

# Partner With Youth to Make A Difference in Communities!

## You Can Help Kids Make a Difference!

Kids really do want to be a part of community solutions, but they need adult and older teen partners to help them make a difference.

## What the Research Says About Kids and Community Service

In the 1994 Michigan State University research report, "[13,000 Adolescents Speak: A Profile of Michigan Youth](#),"\* 43 percent of the seventh, ninth, and eleventh graders surveyed reported no involvement in volunteer work or community service. Yet, research supports that involving kids in volunteering or community service is critical to promoting positive development and preventing risky behavior.

According to the MSU research, by involving young people in community service opportunities, we can:

- Establish a sense of community interdependency and shared purpose.
- Provide young people with "real world" opportunities to confront problems, consider alternatives and find solutions.
- Help young people develop social competencies, form positive values and plant the seeds to form meaning and purpose in life.
- Help encourage use of problem-solving and critical thinking skills.
- Reduce the rate of risky behavior in youth.

*\*Keith, J.G., and Perkins, D. F. (1995) "13,000 Adolescents Speak: A Profile of Michigan Youth," Institute for Children, Youth and Families, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan.*

## The Best Way to Partner With Young People in Community Service

To ensure that you're involving young people in high-quality community service-learning experiences, you should keep these questions in mind:\*

1. Are young people involved in assessing real and meaningful community needs and alternatives?
2. Are young people helping to decide who will do what, by when?
3. Is the planned service activity age-appropriate and supervised by a responsible adult?
4. Is the planned service activity safe and free of the operation of vehicles or machinery that require technical training?
5. Is the service activity meaningfully connected to subject matter that young people have been learning? Does it provide them with opportunities to use their newly acquired subject matter skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their communities?
6. Will the proposed service meet actual community needs? Will it meet the needs of individuals with whom the young people will meet and interact?



7. Are community groups, agencies, organizations and/or schools partners in the project? Will young people experience and understand collaboration?
8. Does the planned community service provide structured time for a young person to think, talk and write about what he or she did and saw during the actual service activity?
9. Does the plan include opportunities to inform families, the media and the community of the service (and learning) that has taken place?
10. Does your service opportunity promote healthy self-esteem, moral and intellectual maturity, responsibility to self and others, and taking an active role as a citizen? Does it promote career exploration and workforce skills that benefit young people and society?
11. Will young people be meaningfully involved in evaluating the project?
12. Will there be opportunities for young people to consider new applications for what they have learned from their service-learning experiences?
13. Will the young people's efforts be recognized by those served, including their peers, 4-H itself and the community?
14. Are young people's differences in age, interests and ability provided for with service opportunities?

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- **Scales, Peter, and Leffert, Nancy.** (1999). The empowerment assets. *Developmental Assets*, 63-74, Search Institute.
- **Shumer, Robert.** (1994). Community-based learning: Humanizing education. *Journal of Adolescence*, 17, 357-367.



- **Sundeen, Richard, and Raskoff, Sally.** (1994). Volunteering among teenagers in the United States. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 23(4), 383-403.

## Learning Materials

- **Citizenship Adventure Kit (4HCCS MI-7329)** From Citizenship - Public Adventures. This unique curriculum for 4th to 12th graders is set up in a "kid friendly" format. The kit teaches the essentials of community service.
- **Mark, Cynthia, et al. (2000).** *YEA! (Youth experiencing action): A community service learning guide.* (4-H 1553). East Lansing: Michigan State University Extension, 4-H Youth Development. How to plan and carry out a community service project using the 5-step community service-learning cycle. For 14- to 19-year-olds.

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