

## Youth Count Column: January 2012: “Young People Are Assets”

Everybody in our community needs help at some time or another. The need for help can take many shapes. It might be personal help, business help, help with a neighborhood issue – it can have any dimension or design.

Think about these two facts: 52%, or over one half of New Albany Floyd County 6-12 grade students report that they already serve in the community more an hour or more per week (Asset #9: Service to Others). 36%, barely more than one third of our young people say that they are given useful roles in the community (Asset #8: Youth as Resources).

What would happen – what good would be generated in our community if we deliberately provided useful, meaningful service roles for youth in the community?

Sometimes as adults we have trouble asking others for help, let alone even entertain the thought of asking kids to help us solve a problem. Think of the energy they possess. Couple that energy with enthusiasm and watch out for the action explosions. They are not bound by the notion of “we’ve tried that; it doesn’t work”. Youth who become active in their early years tend to continue that service approach throughout their lives.

Young people who serve an hour or more in the community are more likely to be respectful of others, helpful and kind, and patient. They also tend to value diversity.

So you ask, how do we go about providing them useful roles?

- Offer opportunities to work in community projects – like cleaning up neighbourhood areas, local parks, planning and planting a community garden. Better yet, ask youth what they would do to make the community better and then help empower them to accomplish their recommendations.
- Do you have technology needs at home, at church, even in the office? If I’m stumped on some problem with my cell phone or the laptop, I call my 14 year old grandson: zip ... he knows how to take care of it! Lots of young people even know how to create websites.
- Consider having older youth serve as mentors in church groups of youth programs.
- Are you trying to solve a problem at home, church, youth program, or even at work. Ask a young person his or her ideas.

We should begin modelling an attitude of service when children are young. It can start at home and while in public settings with the family:

- Encourage your child to hold the door open for others, especially older citizens and those with special needs.
- Have them help you recycle at home by putting items in the appropriate bins – then take them to the recycle center with you. Go even one step further and let them help you decide where to donate funds from recycling.
- Take a family walk around the neighborhood – and take a trash bag with you to pick up trash as you go.

Serving others is rewarding regardless of the age of the person providing service.

Let’s give it a try and see what rewards we – our entire community – will reap when give our young people the opportunity to BE assets by helping them BUILD the empowerment assets.

For additional ideas or information, or to share your story or ideas about asset building, contact 812-923-1160 or [barbara@youthcount.com](mailto:barbara@youthcount.com) and please visit the Youth Count website at [www.youthcount.com](http://www.youthcount.com) .