

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com

Generation Give

Teens Volunteer Their Time in Huge Numbers

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Posted: Sept. 6, 2011

What Happened:

“Kids today...” some adults lament. “Why don’t they stop that infernal texting? Why don’t they pull up their pants and pull those ear buds out of their ears? Why don’t they ever think about someone else besides themselves?”

Well, the next time you hear your crotchety Uncle Al or someone else say that, you can tell Uncle Al (politely) that he’s wrong—at least in part.

According to a study released by the government organization Volunteering in America, teens are volunteering in near record numbers these days.

About 4.4 million teens, in fact—more than a quarter of all American teenagers—donated their time to charity in 2010. All told, volunteers between the ages of 16 and 19 gave a collective 377 million hours doing good work.

Nearly a quarter did some fundraising work. Another quarter spent their time doing manual labor—helping to build houses, maybe, or cleaning up streets. About 23 percent collected or distributed food. More than one in five teens mentored other youth.

In other words, a huge number of teens gave a significant amount of their time helping others—making a real difference in their communities—and a whopping 31 percent of them did their volunteering through church.

Good thing, too. Churches almost always depend on volunteers to help get things done, and they’re almost always looking for more. Truth is, not everyone is so generous with their time. Once teens graduate from high school, many stop volunteering. Youth between the ages of 20 and 24 have the lowest volunteering rate of any age demographic, with just one-fifth of young adults chipping in their time. Statistically, it’s only when people reach age 35 that their volunteering rates surpass those of high schoolers.

Talk About It:

Do you volunteer? If so, what do you do? *Why* do you do it? Do you get credit for it in school? Does it help on your college resume? Do you just like to do it?

Why do you think teens tend to volunteer more than 20-somethings? Is it because teens tend to have more time? Is it because their parents make them volunteer? Or is there something else going on?

Do you know of any organizations that could use a little extra help? Any ministries in your church that need a helping hand? People in your neighborhood who need someone to help them with groceries or doing some odd jobs? Could you do more to make a corner of the world a little bit better?

What the Bible Says:

“He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done” (Prov. 19:17).

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Prov. 31:8-9).

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matt. 6:2-4).