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# Catch the Spirit: A Student's Guide to Community Service

Prudential

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## Catch the Spirit

**Ideas and information on how young people can help make their communities better places to live.**

In this fast-paced world, it's surprising there's time for you to attend classes, do homework, take part in extracurricular activities, and still manage to relax and have fun with family and friends.

Yet despite busy schedules, many young people like you are concerned about what's going on in their neighborhoods and around the world, and are looking for ways to get involved. Here are some facts:

In a survey of nearly 1,000 young people commissioned by Prudential, 95 percent of those interviewed said they felt it's important for people to volunteer.

Almost two-thirds of those respondents said that individual responsibility is the best way to address community problems.

67 percent indicated that they devote some of their time to volunteer activities.

## Why Volunteer?

Why are so many students interested in serving their communities? Because they want to:

- Make a difference
- Develop new skills
- Prepare for college
- Explore career paths
- Have fun working with friends
- Feel good about themselves

Although the efforts of one person may seem small, every act of service can have an important impact on someone ... and millions of individual volunteers can create a revolution of sorts. Whatever your reason for volunteering, once involved, it's easy to get hooked—to “catch the spirit” of community involvement. Volunteering can expand your horizons and become a satisfying, lifelong commitment.

## What's Right for Me?

You may make an instant decision to volunteer in your community. But don't be hasty in selecting a project or organization. First, take time to think about what problems or issues in your neighborhood or community concern you.

Then, as you search for the “right” volunteer activity, ask yourself:

How much time do I have to commit?

What talents or skills do I offer?

What do I want to get out of my involvement?

Will I enjoy this type of service?

There are many reasons to volunteer. But one should be universal—volunteer for something you can enjoy.

Don't limit your thinking. You may want to volunteer in the structured environment of a large organization, or you may prefer the more informal “family” feeling of a smaller group. Perhaps you want to create your own volunteer activity by engaging your friends or family, or maybe just work alone on a project. When you've selected or narrowed your volunteer interests, you may want to talk to your parents, friends, a teacher or club sponsor, a counselor, or someone at your church, synagogue, or other place of worship. They might have suggestions on how to go about making it happen. Call organizations and local government offices that offer services to the public. Read your local newspaper. Watch and listen to the television and radio news for ideas. Look online for volunteer opportunity databases.

After you've made a choice, commit yourself to it. Give it your energy—and adequate time—to determine if it's a good fit.

## What Can a Volunteer Do?

This information can help serve as a compass to point you to some of the many possibilities for volunteering. Combine these suggestions with your own ideas and creativity—and go for it.



## A PRESCRIPTION FOR SATISFACTION

So the medical or healthcare field intrigues you. Take heart, opportunities abound. Consider

volunteering at a hospital, local blood bank, a medical clinic for the poor, a nursing home, an emergency medical squad, or a cancer or AIDS facility. Maybe you'd enjoy entertaining kids in the hospital, or collecting books and toys to help them pass the time. Many young volunteers also get involved in walkathons and other fund-raising activities to fight major diseases, or to provide medical care for those who cannot afford it.



## ANIMAL MAGNETISM

If animals are your passion, here's a flock of ideas. Check with your local zoo, animal shelter or humane society. Volunteer chores can include

cleaning cages, feeding and exercising the "residents," assisting with adoptions, working in the office, or planning fund-raising events. Or consider raising a guide dog for a blind person. Perhaps your interests are more in tune with endangered species. Think about volunteering at a wildlife refuge or nature habitat where you can steer your commitment to awareness campaigns or fund-raising activities.



## YOU'RE READING OUR MIND

If you enjoy reading, you've got a skill that's easy to share. Community shelters (for the homeless or abused) often house children

who are as hungry for fun and stories as for a square meal. Libraries, children's hospitals and Head Start programs may jump at the offer of organized story hours. On a more personal level, you can read to an elderly neighbor or someone who is blind. Or check into a local organization that needs readers for a "talking books" program. Consider starting a book drive at your school or community center to donate to schools or other community facilities.



## IF YOUR HEART'S IN THE ARTS

Young volunteers with an interest in the arts can share those talents, as individuals or in a group.

Check with senior centers, shelters, daycare programs, local parks, or recreation programs. Offer to serve as an usher at a community theater or help find stage props and costumes. Or offer assistance at an arts center or a local art gallery. You could present theatrical skits, musical revues, magic shows, concerts or other forms of entertainment at senior citizen homes, hospitals or

other community facilities. Not only does your contribution help keep cash-strapped arts alive in your community, but it also helps build a lifelong appreciation for the arts and brings enjoyment to many.



## SOME SPORTING GOOD IDEAS

Share your athletic talent and interest as a coach or coaching assistant in sports or recreational activities. "Help wanted" signs are often posted at volunteer organizations serving people with mental or physical challenges; YMCA, YWCA or Red Cross chapters; local civic organizations (like the Elks, Kiwanis, Rotary or Lions clubs); city parks; and recreation or neighborhood programs for low-income kids. They often seek volunteers to help out with Little League, swimming, softball, basketball, soccer, tennis, gymnastics, or other recreational activities. Or collect used equipment to help out a local sports program.



## APPLY YOUR ABILITIES TO DISABILITIES

Be a special friend to people with mental or physical disabilities. Not only will your skills contribute to the programs, but you may help change public perception about people who have special challenges. Volunteer to help with local, regional or state Special Olympics competitions held in many communities. Local groups and residential facilities often need volunteers for field trips to museums and amusement parks, recreation and sports activities, or arts and crafts programs. Contact community centers or other facilities for disabled persons, or ask your mayor's office for options.



## PRESERVE THE PLANET—RECYCLE

Concern about our environment is serious stuff. And your commitment can start right at home. If you're not doing it now, start recycling your own newspapers, glass and aluminum. Then get your neighbors involved. If your school doesn't have a recycling program, talk with your teachers or principal about getting one started. The company that supplies your school cafeteria might lend a hand in this effort. Young volunteers also have been known to recycle tires, motor oil, telephone books, greeting cards, Christmas trees and computer ink cartridges.



## HEART AND SOLE

Perhaps you don't want to take on the responsibility of organizing and planning. There are other ways to help your favorite causes. There are many activities in which you can let your feet do the talking—at dance marathons and other indoor activities or at outdoor events, such as bicycle races, walkathons, and charity runs.



## BE A CRIME FIGHTER

So you have an interest in police work as a career, or are concerned about crime in your community. Contact your local police department to see if you

can help develop or get involved in a student-watch program. How about developing a school watch program? Talk with your principal or school counselor about establishing a student patrol that keeps an eye out for and reports theft, graffiti and other crimes at your school. Or think about educating other young people about avoiding drugs, dealing with strangers, or staying safe on the Internet. Another possibility: volunteer to take part in "teen court" justice systems that operate in many cities.



## MANY IN NEED, INDEED

Perhaps you've been concerned about homeless or needy people. Their needs are many—from shelter to food and clothing. Community projects

and church-affiliated organizations such as Habitat for Humanity need volunteers to construct housing for the poor. Volunteer to help prepare or distribute food at community or church-sponsored soup kitchens. A local low-income housing project may need some help in a community garden. Or you can plant and tend your own garden, and then donate the fruits (or vegetables) of your labor to a local food bank, or sell them to support your favorite charity. Many young volunteers also have had success with school or community campaigns to collect food, clothing, books, toys, school supplies, eyeglasses, toiletries, backpacks and holiday gifts for the disadvantaged.



## SPREAD THE WORD

Perhaps you'd like to educate fellow students and others in your community about an issue that's important to you. For example, you could warn

fellow students about smoking, drug or alcohol abuse, AIDS, or negative peer pressure. Or you could promote important ideals such as racial tolerance, a clean environment, or traffic safety. You might want to put together an educational presentation and take it to schools in your area, or launch a general awareness campaign in your community.



## SPRUCE UP YOUR TOWN

Here are some earthy ideas to sink your hands into. Your local parks department may welcome an offer to plant trees and flowers

in public parks, along walkways, or in downtown areas. Local environmental groups, landscaping companies and the National Arbor Day Foundation often give away tree seedlings. Talk to your principal about ways to beautify and maintain your school grounds. Or consider cleaning up litter on a regular basis from neighborhood streets, local streams, highway shoulders and other public places. Another idea: offer to help paint over graffiti on school or city property.



## KIDS ARE YOUR THING

If you like helping other kids, or are considering a teaching career, volunteering can work for you.

Schools, churches, libraries and community centers often have tutoring or mentoring programs for youngsters.

Local camps, especially those for sick or low-income kids, frequently need counselors. Other places to consider: children's hospitals, daycare centers, shelters, programs for "latchkey" kids, homework tutoring phone lines, and Big Brothers or Big Sisters programs. Some city or county courtrooms are interested in activities for children who must come to court with a parent; ask about setting up a room with books and toys, and volunteer to help care for these children. If you prefer, you could organize your own "camp" to get local children involved in sports, music, science, theatre, gardening or some other activity.



## RECOGNIZE THOSE WHO SERVE

Reward our military personnel by collecting personal care packages, food, and other items

and send them overseas. Gather your friends and adopt a soldier, a military unit, or just send a note of thanks to individuals in uniform. For those who have returned from service, you can visit a local veteran's facility or hospital.



## GOING GLOBAL

Volunteering knows no boundaries. Volunteer abroad to teach foreign students, donate books, work on conservation projects or assist disaster

recovery efforts. If you can't travel overseas, you can still help by raising awareness of global issues or collecting items for international communities in need.



## YOUR OWN SPECIAL BRAND OF HELP

If you want to do something in your own special way, put on your creative thinking cap. On your own, or with a few friends, you can raise money for your favorite cause through bake sales, car washes, and garage sales. Or form a volunteering club at your school that can work on a wide variety of service projects.

## Do's and Don'ts of Successful Volunteering

Do be flexible. It is rare to find the “perfect” fit right away. Keep an open mind—you might discover something new that interests you.

Do be persistent. Volunteer coordinators are often busy, so don't assume they're not interested in you if they don't call you right away.

Do attend orientation meetings. Keep in mind that informed volunteers are the best volunteers. These meetings will help you do the best job possible.

Do take necessary training classes. Ask about them before you decide to get involved and be prepared to learn what will be needed.

Do be responsible. Show up on time and follow through with your commitments. People will be depending on you.

Don't expect to start at the top. You have to work hard and prove your worth before you are given more responsibility.

Don't think that volunteering has to be a group effort. You can start your own volunteer program and do it on your own time.

Do expect to get plenty of personal enjoyment and satisfaction from your volunteer experiences.

## Local Resources for Volunteer Ideas

Principal, counselor, teacher

Churches, synagogues and other places of worship

Organizations such as the United Way—and their many affiliates

Mayor's office

Civic service groups, such as the Elks, Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions clubs

Local arts centers, community theaters

Food pantries, shelters for domestic violence and the homeless

Zoos, animal shelters, conservation groups

Hospitals, hospices, nursing homes

Residential facilities for disabled persons or abused children

Newspapers, television and radio

Schools and libraries

Local community and volunteer centers

*We hope this booklet has given you some ideas for volunteer service and information on where to find organizations in need of young volunteers. There is little doubt that your help is needed, whether in your school, your neighborhood or city, or through your place of worship. Match your interests with the many volunteer opportunities available.*

*If you are still stumped, on the next page is a list of some national service organizations that offer information on youth volunteerism. Write or call them for additional ideas.*

*Ready, set, go—Catch the Spirit of volunteerism!*

John R. Strangfeld  
Chairman and  
Chief Executive Officer  
Prudential Financial

# National Organizations with Information for Young Volunteers

## **The Prudential Spirit of Community Initiative**

751 Broad Street, 16th Floor  
Newark, NJ 07102  
[spirit.prudential.com](http://spirit.prudential.com)

## **Corporation for National and Community Service**

1201 New York Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20525  
[www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov)

## **America's Promise**

110 Vermont Avenue, N.W.  
Suite 900  
Washington, DC 20005  
[www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org)

## **Points of Light Institute and HandsOn Network**

600 Means Street  
Suite 210  
Atlanta, GA 30318  
[www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org)  
[www.handsonnetwork.org](http://www.handsonnetwork.org)

## **generationOn**

6 East 43rd Street  
25th Floor  
New York, NY 10017  
[www.generationon.org](http://www.generationon.org)

## **Do Something**

24-32 Union Square East  
4th Floor South  
New York, NY 10003  
[www.dosomething.org](http://www.dosomething.org)

## **Volunteer Match**

717 California Street, Second Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94108  
[www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org)

## **Youth Service America**

1101 15th Street, N.W.  
Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20005  
[www.ysa.org](http://www.ysa.org)

This booklet was produced by Prudential in cooperation with the Federal Citizen Information Center. It is part of The Prudential Spirit of Community Initiative, which seeks to promote volunteer service and community involvement by young people. The initiative also includes:

### **The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards,**

an international recognition program that honors young people in middle and high school grades for outstanding volunteer service. In the United States, applications are accepted each fall through participating schools and officially designated local organizations, and awards are presented at the local, state and national level. The top two youth volunteers in each state and the District of Columbia receive \$1,000 awards, engraved silver medallions and a trip to Washington, DC. Ten national honorees receive an additional \$5,000, gold medallions, and crystal trophies. The program has been operating in the U.S. since 1995 in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and also has been introduced in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Ireland and India.

### **The Prudential Spirit of Community Web site**

at [spirit.prudential.com](http://spirit.prudential.com), featuring news and information about The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program, profiles of outstanding youth volunteers, volunteer tips and project ideas for young people, and more.

### **The generationOn Youth Leadership**

**Institute,** a unique leadership and service training program for high school students. Developed and initially funded by Prudential, the Institute features an innovative curriculum developed by the Center for Creative Leadership and is now administered in communities throughout the United States by generationOn, the youth division of Points of Light Institute.