

Parents Are the Foundation

Teens & Service

December 2007

When young people reach out and help others, their world grows and so does their confidence. What may be a burden or a chore could be an opportunity for school credit, a boost to self-esteem, even an escape from boredom for a young person.

A service project is more than just an activity you're supposed to do. According to the Search Institute, young people need to be given opportunities to serve through their families, schools, and communities. Volunteer activities build a teen's identity and sense of purpose and help them grow up more caring and responsible adults.

The 2005 Iowa County Search survey of 1,264 7th through 12th graders, asked young people during an average week how many hours they spend helping other people without getting paid to make their city a better place for people to live. As shown in Chart A, 64% of all youth say 0 hours per week. 31% of boys and 41% of girls spend 1 or more hours per week helping other people without getting paid.

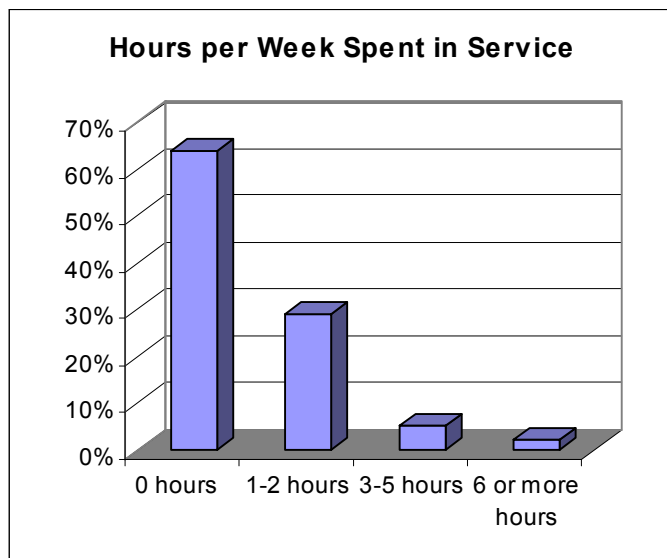


Chart A

When asked, "I'm given lots of chances to help make my town or city a better place in which to live" only 30% of young people in Iowa County agreed with this statement. Chart B, shows how many times in the 12 months prior to the survey young people felt they were asked to help on service or volunteer projects.

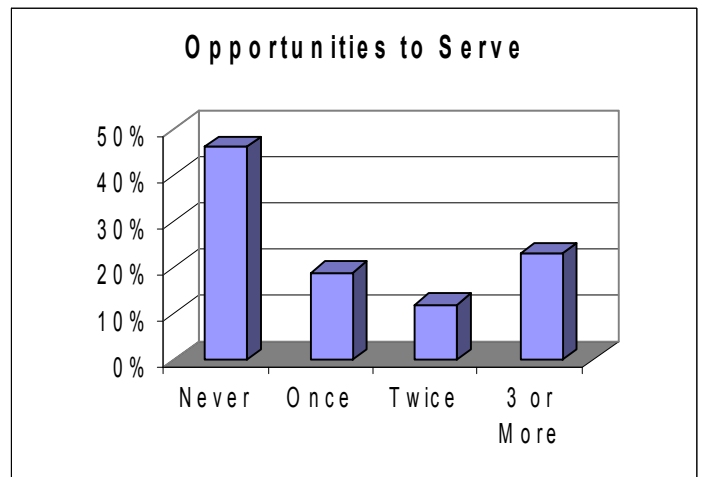


Chart B

When you read biographies of great leaders, many of them tell about how much they were shaped by experiences of serving others as a family. They were moved to compassion when they saw their parents show compassion. Sixty-seven percent of adults who remember that their family volunteered when they were young now volunteer as adults.

In Iowa County, the 2005 Search survey posed this statement to the young people: “My parents spend a lot of time helping other people.” Fifty-three percent agreed or strongly agreed, 34% were not sure, and 13% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

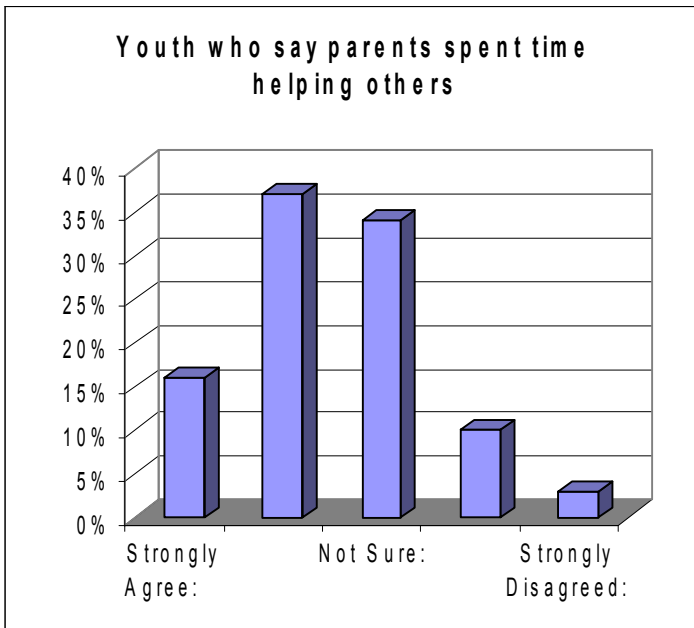


Chart C

Here are some ideas for giving back to your community. Teens can use these projects to meet school or youth group requirements for community service and to start building resumes that they'll use when applying for first jobs or college.

For Young People

- Don't wait to be given a 'useful' role. Figure out where you want to serve, and then find out what's needed, and how you can do the most good.
- Do a 'secret' service for someone. Take out the trash when it's not your turn; leave a plant on the neighbor's doorstep, or a treat in a friend's locker.

**REMEMBER:
PARENTS ARE THE FOUNDATION!**

- Come up with fun ideas – a pajama party for kids who don't have nightwear, a senior prom after your school prom for older folks, have a book shower for young people who need books.
- Speak up when you hear negative stereotyping of youth. Speak proudly of the ways you and your friends serve your community.

For Families

- Be a role model for your teens by serving others.
- Help your neighbors - bake a few extra cookies and take them a plate, shovel snow, rake leaves or offer to take a young child to the park.
- Visit someone who is home-bound either as a whole family or in small groups.
- Offer rides to school events to other young people who may have parents working during club meetings, school musicals, or athletic events.

School

- Have a column in your school newsletter highlighting service projects, written by the youth.
- Offer a few free tickets for families with limited resources who may not attend the school play or musical or homecoming game.
- Place as much emphasis on celebrating service as rewarding academics or athletic achievements. Hold ceremonies and consider giving service 'letters'.

In the Community

- Ask teens how they would like to serve. Young people are four times more likely to help if they are asked, however, only half of young people say they are asked to help out.
- Match interest to opportunities. Pay attention to what youth seem most concerned about, as those are areas where they're likely to invest more energy.
- Make sure young people know why you are having a fund-raiser and where the money goes – better yet ask them to help decide where to donate monies. Young people are seldom asked 'What do you think we should do?'
- Recognize young people who serve your community with praise – a simple 'thank you' is enough to make them feel proud and appreciated.
- Don't be afraid to address social issues with youth – they know about hunger, abuse, homelessness, illiteracy and can help solve real problems.

"Parents are the Foundation" is a monthly, school-year newsletter containing information from the 2005 Survey of Student Resources and Assets in Iowa County Schools by America's Promise and the Search Institute and the University of Wisconsin-Extension Iowa County. This series is adapted from the UW-Extension Teen Assessment Project "Whose Kids?...Our Kids!" newsletter series. This issue was written by Sarah Weier and edited by Ruth Schriefer and Deb Ivey. Thanks are extended to the 1,264 7th to 12th graders in Highland, Mineral Point, Pocatonia and River Valley who participated in the survey. For more information, contact us at UW-Extension Iowa County, 608-935-0391 or on the web at <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/iowa/>