Are there any Volunteers?
To Teachers/Parents:

This guide to volunteerism is meant to be informative and thought-provoking, and you should avoid making the students feel obligated to enter into public service. However, if activities and ideas from this guide lead to meaningful work outside the classroom, everyone involved will benefit.

To get the most out of this guide, consider these recommendations:

- Arrange to have classroom sets of newspapers on hand for two weeks or more.
- Set up your room to allow small groups to work together.
- Read through the section and make your lesson plan before introducing it to your students; you will find that some activities take longer than others.
- Having several telephone books or other lists of community services and agencies available is helpful.

Draw on your personal experiences as a volunteer, and encourage students who have volunteered to share their stories. This experience might allow you to gain insight into the concerns and feelings of your students. Enjoy the experience.

Resources:

- A Student’s Guide to Volunteering by Theresa DiGeronimo
- Hands-On Service Ideas for Youth Groups by Steve Case and Fred Cornforth
- The Kid’s Guide to Service Projects — Over 500 Service Ideas for Young People Who Want to Make a Difference by Barbara A. Lewis
- Reinvesting in America: The Grassroots Movements that are Feeding the Hungry, Housing the Homeless, and Putting Americans Back to Work by Robin Garr
- A Practical Guide for Developing Agency/School Partnerships for Service Learning from The Points of Light Foundation
- Impact Online (www.impactonline.org)
- Volunteer Center of the Bluegrass

She loves snowboarding but knows that winter weather is especially hard on the homeless. She volunteers every Sunday afternoon at the local homeless shelter.
Volunteering is never a lonely job. About 10 million young people in the United States volunteer every year, but 10 million is not the important number here. One volunteer is important, especially if that one is you.

In this guide, you’ll learn why volunteering is important to people in your community and how to get in on the gratifying fun of lending a hand. You’ll learn that volunteering also provides a pathway to learning new skills and gaining work experience. Using this guide along with your local newspaper gets you off to a great start.

Let’s make sure we’re all on the same page (that’s page 3 right now) and agree on a few definitions:

**Volunteer** — Even as a word, “volunteer” isn’t just sitting around. It’s holding down three jobs:

- **verb**: to give freely of time or talent, expecting no compensation.
  - She volunteers her services as an interpreter at the clinic.
- **noun**: a person who does the giving.
  - The volunteers cleaned up the park and built three picnic shelters.
- **adjective**: describing the person or the job.
  - Volunteer tutors helped third-grade students learn about nutrition.

**Philanthropy** — A close relative to “volunteer,” it means giving money or resources to help others. It’s Greek for “love of mankind” and represents the desire to give to people in need or to charitable organizations.

**Meaningful service** — Work performed for others that a) truly helps them and b) represents a significant effort or sacrifice by the giver.

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**Rights and Responsibilities**

**Volunteers aren’t slaves. As a volunteer, you have the right to be:**

- informed and trained for the task
- safe around equipment and clients
- trusted as a valuable member of the team
- evaluated on the work you perform

**Volunteers must act responsibly. You should be:**

- open and honest with the organization’s staff
- dependable and punctual
- committed to learning and growing
- positive in your dealings with others

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**Dear Students:**

Today, our economy is stronger, our streets are safer, and our environment is cleaner. We’ve made remarkable progress, but we still face enormous challenges. This is why volunteering and community service are so important. In April 1997, I was very pleased to participate in the Presidents’ Summit for America’s Future. In this bipartisan effort, people from all over the country came together to encourage people in every community to serve their nation and their fellow Americans.

You and your generation can help to make the changes that America needs. You can preserve the environment by participating in recycling programs and by cleaning up litter. You can volunteer to serve food in shelters for the homeless, you can tutor kids who are having trouble in school, or you can become a friend to someone less fortunate than you are. You should also work hard in school and prepare yourself for the time when your generation will be leading America.

Become involved in your community, and together we can make a difference. I hope you will take a personal interest in your future and in the future of our nation.

Sincerely,

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**Doing nothing for others is the undoing of ourselves.**

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)

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He works at a supermarket and is surrounded by food. On Monday and Wednesday evenings, he delivers meals to people who have no food on their shelves.
There are as many reasons to volunteer as there are volunteers, because every individual, agency, and situation are different. Two volunteers working side by side might be motivated by completely different reasons, yet they are both pitching in to help. Read below and on subsequent pages to explore reasons to be a volunteer. Jot down any reasons you can think of that are not mentioned, and discuss them in class.

“I just want to help...
... somebody who’s important to me.”

If a friend or relative is getting help from an organization, you can support them by signing up as a volunteer.

Shelby’s brother was getting into trouble with drugs until he got help from a neighborhood substance abuse center. Now Shelby answers phones at the center two evenings a week.

... make this world a better place.”

You can’t solve all the world’s problems this week, but you can start by volunteering with an organization that helps people help themselves.

It used to bother Jessica when she read about poverty in the newspaper. Now she does something about it: She collects coats in her neighborhood and takes them to the Salvation Army.

... myself!”

You might have a family situation or a medical condition that has its own organization that uses volunteers.

Josh is on a list to receive a liver transplant. On weekends, he helps assemble information packets at the hospital to recruit organ donors.

“I think this work is important.”

Many people have strong feelings about an agency or organization and the cause that it advances. Perhaps the best way to express that support is to join forces with others who share your belief. You can act on your beliefs by investigating an organization in one of the following categories:

Environment — The natural beauty of your area may be at risk from people who pollute, poach, and encroach. You can find organizations working to protect the forests, streams, wildlife, and air in your community.

Social action — There are groups in your area that fight injustice, racism, discrimination, or abuse. You can make your voice heard by offering your time and talents.

Poverty — While people are learning how to support themselves, they often need help with food, clothing, shelter, and transportation. You can volunteer at an agency that helps meet the basic needs of poor people.

Politics — You can approach politics from two angles. You can join forces with a politician or a political party that echoes your beliefs, or you can join a watchdog organization that strives to prevent politicians from abusing their power.

Once you choose a cause, you might invite a friend and share your enthusiasm. If you have discovered a place that offers fulfilling and needed work, sharing it with a friend will:

— deepen your friendship
— make the experience more enjoyable for you
— provide more hands-on help at the volunteer site
— open a whole new world of volunteerism for your friend

“She’s working on getting a scholarship and a summer job by listing her experience as a volunteer on college applications and on her résumé.

“I want to learn additional skills.”
Volunteering is a win-win situation: By helping people, you help yourself. While selfish motivations should take a back seat to human service, that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t take full advantage of the benefits of volunteerism. Volunteering at an active agency with many needs, you would be hard pressed not to learn a new skill or pick up valuable experience.

Agencies that rely on volunteers understand this trade-off, and nobody expects volunteers to become slaves to the organization. Before you commit yourself to service, you should meet with the agency’s executive director and the staff member who will supervise you. Everyone involved should reach a clear understanding of your duties and your goals. You can provide a needed service to the agency while acquiring or honing skills that can advance your education or employment prospects.

As a volunteer, you can lend your proven talents to an organization, or you might instead investigate new challenges. Some volunteer positions require prior knowledge or experience, while others allow you to learn on the job.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To develop skills in</th>
<th>seek out opportunities to</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>organization</td>
<td>work with special events or fund-raising</td>
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<td>training</td>
<td>teach a procedure</td>
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<td>office work</td>
<td>answer phones, schedule appointments</td>
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<td>leadership</td>
<td>work with other volunteers</td>
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<td>writing</td>
<td>write newsletters</td>
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<td>designing a home page</td>
<td>put a local agency on the World Wide Web</td>
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<tr>
<td>tutoring</td>
<td>teach young children, peers, or adults</td>
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<td>carpentry</td>
<td>enlist in home-building projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>animal care</td>
<td>care for animals at zoos or shelters</td>
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<tr>
<td>landscaping, lawn care</td>
<td>mow, plant flowers, or raise a garden</td>
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<tr>
<td>computer applications</td>
<td>word process or lay out documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>problem-solving</td>
<td>meet human needs using limited resources</td>
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If you want to learn about
- health and nutrition: plan, prepare, and serve meals for those in need
- our political system: lobby for new laws or work with political groups
- writing grants: spend time with a fund-raiser and help with research
- your community: investigate its social service network
- fund-raising: work with professional fund-raisers
- the environment: pick up, clean up, and study natural resources

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activity • 5

Go through the classified section and pick out four job openings. Write them down. Beside each one, list two or three volunteer jobs that would help you gain experience and skills to get that job.

activity • 6

Get out your calculator for this one, and have a place to make a big list (a chalkboard or flip chart will do).

1. In your newspaper, find a story, picture, or advertisement about an agency that needs volunteers — lots of volunteers.

2. Next, make a list of class members and write down the task that each of you would perform as a volunteer team.

3. Now assign a wage to each job, no lower than minimum wage ($5.15).

4. Go around the room and determine how many hours each volunteer team member could give in the next week. Write it down.

5. Now multiply each team member’s hours by the value of each hour. Add them all together, and you’ve got the monetary value of volunteering for just one week!

activity • 7

Find a picture of a world leader in the newspaper. Match him or her as a volunteer with an organization that could best use the leader’s skills. Write a volunteer’s job description.

activity • 8

Get into small groups and look through the section of your newspaper that covers your community. Each group should find a story featuring a person who is helping other people. Discuss the following questions about the story: Are they getting paid to do it? Is it something that a volunteer could do? What skills are required to provide that type of help? Report your group’s conclusions to the class.

When you are laboring for others, let it be with the same zeal as if it were for yourself.
Confucius (551–479 B.C.)

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He’s earning college money as a free-lance photographer, but there’s no charge for the pictures to be used in a brochure for the child-abuse center.
“I need the experience.”
How do you land a job that requires experience when you can’t get experience without a job? How do you make your résumé stand out? The answer is simple. Volunteer! An impressive résumé can serve as a red carpet, ushering you right into the job you want. A résumé without work experience, though, might look more like a red stop sign. Here’s what you can gain from volunteer work:

**Specific skills**
As a volunteer, your job has duties and responsibilities that correspond to real-world work situations. On your résumé, don’t just use the term “volunteer.” You can make a stronger statement by giving a job title, for example:
- If you answer the phone, put “volunteer receptionist” on your résumé.
- If you keep tabs on the bread and beans at a food bank, call yourself a “volunteer inventory specialist.”
The title you use should be an accurate description of your work and reflect your contribution to the organization.

**Discipline of sticking to a work schedule**
Just knowing that you possess the maturity and experience of showing up for work can help a potential employer to feel more comfortable hiring you. A job involves a lot more than clocking in every day, but employers want to hire dependable people. Even the brightest and best workers can’t help the company when they don’t come in to work.
You can use your good work record to earn a letter of recommendation from your supervisor.

**Teamwork skills**
On your résumé or at a job interview, you can list ways in which you worked with agency staff or with other volunteers. Employers will pay special attention to any supervision or training experience you gained while working as a volunteer. Even if you trained or organized other volunteers only, the skills required are the same as those needed in the work world.

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**Man’s greatest sin is not hatred, but indifference to one’s brother.**
Mother Theresa (1910–1997)
Measurable achievements
If you pulled together a project as a volunteer, you should not only list the organization and leadership skills you used but the group’s achievements as well. Whenever you can, cite measurable results:

- My team painted and repaired 14 houses in two days.
- The committee raised $2,700, a 20 percent increase over last year.
- Our group fed 4,000 people over the holiday weekend.

These objective results — stating a specific number — are stronger than a subjective statement, such as, “We did a great job for the center last summer.” People might disagree about what a “great” job is, but nobody can argue with solid numbers.

Well-roundedness
Your work as a volunteer demonstrates to prospective employers that you have a human, caring side to your personality. Many employers believe that good citizens make good employees.

Citing volunteer work experience can also make a difference when applying to college. Many colleges and universities limit the number of new students they admit to their institution, and some look at factors other than grades and test scores when selecting students for admission. Check to see if the colleges on your list routinely look for school activities and volunteer experience when considering students for admission.

“Helping others helps me.”
As a volunteer you are rewarded handsomely for your efforts, and those rewards can be immediate! Take a look:

Relieve stress: Addressing the needs of others can provide a needed diversion from your own problems.

Get some exercise: You can help others by providing manual labor (moving furniture, cleaning out storage areas, planting a tree, etc.) at a facility for children or senior citizens. Exercise is another way to relieve stress.

Cure boredom: Think about what you do when you get bored: watch TV, sleep, or eat? Well, wake up and pitch in! Volunteering not only beats those alternatives, you’ll come out miles (and smiles) ahead.

Receive recognition: Don’t set your sites on the Nobel Peace Prize, but chances are you’ll get a pat on the back and maybe a “thank you” for your volunteer efforts. You might even see your name printed in an organization’s newsletter.

Make friends: Unless you volunteer as a fire watcher in the middle of a forest, you’re certain to meet people when you volunteer. And as you might imagine, other volunteers and agency staff are caring people worth knowing — like you!

Ease guilt: Many people volunteer because of a sense of gratitude for their own good fortune. They feel obligated to help others who don’t have the same advantages: enough to eat, a nice home, good health — you get the picture. You don’t have to feel guilty about being comfortable, but if it will help you to help others, a little guilt might be a good thing!

Make a difference: Whether you mean to, you make a difference in the lives of others every day as others observe your behavior — good or bad. You can make sure your example is a positive one in your work to help make your community a better place in which to live.

Feel good about yourself: How can you not feel good about yourself after you make new friends, relieve stress, and ease the burden of other humans in need? Give yourself a round of applause.

activity • 11
Divide into small groups. Each group should find a job ad in the classified section that calls for a résumé. As a group, develop an impressive résumé for an imaginary job applicant who has never had a paying job, but has lots of volunteer experience. Your teacher, as “boss,” will read the résumés and hire the group with the most appropriate work experience.

activity • 12
Organize an alternative spring break (or winter break or summer break). Instead of spending money at a beachfront hotel, many students spend spring break building homes for the needy, repairing houses for elderly residents, etc. You can plan a group project for your class. Who knows? It might evolve from an in-class exercise to a field trip!

1. Decide what group of people you want to help: homeless, hungry, abused, illiterate, etc.
2. Decide if you will volunteer within your community or if you will travel to another town or state.
3. Choose an organization that solves problems for those people, and work with a representative to identify a specific project that your class can tackle.
4. Decide how much time (hours, days) class members can give.
5. Determine if any money will be needed for supplies, meals, lodging, and gas. Can you get sponsors to help with expenses?
6. Make sure parents and school officials support the plan.
7. Have fun!
Not everybody can jump in and volunteer to change diapers or wire a house; some people simply want to load boxes onto a truck. Many potential volunteers don’t get started, though, because they are nervous about where they fit in. Don’t let indecision be your excuse. With this do-it-yourself volunteer chart, you can gain some sense of the type of work available and the type that fits you.

Please note: This exercise is meant to make you think about volunteering and where to start; it is not a validated instrument.

There are two challenges to receiving accurate information from this assessment tool. One is the math; you have to plot a point on a graph with two axes. Your teacher can provide help with this.

The other trick is being totally honest in answering the questions, especially the ones about interacting with the people you help. Let’s face it: Volunteers often work with people who are poor in health, spirit, or financial condition. Some folks can handle it, but many others can’t.

If you are uncomfortable working closely with victims of poverty, abuse, or illness, don’t! But don’t walk away from doing your part, either. As you will learn from this ultra-cool volunteer tool, there are volunteer opportunities available for all types of people.

Using the above scale, list the number that matches your response to the following statements. Be sure to include the negative sign when you disagree. After each category, add or subtract your response numbers and write the total in the space provided. (For example, if your response numbers are -7, -8, 2, and -4, your total score is -17)

Now, take your up-close score and your skill score and plot them on the multi-colored graph. Along the horizontal up-close axis, find the number that corresponds to your up-close score and mark it with an “x.” On the vertical skill axis, mark your skill score with an “x.”

Next, plot your score: find the point where the two scores intersect and draw a big dot. Your dot is located in one of four quadrants of the graph: red, green, yellow, or blue. The higher your scores, the stronger your connection with the quadrant’s description.

Up close and personal
I want to be able to see and meet the people I help ........................................ ______
I can handle being around people in distress ................................................... ______
I must have face-to-face interaction with the people I help ............................ ______
I’m not interested in working behind the scenes ............................................. ______
Up close total score = ______

Skilled labor
I have a specific skill I want to put to use helping others .................. ______
I want to stay within my area of expertise when volunteering ........... ______
I can lead or teach others in a specific skill ........................................... ______
I’m not interested in learning a new skill in a volunteer situation ........ ______
Skill total score = ______

Once you’ve found the quadrant you’re in, read below to learn more about volunteer choices that make sense for you:

Red — A volunteer dentist would best sum up this quad: You want to use a special skill and work closely with people. Other — more realistic — volunteer positions would include working in a child-care center for low-income families, teaching kids or adults to read, coaching a team at a youth center, or helping senior citizens fill out complicated forms.

Green — This type of volunteer could be called a volunteer diplomat: A good attitude and a willingness to interact with others are your strong points. Green volunteer positions might include staffing a voter registration booth in the mall, delivering Thanksgiving baskets, reading storybooks to sick children, or playing cards with residents at a senior citizen center.

Yellow — Volunteers in this quad are more like a volunteer disc jockey: You give time and energy but may never meet the recipients of your help. Folks in the yellow quadrant might pick up litter in a neighborhood park, stuff envelopes with fund-raising letters from the community playhouse, answer the telephone at a literacy center, or carry materials for a volunteer home-building project.
Knowing your quadrant covers only part of the matchmaking process, giving you an idea of the type of volunteer work you should seek. There are several other factors to take into consideration:

1. **WHERE?** You can’t just save the world at large; you must first narrow it down. Which social need, community issue, or health problem is your top concern? How can you match a cause with a local organization? (Hint: First call your local volunteer center, United Way, or similar clearinghouse.)

2. **WHEN?** How much time can you spare? Four hours a week? Four hours a month? An hour a day? How long do you anticipate volunteering at the site you’ve selected? Is it a one-shot deal or a summerlong commitment?


4. **WHO?** Will this be a solo adventure, a group activity, or a chance for your family to interact on a new level?

5. **WHAT?** Within the quadrant that suits you best, what will be your duties? Remember, a job title and a job description will help you at the volunteer site and on your résumé.

Usually, any agency can match volunteer work with people from each quadrant. For example, at a homeless shelter, all four quadrants can go to work on a Saturday afternoon:

- **Red** is a recreation leader for children at the shelter.
- **Green** helps a family to sort through donated clothing to find something suitable to wear.
- **Yellow** works in the kitchen washing lunch dishes and helping to prepare the evening meal.
- **Blue** uses a computer to lay out a newsletter to the shelter’s supporters.

This exercise was created by Bob Rouse, M.S. Ed., solely for the purposes of exploration and discussion. While it might be accurate, it is not a validated assessment instrument.
Deciding on the “it” in “Getting It Done” is an important first step. Think of a time when you have thought or said, “You know, if only people would ______, we wouldn’t be in such a mess.” What filled your blank? Did it deal with child abuse? Hunger? Loneliness? What’s your solution?

The Kid’s Guide to Service Projects, by Barbara A. Lewis, contains more than 500 activities and ideas for groups or individuals. It also has tips on how to take hold of an idea and make it happen. Once you have come up with an idea, mission, or solution, use the following steps:

1. Gather facts
2. Raise awareness
3. Raise money
4. Make things happen

Gathering facts might be as simple as personal observations. You might confirm your opinion about a problem by contacting an agency that deals with the problem every day. Talk to them about what has already been done to try to solve the problem. You might also want to create a survey to find out what other people in your school or neighborhood think about an issue. With an opinion survey, you ask people to respond to statements or questions prepared by you in advance. You can use the results of your survey to raise awareness or money and to change things.

There are several ways to raise awareness in your community about a problem. Often, people do not work together to change things because they don’t know a problem exists, or they don’t know where to begin to solve it. Here are three ways for you to raise awareness:

• Make a flier to distribute at school or in your neighborhood (see activity No. 13).
• Create a news release for local newspapers, TV, and radio (see activity No. 14).
• Prepare a proclamation for the mayor or principal to sign (see activity No. 15).

If you work as a volunteer for very long, you will reach the point when you say, “If we could just raise some money, we could really help these people!” It’s true. Many social service agencies are on tight budgets, and all are constantly on the lookout for ways to get more money to further their missions.

Whether you’re raising money for an organization that already receives contributions, or you need start-up funds for a new project, the same fund-raising principles apply.
There are three ways to raise money: Sell something, hold a special event, or come right out and ask.

1. Sales: You and your group can sell items or a service and use your profits for your project or as a gift to an organization. You can sell:
   - donated clothes, books, CDs, etc.
   - items from companies that specialize in fund-raising projects (cards, candy, etc.)
   - handmade items (baked goods, holiday decorations, etc.)
   - shirts, hats, bumper stickers, etc., that display a special message
   - a service (walk dogs, mow grass, wash cars, etc.)
   - raffle tickets, with a TV or something good (and donated) to be awarded

   Unrealistic expectation caution: Be careful not to buy too many items and pray that you can sell them all. It's better to reorder than to have hundreds of dollars of unsold inventory on your hands.

2. Special events: Special events can raise friends and funds. Here are some pointers:
   - Strive to be unique. If you try an idea that worked for another group, don’t expect the same results. People will only spend a limited amount for carnivals, auctions, and cow-pie bingo.
   - If you charge admission to your event, try to hold the line on expenses so that you don’t have to charge too much.
   - Get as much stuff donated as you can: supplies, food, publicity, etc.
   - At your event, use some of the sales ideas listed above to bring in more money.
   - Guarantee financial success by getting pledges before the event. Sponsors sign pledge forms and promise to donate a certain amount for every hour you wash cars (for free), rock in rocking chairs, chew gum, or whatever.

   Unrealistic expectation caution: Special events require lots of planning and lots of legwork to be successful.

3. Direct contributions: Don’t be ashamed to make a simple request for donations. Here are ways to ask:
   - Go in person to ask for a donation. As you ask:
     - introduce yourself and the organization you represent
     - have written information to use as a guideline
     - have a specific donation amount in mind for your request
     - talk to the owner of any business you solicit
     - be polite even if they refuse; they might change their minds, you know.
   - Offer businesses the opportunity to sponsor an activity or event.

When I am employed in serving others, I do not look upon myself as conferring favors but paying debts.
Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)

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activity • 15

To heighten awareness about an event or a cause, create a proclamation for the mayor or school principal to sign. A proclamation is an official statement in which a day, week, or month is proclaimed “Fill in the blank Day” — or week, or month. Here’s the process:

- Contact your principal, mayor, or council member and find out the policy concerning proclamations.
  - Write a letter that sums up your proposed proclamation and send it to the official you’re working with.
  - Ask to look at a copy of a previous proclamation. They are formal documents written in a specific style; try to use the same style.
    - Make an appointment with the mayor (or other official) for the signing.
    - Take pictures and send out a news release to maximize your exposure.

activity • 16

Write a letter to the editor of your newspaper, urging people to get behind a cause or organization that needs volunteer support.

Help thy brother’s boat across, and lo! thine own has reached the shore.
Hindu proverb

He called the volunteer center and asked if he could help. In four months, he’s helped seven human service agencies computerize their records.
activity • 17

“Give a man a fish, and you’ve given him a meal. Teach him to fish, and he’ll have food for a lifetime.”

As a class, discuss the meaning of this proverb and how its meaning extends beyond aquatic life. Then, divide into small groups. Each group is to write a three-act, six-minute play about helping people in need. In the first act, a person is “given a fish.” In Act II, a second person is “taught to fish.” The third act shows how the lives of the two recipients have changed.

activity • 18

Look in the newspaper for a story about a person or organization giving away “fish.” Find a second story that describes a person or organization that “teaches fishing.” Is one approach better than the other? Are both positive steps?

3. Direct contributions (cont’d)

- You can write a letter with the information on the previous page and reach more people, but you lose the personal touch. Some businesses, though, require that all requests for contributions be made in writing.

- If you really want to get fancy, go to the library and get a book about charitable foundations. Applying for grants is often complicated, but foundations hand out millions of dollars a year.

**Unrealistic expectation caution:** Michael Jordan, Bill Gates, and other famous people might seem to be obvious choices for contributions, and they are obvious — to every organization in the free world. Most wealthy people make donations through private foundations. It doesn’t hurt to ask, but don’t count on getting a check from somebody just because they’re rich.

Once you’ve gotten everyone’s attention (and some of their money), it’s time to make things happen! Think through this part carefully, though. Are you suggesting a quick fix for a problem or are you trying to change things for the long haul? It’s disheartening — but important — to know that for nearly all of society’s toughest problems, there are no quick fixes.

Let’s take hunger, for example. Solving hunger is as simple as getting nutritious food into everyone’s mouth every day. But how do you gather all that food, and how do you get it to all the hungry people? Who fixes it, and how do you keep it warm? What if the hungry people sell the food for drugs? And even if you get everybody fed for one day, how can you keep it going?

Sorry to burst your bubble and dampen your enthusiasm. It’s better that you learn now just how deep the problems run before you dive into the middle of things. You can’t stop hunger (or pollution, or sickness, or child abuse) today. But it doesn’t mean that one sandwich in one hungry mouth doesn’t matter.

Just know that solving big problems is a long journey that starts with one step. Then keep walking.

It may be that educating people about the problem and urging them to help will make a difference. Sometimes you have to change the system, though, and here are some steps to take to make a new law for your state or an ordinance for your town.

- Do your research and gather the facts. Make sure that
It's not the cut of a man's coat, nor the manner of his dress. It's service that measures success.
George Washington Carver (1864–1943)

a new law makes sense and has support in your community.
• Call or write the person who represents you and your community; it might be your council person, state representative, state senator, or mayor.
• Don’t stop calling or writing until you have heard from that person or one of her staff members.
• Ask them to keep you informed while a new law (or bill) is researched, investigated, and drafted.
• Be a part of the public process and attend any hearings or voting sessions on the matter. You may be asked to testify on behalf of the new law.
  • If the law is passed, find out when it will be signed (you’ll be famous!). If it fails, well, keep trying.

You’re probably asking, “Is it that all I need to do to get things done in this country?”
Yep. That’s it.

She’s still in high school but is already working to improve the environment.
She’s a volunteer worker for a congressional candidate who advocates clean air and water.

activity • 19
Divide into small groups and find a story in the sports section about a successful team. Discuss what makes them win: Good teamwork? A strong leader? Excellent uniforms?
Think of a community need or organization that could benefit from a team of volunteers. Pick a nickname for the team, select a mascot, and design the team uniforms.

activity • 20
Design a quarter-page ad describing and promoting the good works of an organization you admire.

activity • 21
Plan a fund-raising special event to benefit a local charity that needs money and publicity about its mission.
Is it a dance, a sale, or a ____-a-thon (fill in the blank)?
Will you charge admission, auction off items, or both?
Design an invitation or flier. How will you distribute it?
Who can donate auction items or door prizes?
Where will you hold the event?
How many people will you need to set up and then clean up?
Write a press release detailing your plans.

Every single one of us has the power for greatness, because greatness is determined by service — to yourself and to others.
Oprah Winfrey (1954– )
You don’t have to reinvent the wheel on the volunteer cart to be useful. Take a look at the following project ideas and examples of real-life accomplishments and opportunities from around the country to help your neighborhood, region, or planet. You can use your local newspaper for the activities outlined below, or use community guides to create a list of volunteer opportunities in your area.

**Hunger relief**

- The Salvation Army Shelter in Champaign, Ill., provides opportunities to help during the early evening hours. Volunteers can help cook dinner, serve guests, refill plates, and help with cleanup. On-the-job training is provided on the first visit.
- Start a food drive in your area. Decide how you will collect the food (Door to door? Ask people to deliver donations to a central location? Set up a booth at a shopping center?) Make sure you have a place to store the food. You can work with a shelter or food bank to distribute the donations.
- Get a group together to make small loaves of bread. This can be done in several houses or in your school’s environmental science lab (only with permission). Attach a note describing the bread and your group, and distribute the loaves to a homeless shelter or a food kitchen.
- Start a school garden. Get permission, of course, and get seeds and tools donated by local businesses. Find a shelter that will receive the produce you grow in your garden and set up a work schedule to take care of your garden during the week and on weekends. You can also start a garden at the shelter.

**Senior citizens**

- Students from Yarmouth Consolidated Memorial High School in Nova Scotia took part in an “All Saints” program on Halloween. Volunteers spent Halloween evening with senior citizens who were nervous about being victims of pranks or vandalism. At senior citizen complexes, volunteers escorted trick-or-treaters to common areas where residents dispensed candy.
- Visit a local retirement center or nursing home and talk to the director about forming friendships with the residents. You and your group can lead activities (hold an afternoon dance and learn each other’s dances), run errands, put on a talent show, or share life stories.
- Call a senior citizens center and ask for permission to make gift baskets for holidays. Check to see what items you should include in the baskets: food, personal-care items, books, cards and letters, etc. Decide whether you’ll use real baskets, boxes, or sacks, and arrange a time to deliver your holiday baskets.

**Animals**

- The Sidwell Friends Animal Rights Club in Washington, D.C., is dedicated to helping protect the rights of animals while educating people about animal neglect and abuse. Members encourage people to have their pets spayed or neutered and monitor companies that test products on animals.
- With help from your local humane society or animal shelter, start an information campaign to help control your local pet population. Create flyers and posters to distribute and display in schools, public buildings, and storefronts.
- Find out what birds are in your neighborhood. Research their food and shelter needs, then set aside an area where you and your neighbors can provide seed or suet, water, and shelter.

**Education**

- At Brooke High School in Wellsburg, W.Va., students serve as peer tutors in the writing lab. Tutors help students work on the computer, assisting with everything from inserting a disk to spell-checking a final draft.
Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents... It is loaned to you by your children.
Kenyan proverb

You’d never guess to look at her, but she is tenacious when it comes to raising money for the child-abuse center. She gathered $8,722 in telephone pledges.

The Multicultural Club at Mission High School in San Francisco conducts a variety of activities to help break down cultural barriers. By addressing issues of racial understanding and tolerance, club members educate themselves and their peers.

Start an Outreachers’ Club at your school to make new students feel welcome. Make up and distribute New Kid Survival Kits that include a map; school calendar; coupons from local stores; student handbook; and lists of teacher names and subjects, activities, clubs, and sports offered at your school.

Environmental concerns

At Archbishop Chapelle High School in New Orleans, the environmental science class produced a video to educate grammar school students about the environmental problems with Lake Pontchartrain. Students also educated the community about environmental concerns by decorating grocery bags with slogans and illustrations; the bags were later taken home by grocery store customers.

If your school doesn’t have an environmental club, start one. Find a sponsor, give your club a name, and design a logo. Meet regularly to decide on worthwhile projects, such as:

• Monitoring a stream in your area: Test it for contaminants; remove debris; and identify fish, protozoa, and bacteria that live in it.
• Organizing a coalition to clean up a neighborhood park. Contact city officials to get permission and trash bags, and ask where to take the trash you collect.

Hold a recycling contest at your school by working with your local recycling center. Think of a catchy title, ask for prizes to be donated, and create competition based on pounds or numbers of recyclables collected. Ask your principal to challenge the students with the promise of a zany — and embarrassing — act if the challenge is met (kiss a pig, shave his head, dance the macarena, etc.).

Health care

The Cincinnati Area Chapter of the American Red Cross is a great place for young people to volunteer. Teen-agers take puppies to nursing homes to visit with residents, serve as peer educators providing HIV/AIDS information, and assist with health and safety courses.

Students Against Drunk Driving is an active organization at Canton-Galva High School in Canton, Kan. Members discourage students from drinking and driving and sponsor an annual After-Prom Party at the local YMCA. They also hold a “White-Out Day,” picking students at random to have their faces painted white to symbolize deaths from alcohol-related accidents.

Work with your local health department to educate families about immunizations for children. Let parents know when and where they can get their children immunized and organize transportation for families that need it.

Shelter for the needy

At the People Serving People Homeless Shelter in Minneapolis, Minn., volunteers can organize donated items, lead recreational activities for children, work in the laundry, read to children, and answer phones.

In your community or school, hold a clothing drive, coat drive, or blanket drive to collect needed items for homeless people. You could also ask people and businesses for books, toys, mittens, sweaters, and disposable diapers.

Habitat for Humanity is an organization that builds low-cost housing for people and families that might not otherwise be able to afford their own homes. Find out whether there is a Habitat chapter (or similar organization) in your area and volunteer to help on your own or as part of a group. You don’t have to be a skilled carpenter to help.

activity • 26

People who pay taxes often worry that the schools they support are not providing effective education. To boost your writing skills and school pride, write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper and describe what’s right with your school. Make absolutely certain that you use proper grammar and punctuation.

activity • 27

Collect used books from libraries and neighbors, and hold a used book sale at a convenient location. You’ll need lots of publicity. Let everyone know that you will donate the proceeds to a preschool center, literacy program, or another agency you select.

activity • 28

Improve the environment at your school by taking on these projects:

• clean up litter inside and outside.
• erase or cover graffiti in the bathrooms.
• conduct an energy audit of your school.
• monitor the indoor air.
• test the drinking water for lead.

activity • 29

Find out from a state or city arborist if there is an area in need of trees. Work with the arborist to research which trees grow best in your area and how to plant them. Contact local utility companies to stake out safe areas to dig and ask if they would like to help finance the project.

The be-all and end-all of life should not be to get rich, but to enrich the world.

B.C. Forbes (1880–1954)
Are there any Volunteers?