

Teens Turn to Volunteering

More teens--eager to pad résumés, lacking money for movies and shopping, bored or simply interested in meaningful service--are volunteering. Experts say the current generation of teens has already shown more passion for volunteering than others in the recent past. Youths ages 16 to 19 volunteered in 2004 at more than twice the rate teens did at the close of the 1980s, according to the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Last summer, teen employment reached a 60-year low in the United States. Just a third of 16- to 19-year-olds held jobs, according to the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University--down from 45 percent in 2000; but what some call a crisis in the teen job market may turn out to be a great opportunity in the world of volunteerism. Studies show that people who develop the habit of volunteering early in life are more likely to continue and expand their volunteerism as they age. As the struggling economy saps the finances of nonprofits, teen volunteers may play critical roles in organizations with downsized staffs.

Much of the benefit is likely to be seen by religious organizations, which are the most popular organizations for volunteers, followed by educational and youth service organizations. Many studies have shown that people of all faiths say their religious beliefs motivate them to volunteer.

The economic stimulus package may also help stir do-gooderism among teens and young adults. It provides \$1.2 billion for youth activities, including the creation of 1 million summer jobs to run them. That money is being distributed to states, where it's trickling down to counties and local programs. The stimulus plan also provides \$201 million for AmeriCorps, which pays people 17 and older to work part- or full-time at nonprofits for 10 or 12 months.

Background and research

See a [**Bizjournals.com report**](#) on a study that found that summer 2009 may be the first since 1954 in which fewer than 1 million teens age 16 to 19 are employed. In summer 2008, 30 percent fewer teens had summer jobs than in 2007.

See an [**April 23, 2009, Cleveland.com story**](#) about a study that found that teen volunteering has dipped for the first time since 9/11, with 28 percent of teens volunteering during 2007.

See [**“The Historically Low Summer and Year Round 2008 Teen Employment Rate,”**](#) a September 2008 study by the Center for Labor Market Studies at

Northeastern University.

“OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era” is the title of a 2004 survey of 1,400 youth ages 18 to 25 that included Christian, Muslim, Jewish youth and a mix of races and ethnicities. The survey explored attitudes about faith, politics and volunteer service. It found a “strong and intimate” connection between religious faith and volunteerism. Fifty-six percent of those surveyed volunteered in their community in the last year, but only 14 percent did so regularly. The 2004 survey was conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research.

The 2008 **Volunteering in America study** details volunteering trends nationally and provides data by state and city. It includes information about college students.

“Building Active Citizens: The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering” is a study by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Based on 2004 data, it found that 55 percent of teens volunteered through a formal organization that year.

“Love Thy Neighbor: The Role of Faith in Volunteer Motivation,” a study by the Center for Urban Policy and the Environment at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, found a very high correlation between religiosity and volunteer service.

- Religion Newswriters Association