

## REACHING OUT TO YOUTH

### Rely on School Counselors to Help You Approach Youth

What role do youth volunteers play at your organization?

At Montana's Deaconess Billings Clinic, youth make up approximately 20 percent of the 220-bed hospital's volunteer force, reports Manager of Volunteer Services Marilyn Owen.

One resource that the hospital has found helpful in recruiting youth volunteers is school counselors. Owen goes to schools and chats with counselors and club leaders and provides them with the hospital's volunteer application forms.

School personnel are good sources for youth volunteers for several reasons, Owen explains. First, they can easily identify youth who would be good volunteers. Second, they visit frequently with students and can more easily spread information about volunteer opportunities.

Most of the youth volunteer during the summer months on an ongoing basis, says Owen. They perform the same tasks as adult volunteers — delivering flowers and mail, working in the gift shop, and other tasks where needed. If youth volunteers are interested in healthcare as a possible future career, more job-related activities can be developed.

The recruitment process for youth volunteers includes an interview, which they usually attend with parents or guardians. Here, expectations are outlined.

Youth volunteers undergo the same orientation as adult volunteers. This includes an introduction to hospital operations as well as specific training by either staff or volunteer mentors. The hospital has around 500 volunteers.

The big trick when working with youth volunteers is to have them feel that whatever they're doing is worthwhile and meaningful, says Owen.

Owen is currently working on another concept to make youth volunteer opportunities more attractive in the Billings area. The concept involves awarding varsity letters — like those awarded for athletics and other activities — for community service. Hours would accrue toward the letter.

*Source: Marilyn Owen, Manager of Volunteer Services, Deaconess Billings Clinic, Billings, MT. Phone (406) 657-4027.*

*Schools provide an obvious place to reach out to youth as volunteers. The key is getting your foot in the door.*

### Let's Get Youth Excited About Volunteering

Whether it's your own son or daughter, other relative, a young neighbor or the child of a friend or associate, think about what you might do to interest a young person in volunteering.

There is no time like youth to begin conveying the virtues of volunteering. If you can expose youth to this noble endeavor early on, you can open them up to its rewards and help them to establish positive volunteering habits.

It's been said, "The more you lose yourself in caring about others, the more trivial your own worries and problems become."

Teaching young people to become involved as volunteers and to care about others helps reduce their life's stresses and moves the focus from them to others.

Do your part to involve youth in volunteering. Use any of these examples to get started:

- Tell your children or other young people in your circle of influence about your volunteer involvement. Let them know the ways in which you assist other organizations.
- If and when it's possible, bring the young adults with you to meetings or assist you with volunteer tasks to get a flavor of the experience.
- Help the young person research and find a volunteer opportunity that could be rewarding for him/her. If the individual is college-bound, explain that past leadership experiences are taken into consideration for both admissions and scholarship awards.

*Studies have proven that those who become involved as volunteers at a young age are much more apt to stay involved as adults.*

#### Offer Volunteer Opportunities to Eagle Scout Candidates

Don't overlook Boy Scouts of America as a source of volunteer assistance.

Boy Scouts seeking to achieve the rank of Eagle Scout — only about 2 percent of them achieve this rank — are expected to plan a philanthropic project for their communities that generates both volunteers and funds.

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*Grabbing the attention of young people sometimes takes a different approach than one used to attract a different age group. The media can help you reach out to youth.*

**Use the Media to Recruit Young Volunteers**

Access to a steady supply of new and enthusiastic volunteers is a goal of nearly every charitable organization. And getting the message out to young, would-be volunteers takes some special doing. That's where the media can help in recruitment efforts.

Most members of the news media are interested in stories about youth who are doing worthwhile volunteer projects. You may be able to develop some successful strategies to attract youngsters to your roster by offering programs and volunteer opportunities that have a dual objective: Adding to your base of support both now and in the future, and training youth who will become future leaders themselves. To do so:

- **Identify assignments in your organization that young volunteers can complete.** Once you have found a variety of jobs for the "entry-level" volunteer, schedule them for weekends and after school hours when students' hours are more flexible. Send news releases to news media outlining the work schedules. Make it known that youth is the focus of your recruitment efforts. When enough youth have agreed to participate, schedule a festive kickoff meeting with food, T-shirts, music and an organizational rally. Invite photographers and reporters to attend. Have press packages for them to use for reference material in future coverage.
- **Explore the concept of youth internships in your organization.** Many youth search for positive work and civic involvement experiences to use on resumes or for scholarship and college entrance applications. Your organization can help provide these. Interview school guidance counselors, as well as youth leaders at area churches or other organizations who share in your philosophies to determine which kinds of opportunities are most useful to students. When solid objectives are defined, prepare formal media announcements detailing your plans, and inviting community youth to participate.
- **Ask parents to involve their teenaged children and friends.** Like the popular "take your daughter/son to work day" observed by many businesses, borrow a similar approach with a "bring a youth to help" project where the first student you ask in turn brings another, until each has asked or recruited 10 helpers. The hook of the "chain of youth volunteers" may be unique enough in your community to attract reporters. Present each participant with certificates of achievement. After the event is over, continue to contact first-time participants to join in other projects.
- **Be selective about the type of youth you select to participate.** Like adults, youth like to feel important, capable and respected. Develop some high-level youth leadership programs designed to attract the "cream of the crop" in your community, and even offer a scholarship if appropriate. Ask senior volunteers and board members to serve on a selection committee. When criteria are established, hold a press conference about your prestigious new youth program, having your board chairman or best-known volunteer leader preside. Even if all the youth who are interested in being included don't meet the most stringent criteria, offer them other special projects in your organization and opportunities to be future honorees.

**Recruitment Idea...**

Think others should take an interest in the organization you represent? Then don't be shy about telling them.

Make a point to add a "P.S." to every piece of business and personal correspondence: "Just in case you don't know it, I'm proud to tell you that I volunteer for [Name of Organization] and we could sure use the help and expertise of someone like you."

Take a look at the ways in which you are recruiting young volunteers today and examine how the media might complement those strategies.

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**Teen Volunteers Add New Life to Existing Programs**

Give teenage volunteers the attention they deserve, and they just may surprise you.

When the Springfield, Massachusetts Ronald McDonald House opened in 1991, the facility was inundated with calls from teens who wanted to volunteer. Volunteers must be age 18 to serve at the McDonald House. However, Suzanne Herlihy, volunteer coordinator, and Ginny Hyde, volunteer, recognized an opportunity to use teen service in support areas such as fund raising.

Herlihy speaks glowingly of McDonald House's Teen Board contributions. Teen volunteers play a significant role in soliciting gifts to cover annual operating expenses.

Teen Board members play a valuable role collecting food and paper products, raising public awareness and organizing fund raisers. In addition, they perform reception and clerical duties, cook meals, decorate and organize social activities.

Herlihy noticed that most organizations are oblivious to the powerful benefits a teen volunteer program can hold for the organization, youth and the community.

She has found that with well-planned bylaws, good leadership and consistent supervision, youth are priceless. Their advisory board was founded on those principles. The first advisors were recruited from active McDonald House volunteers, some of whom were parents of teens who wished to volunteer.

The ratio of adults to teens is purposefully small: One adult to five youth.

A thorough orientation is key to teen volunteer commitment and retention, says Herlihy. Each September, members attend a mandatory orientation including speakers, informational videos and a tour of the Baystate Hospital, Shriners Hospital and the Ronald McDonald House. Bylaws serve as the core for training. In addition, teens are coached in the art of public speaking and fund raising. Teens sign a commitment contract and receive a copy of bylaws. Now in its third year, the Teen Board has not yet had a teen volunteer quit.

A letter is mailed to Teen Board parents informing them of their child's responsibilities, and thanking them for sharing their teen's time. Parents are also invited to tour the McDonald house.

*Source: Suzanne Herlihy, Volunteer Coordinator, Ronald McDonald House, Springfield, MA. Phone (413) 794-5683.*


**Teen Advisory Board Bylaws**

*Following are the abbreviated bylaws that govern the adult Advisory Board of the Springfield, Massachusetts Ronald McDonald House:*

1. The Advisory Board will consist of four to six adult advisors who agree to a three-year commitment.
2. Advisors act as a contact for area high school Guidance Departments during the application process.
3. Advisors will not recruit.
4. Advisors assist in the interview/selection process, attend all meetings and oversee youth activities.
5. Each advisor will monitor five teens, supervise their progress, offer advice and monitor service hours.
6. Advisors contact the Ronald McDonald House manager to assess current needs and meet monthly to address those needs.
7. Each Advisor plans one annual event, but delegates responsibilities to the other groups.

**Teen Board Member Bylaws**

More than 200 teens applied for the 30 academic-year positions. Applications are due June 1, with all applicants interviewed during the summer. Teens who served the previous year are automatically reenlisted to take advantage of their experience. Membership is intentionally diversified to avoid cliques. Volunteers come from every local school, religion, gender and ethnic background.

*Following are abbreviated bylaws that govern Teen Board members:*

1. Applicants must be entering grades 10 or 11.
2. Leadership, communication skills, dependability and sincerity are essential.
3. Teen Board members serve a minimum of four hours per month attending meetings, performing community relations, fund raising, cooking or working at the McDonald House.
4. Teens record volunteer hours in a log book, initialed by an adult.
5. Members wear a uniform shirt and name tag while volunteering.
6. Teens are supervised by an adult advisor during all activities.
7. Members share leadership responsibilities equally by organizing/ conducting meetings and reporting to the Board of Directors.
8. Attendance is mandatory at Teen Board meetings and sponsored events. Teens must inform adult advisors or justify absence.
9. Members serve as ambassadors for the McDonald House.