that approximately 80 percent of parents and 60 percent of youth and teachers agree the program enhances youths' interpersonal skills and helps them learn how to make a positive contribution to their community. A majority of the youth said they enjoyed volunteering and that they planned to volunteer in the future.⁹

¹ Datta, A. Rupa; de Kanter, Adriana, *Family Involvement in Education: A National Portrait*, The Partnership for Family Involvement, The GTE Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education, August 1998.

² The Wirthlin Group, *Prudential Spirit of Community Youth Survey*, Newark, NJ: The Prudential Insurance Company of America, 1995.

³ *Community Service and Service-Learning in U.S. Public Schools, 2004: Findings from a National Survey*, Search Institute, Minneapolis, Minnesota, www.search-institute.org/whatsnew/2004G2GCompleteSurvey.pdf.

⁴ Youth Service America estimates based on Independent Sector value of service, 1999, www.ysa.org/nysd/statistics.html.

⁵ Corporation for National and Community Service, *Students in Service to America*, Washington, D.C., 2002.

⁶ 4-H, "Are You Into It?" brochure.

⁷ Civic Ventures, *Innovations: Lessons for Life: Experience Corps*, Innovations 2, Fall 2001.

⁸ Blackfeet Youth Initiative, *Words of Wisdom*, 3 June 2002, <http://pubweb.nwu.edu/~oaj108/byinew/byihome>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, *Safe and Smart: Making After-School Hours Work for Kids*, Washington, D.C., June 1998.