

# Volunteerism: A Tool for Positive Youth Development

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While negative stereotypes abound on the outlook, lifestyles and attitudes of young people today, most youth in the country are actually healthy, happy and productive members of society. In fact, the majority of youth in this country engage in some form of volunteer activity, and many see the value of helping others.

When youth volunteer, benefits are reaped by almost everyone involved — the targeted population, the community and especially the volunteers themselves. More importantly, volunteerism has important implications for positive youth development. Among other things, it encourages a sense of service and responsibility toward others, provides a venue for developing skills and relationships, and facilitates the development of various social skills such as empathy, a sense of service toward others, and a stronger sense of identity. It is thus essential that young people are encouraged to participate in volunteer endeavors. This community program will explore the different types of — and opportunities for — youth volunteerism, the benefits of those experiences, and the ways by which adults can encourage young people to volunteer. Several activities are presented here, and you can either do all of them or choose which ones might be most useful for the group you are working with.

## Objectives:

This community program is designed to...

- Provide information on the benefits of volunteerism for youth and their communities.
- Help adults understand the various ways by which they might encourage youth to develop a sense of service toward others.
- Provide resources and suggestions for plans of action.

## Audience:

- Parents
- Educators, School administrators
- Community leaders
- Recruiters from volunteer organizations

## Before the Meeting:

- Read leader's guide and lesson materials
- Obtain and collate copies of the lesson materials for each audience member. This includes:
  - Participant manual
  - Handouts 1, 2, 4
  - 40 Developmental Assets list (obtain copies at: <http://www.search-institute.org/assets/40AssetsList.pdf>)
  - Evaluation sheets
- Review the accompanying PowerPoint presentation (if using)
- Explore volunteer opportunities around your community, and obtain brochures and other materials regarding those programs
- Consider inviting individuals involved in volunteer programs, including:
  - Current and former volunteers
  - People who have been touched/helped by volunteers (e.g., someone who was mentored)
  - Individuals who coordinate volunteer efforts from the community, including recruiters

**Note:** This program uses quizzes, discussions and brainstorming activities. As such, you might consider distributing the participant manual after the program as many of the answers and other ideas are there.



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### **Activity #1: Take the quiz: Facts about volunteerism in the U.S.**

This activity introduces participants to different facts about volunteerism. It can be used as an opening exercise to introduce information and as a discussion opener.

For this activity, distribute the volunteerism quiz sheet (handout 1). Give them about five minutes to fill in their answers. Once they have finished, go through each item and have participants share their responses. Use discussion sheet 1.1 to process the activity.

### **Activity #2: Who benefits from volunteerism?**

Volunteerism is sometimes thought of as an activity that benefits only the target group. If youth volunteer at the local library, for instance, we often think that it is only the patrons and employees of the library who are the beneficiaries. In fact, volunteer efforts help almost all those involved – the intended beneficiaries, the community at large the volunteers themselves.

The objective of this activity is for participants to recognize the multiple benefits of volunteerism. Whether in small groups, pairs or individually, ask participants to discuss the following: *“Who benefits from volunteerism, and in what way?”*

Ask them to write down their responses. If the group is large, have participants divide into smaller sub-groups, and then ask them to share responses to the larger group. Provide either paper for them to list down their responses and share among themselves, or larger sheets for them to share with the bigger group. Use Discussion Guide 2 to process responses.

As an alternative, you also can provide participants with the pictorial depiction of the community (picture 1). Participants can think of ways by which the different entities pictured benefit from volunteerism.

### **Activity #3: Volunteerism: A tool for positive youth development**

An additional way to think about the benefits of volunteerism is how it can provide youth with some of the resources they need to succeed. Several factors contribute to successful development among youth. The Search Institute calls these factors “assets,” and their research has identified a list of 40 developmental assets that are linked to positive and healthy development. Distribute the list (printout available for free at <http://www.search-institute.org/assets/40AssetsList.pdf>) and discuss in groups or pairs, how volunteerism fits or promotes these developmental assets.

### **Activity #4: Should I, or shouldn't I? Factors that encourage and inhibit volunteerism**

To promote volunteerism among youth, it is essential for adults (educators, parents, recruiters) to understand the factors that encourage the development of a sense of service for others, as well as the barriers that might impede those actions. This exercise helps participants actively explore those factors through discussion and role-playing.

Depending on your setting and the size of your audience, consider having participants break into small groups. This also can be done in pairs or individually. Distribute handout 4 and ask participants to reflect on the questions and respond to them as best they can. Encourage the audience to put themselves in the shoes of youth who might be considering volunteer work. Use the discussion sheet 1 to process responses and facilitate discussion.

### **Activity #5: Closing: What can I do?**

Ask participants to discuss in pairs or small groups three concrete steps they can take to encourage youth to volunteer, and then share this with the group. Additionally, brainstorm on the volunteer opportunities in your community that youth can participate in.

### **Evaluation:**

Before participants leave, ask them to fill out the evaluation form and submit to you. Return copies to Maria de Guzman, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, 256 Mabel Lee Hall, P.O. Box 880236, Lincoln, NE 68588-0236

### **Resources**

ServeNet: Provides information on volunteer opportunities in your community (based on your zip code).

[www.servenet.org/](http://www.servenet.org/)

United Way: Lists ideas for volunteerism and discusses benefits of activities. [www.unitedway.org](http://www.unitedway.org)

Youth Service America: Provides information on promoting and strengthening volunteerism among youth, ages 5 to 25. [www.ysa.org/](http://www.ysa.org/)

## Discussion Guide 1

# Processing for the Volunteerism Quiz (Activity 1)

To process this activity, go through each question and have participants share their answers. Discuss the correct answers (below) and generate some discussion from these points.

**1. What is “volunteerism?”**

**Answer:** Volunteering is the act of providing services to others for no cost. However, volunteering sometimes provides some small stipends, often to cover costs of operations or to help the volunteers maintain their participation. This can include small monetary incentives, grades or school credit, or other forms of rewards.

**2. What types of volunteering are there? Give examples of activities.**

**Answer:** There are many types of volunteering. This includes (but not limited to) participating in community development, mentoring others and giving services to those in need. Volunteering can be done through school, religious groups/churches, community organizations, nonprofit groups and others. There also are differences in the set-up of rewards. Many volunteer efforts are done with no cost; others pay a small stipend or its equivalent, while others are done to fulfill requirements for school (e.g., service-learning) or other entities. It is important for youth to realize that there is a wide range of opportunities for them and that adults should help them find a way to find a good match between what experiences they are looking for and the activity they will engage in.

**3. Approximately what percentage of youth engages in volunteer activities in the U.S.?**

**Answer:** C. 60%

A large number of youth engage in some form of volunteerism yearly. This participation is done through school programs, family volunteering, community organizations, church or other efforts.

**4. Approximately how many hours do teenage volunteers contribute annually?**

**Answer:** A. 2.5 billion hours

Teens volunteer a significant number of hours per year. Most youth volunteer an average of 3.5 hours per week, totaling 2.5 billion hours.

**5. In dollars, approximately how much does teenage volunteering contribute to the U.S. economy yearly?**

**Answer:** D. \$3 billion

Volunteerism benefits the economy. If the number of hours contributed are converted to dollar values, it actually comes out to a substantial amount. Teens contribute \$35 billion annually. All together, youth and adult volunteers contribute more than \$150 billion per year. This allows services to be more available to a broader range of people.

**6. What best describes the volunteer trends among teens in the US?**

**Answer:** C. In recent years, the percentage of youth who volunteer has been increasing. Among youth, it has increased 12 percent over the last decade.

**7. Which of the following best describes the status of volunteerism in the Midwest?**

**Answer:** B. Volunteer rates in the Midwest are much higher than the national average  
Volunteerism in the Midwest is relatively high — more than 30 percent higher than the national average.

## Discussion Guide 2

# Processing for Activity 2: Who Benefits from Volunteerism?

Volunteering is an activity that helps multiple people and entities. The responses of your audience to this question can likely be summarized into benefits for the following groups: the targeted recipients of aid; the larger community; and the volunteers themselves. You could review the following information:

- **Benefits for the specific target group**

Obviously, youth volunteerism helps the targeted group. For instance, if youth volunteer to help children, the children benefit. Volunteering also helps the organizations, for instance, cutting down costs of organizations and making services available to a larger audience. In the U.S., it is estimated that over \$60 billion is contributed annually to the United States economy by virtue of volunteer services.

- **Benefits for the community**

When youth volunteer, the larger community benefits. As mentioned above, there are practical benefits that targeted recipients and organizations receive, including the lowering of costs of operations, making services available to a larger community, and the like. In addition, volunteerism encourages positive citizenship among youth. Volunteerism encourages youth to be more engaged in their communities. Studies show that youth who volunteer feel more connected to their community, are more likely to show concern, and stay in or return to their communities. Thus, youth volunteerism contributes substantially to community vitality.

- **Benefits for the youth volunteers**

Ironically, while volunteerism is focused on helping others, perhaps the biggest benefits to volunteering are reaped by the volunteers themselves. Studies suggest that volunteerism helps those who volunteer — contributing to identity development, enhancement of skills (including increasing job marketability), increased self-esteem, development of empathy for others, and other changes related to positive youth development. Often, volunteer endeavors also facilitate the development of significant relationships — be it with the people they are volunteering, or the target group of their efforts.

## Discussion Sheet 4

# Processing for Activity 4: Should I, or shouldn't I? Factors That Encourage and Inhibit Volunteerism

To process this role-playing activity, go through each item and ask for participants to share their responses. Below are some discussion points to follow the responses.

### Reasons why youth DON'T volunteer.

According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, the top reasons why youth do not volunteer are the following:

- Lack of time and other responsibilities  
Young people today are getting busier and busier. Between school, sports, after-school activities and other events, it is often difficult to find time to do anything else. Among youth and across all age groups, lack of time is stated as the number one reason (64 percent) for not volunteering. In addition, having family responsibilities (4.5 percent) also was stated. Ask participants about what they can do to help deal with this barrier to volunteerism. This can include helping youth structure their time better and helping them choose which activities might be best for them. This also includes helping them decide the amount and length of time they will commit.
- Practical concerns: Includes lack of information, lack of transportation or expenses  
Sometimes, even if individuals have the time and are willing to volunteer, there are practical barriers such as those stated above. This is the second most commonly stated reason by youth for not volunteering (5.8 percent). Discuss with your participants how they might help youth deal with these barriers. Brainstorm and share the techniques they might use to take care of these practical concerns.
- Lack of interest or activity was not enjoyable (5.2 percent)  
For youth to continuously be involved in volunteer efforts, it is helpful if the activities are interesting or of significance to them. Generate ideas among your participants about what they can do to create interest and enjoyment among youth. Here are some possibilities.
  - Match the young person's interest with the activity. Think about what interests the young person. Consider whether he enjoys face to face interactions (e.g., mentoring) or solitary activities (e.g., community gardening).
  - Make it developmentally appropriate. If tasks are too difficult or too easy, the youth might give up or become bored. Try to help youth find volunteer opportunities that are age appropriate.
  - Try to find something rewarding. While the essence of volunteering is really to provide service without rewards, there are some intangible rewards that youth can take. This includes praise and recognition, improved skills and learning and enjoyment.
- No one asked  
Finally, another top reason why youth don't volunteer is that they simply weren't asked (3.1 percent). Sometimes, all it takes for youth to start thinking about volunteering is for them to be approached and given information about opportunities.

### Why youth volunteer

Youth get involved in volunteer work for various reasons. The top reasons mentioned by respondents include:

- Approached by an organization  
40 percent of youth start getting involved in volunteer work because they were approached by an organization. So simply exposing youth to opportunities, perhaps having them talk to recruiters, often can lead to starting volunteerism.
- Asked by someone in school or organization they are involved in.  
21 percent of youth get involved in volunteer activities because people in school ask them. Schools and other organizations in which youth are involved can be effective ways by which youth can get involved in volunteer efforts.

- Asked by relatives or friends
  - 16.5 percent of youth report becoming involved in volunteerism because they were asked by people they knew — friends and family. Directly communicating an expectation for service, or providing direct communication can encourage youth to volunteer. “Asking” youth to volunteer also is more effective if you set good examples. If you yourself volunteer or volunteered in the past, or if you help others in some way, youth are more encouraged to volunteer.
- Why youth drop out  
Youth discontinue volunteer service for various reasons. Here are just some possibilities:
  - No longer fun/enjoyable/engaging
  - Not developmentally appropriate
  - No rewards (whether compensation, grades, praise or appreciation)
  - Not a good match — for instance, youth do not enjoy solitary activities, and the volunteer work is mainly solitary
  - No clear direction or leadership – activities might not be clearly set up, the goals might not be clear, and volunteers might not be given enough guidance on what to do

This activity helps participants think about the factors that promote both volunteerism as well as the barriers. Knowing these facts can help adults consider how to encourage *sustained* volunteerism.

## Handout 1

# Activity #1: Quiz on Volunteering

Answer the items below as best you can.

1. What is “volunteerism?”
2. What types of volunteering are there? Give examples of activities.
3. Approximately what percentage of youth engages in volunteer activities in the U.S.?
  - A. 15%
  - B. 25%
  - C. 60%
  - D. 85%
4. Approximately how many hours do teenage volunteers contribute annually?
  - A. 2.5 billion hours
  - B. 3.5 billion hours
  - C. 4.5 billion hours
  - D. 5.5 billion hours
5. In dollars, approximately how much does teenage volunteering contribute to the U.S. economy yearly?
  - A. \$750,000
  - B. \$84 million
  - C. \$246 million
  - D. \$35 billion
6. What best describes the volunteer trends among teens in the U.S.?
  - A. In recent years, the percentage of youth who volunteer has been steady
  - B. In recent years, the percentage of youth who volunteer has been declining
  - C. In recent years, the percentage of youth who volunteer has been increasing
  - D. In recent years, the percentage of youth who volunteer has been unpredictable
7. Which of the following best describes the status of volunteerism in the Midwest?
  - A. Volunteer rates in the Midwest are about equal to the national average
  - B. Volunteer rates in the Midwest are much higher than the national average
  - C. Volunteer rates in the Midwest are much lower than the national average
  - D. Nobody really tracks volunteer rates

## Handout 2

# Activity #2: Who Benefits from Volunteerism?

In small groups, pairs or individually, try to think of who benefits from volunteerism, and in what way. List your responses.

## Handout 4

# Activity #4: Should I or Shouldn't I? Factors That Encourage and Inhibit Volunteerism

**Goal:** The goal of this exercise is for you to actively explore the factors that might encourage or prevent youth from volunteering. Read the statements below and try to respond to them as best you can. Try to see this from the point of view of the youth described.

1. My name is Joan. I'm a 14 year-old from your community. I've heard about some volunteer possibilities in our neighborhood, and I've thought about it once or twice. However, I **don't** volunteer because ...
  
2. I'm Johnny, 16 years old. I've been volunteering for an organization a full year now. The reason I got involved in volunteering was ...
  
3. I am a program coordinator for a children's reading program. Last year, I recruited volunteers from a high school to help tutor children who had difficulties in reading. We took everyone who signed up. For some reason, we've lost a lot of volunteers. Why do you think this didn't work?

# Volunteerism as a Tool for Positive Youth Development

## Evaluation Form

1. Which of the following describes you (check all that apply)

parent

educator (teacher, school administrator)

official from a volunteer organization. If so, name of organization \_\_\_\_\_

other \_\_\_\_\_

2. Why did you attend this program? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Please pick the number that best describes your experience in this program: (Are b & c almost alike?)

*Strongly  
agree*

*Agree  
somewhat*

*Disagree  
somewhat*

*Strongly  
disagree*

a) There was **new** information presented

b) Program provided information that I can **apply in real life situations**

c) This program helped me think about youth in a more positive way

d) This program helped me think about volunteerism in a more positive way

e) This program helped me see the importance of my role in encouraging youth volunteerism

4. As a result of this program, I will make the following changes

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What I found most useful in this program was ...

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. My suggestion for improving this program:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_