

Kids Can Make a Difference—Just Ask Them Study Finds Opportunity, Encouragement Are Keys To Youth Volunteerism

(NAPSA)—While more young people are volunteering now than ever before, there are still many that stay home and surf the Web or play video games. Most likely, the reason these particular “Generation Y-ers” aren’t more involved is a simple one—they haven’t been asked.

According to a recent survey, more children would volunteer if more opportunities were created for them and if they were asked. The survey revealed 81 percent of young volunteers started with an activity organized by their school, club or religious organization. The survey also found that seven out of 10 kids who currently do not volunteer would likely do so if opportunities were created for them.

“Creating opportunities for kids to volunteer is key to raising the levels of youth service and spreading the benefits of volunteering,” said Steven A. Culbertson, president and CEO of Washington D.C.-based Youth Service America.

In addition to providing opportunity, encouragement is also a key in planting the seeds of life-long community service.

For 12-year-old Pennsylvanian Meagan Sokol, having the opportunity to help her animal friends at a local shelter has enriched her life, and made life better for the hundreds of dogs and cats she’s cleaned, fed and exercised over the past two years.

Fifteen-year-old Keith Thelen saw an opportunity to help and applied his computer skills to close the technology gap for eco-



nomically disadvantaged youth in his small Minnesota community. Keith’s work at his local community center allowed residents to have access to computers and invaluable computer education.

To acknowledge those like Meagan and Keith, Kohl’s Department Stores created a program to recognize and reward young people who are making a difference. Through its Kohl’s Kids Who Care® program, the department store chain conducts an annual search for the most caring youth in America.

“Kohl’s Kids Who Care is about encouraging young people to make a difference and have fun doing it,” said Julie Gardner, senior vice president of marketing at Kohl’s. “Kohl’s Kids Who Care is an exciting program because in addition to rewarding young people who are generously giving back to their communities, it provides the kind of recognition

that engages even more young people to volunteer.”

Winners are selected at the local, regional and national levels. Two winners at each store receive a \$50 gift card. Regional winners are awarded a \$1,000 post-secondary education scholarship, and national winners receive a \$5,000 scholarship. Since the program’s inception in 2001, more than 20,000 nominations have been submitted and more than 2,250 young volunteers, between the ages of 6 and 18, have been recognized for their hard work. Stores will begin accepting nominations for the 2004 volunteer recognition program in February of 2004. Applications will be available at all Kohl’s Department Stores and at www.kohls.com.

Young humanitarians like Meagan and Keith are proof positive that one person—one young person—can make a difference in the lives of others. And, starting kids volunteering at a young age will likely lead to continued activity. The Kohl’s survey showed that 70 percent of the youth who volunteered began doing so before the age of 12. Through their experiences, these young volunteers felt they really helped someone else while having fun, and they felt better about themselves.

According to the survey, and experts like Culbertson, creating volunteer opportunities for our nation’s youth is critical. Once that opportunity is created, finding kids to reach out might be easier than you think. All you have to do is ask them.