

FAMILY VOLUNTEERING

A Report on a Survey

Sponsored by

**THE FAMILY MATTERS PROGRAM
of
THE POINTS OF LIGHT FOUNDATION**

Conducted by

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I SURVEY FINDINGS

Family Volunteering

Volunteering and community service are well-established traditions in the United States. What is the impact of these traditions on American family life? To what extent are family members volunteering for the same organizations or causes, whether working together at the same time on the same tasks or working at different times for the same causes? What can we learn from those families that are volunteering together that might benefit American families as well as the causes they support?

To gain insight into these questions, the Family Matters Program of The Points of Light Foundation sponsored a mini-survey among a nationally representative sample of 1,002 American households. In each interview, the George H. Gallup International Institute asked whether or not the household member "and at least one other member of your family" did volunteer work together.

In more than one third of American households (36%) family volunteering is part of family life. This is about equally true of younger families, where the household head is aged 18 - 34 (30%), and of those in the middle years of age 35 - 49 (39%) and those who are age 50 or older (31%).

Family volunteering -- and "family" in this study was defined as anyone in the family, no matter how the members are related" -- is most likely in middle income households -- those where the family income is between \$20,000 and \$49,999. Here, family volunteering is happening among almost half (45%) of these households, compared to 18% of households with incomes of under \$20,000 or 23% of households where the income is \$50,000 or more. (Table 1)*

Households in which families are not volunteering together are more likely to be slightly older or younger than in their middle years. There is also a tendency for the incomes in these households to be somewhat less than in the households where families are volunteering together.

* Throughout the report, the tables referred to will be found in Section II, Detailed Findings.

Who are the Family Members?

The predominant family make-up among households in which family members are volunteering together is the so-called "nuclear" family, consisting of two parents with one or more children (60%). The next most common family type is of adults without any children in the household (25%). Only 9% consisted of one parent with one or more children, and 5% consisted of several adults (not two parents) with one or more children. This was equally true of those ages 18-34 and those ages 35-49. Not surprisingly, among the households where the head of the household is 50 years or older, a higher proportion consisted of adults without children (40%) and a smaller proportion consisted of nuclear families (41%). (Table 2)

Who is Volunteering Together?

The most common partnership (60%) is between husband and wife, although 66% say they volunteer with some other family member, not a spouse or partner. This volunteering with another adult family member is particularly true among younger people, with 75% of those between age 18 - 34 saying they do volunteer work with some other adult, not their spouse.

Children are often involved in volunteer activities. Overall, in 22% of households, the adults are volunteering together with one or more of their own children who are younger than age 12, and 17% with one or more of their own children who are between ages 12-17. The most common involvement of children is in households where the adults are in their middle years of 35 - 49, where about 35% volunteer with their children under and over age 12. (Table 3)

Type of Volunteer Work

A wide range of community services benefit from family volunteering. The most broadly supported activities are helping older people (60%), children or youth programs (58%), and church or religious programs (57%). But nearly half of the families assist sports or schools programs (49%), and significant numbers are involved in environmental programs (31%) or assistance to the homeless (25%).

Two areas that appear to have appeal to all age groups are helping older people and church or religious programs. Majorities of each age group say that they do family volunteer work in each of those areas.

Interestingly, those who are age 50 or older, although they are more likely than others to work in activities that help older people, are still very much involved in working with children and youth. More than four in ten (42%) say their family volunteering is directed to children or youth programs, and 28% are involved in school or public education programs.

Environmental projects and helping the homeless did not draw a majority interest in any of the three age groups, but at least 20% of those in each age group are actively involved in family volunteering in each of those two areas. (Table 4)

Length of Time The Family Has Been Volunteering Together

Once established, the pattern of family volunteering tends to become a tradition. Eighty percent of the volunteers interviewed had been serving with another family member for three years or more, 11% had been volunteering more than a year but less than three years, and only 7% started within the past twelve months. A substantial proportion (64%) of those in the younger age group of 18-34 had been volunteering for three years or more, less than those in the older age groups (88%). (Table 5)

How Often Family Members Participate Together

Almost half (46%) of the volunteering perform service with another family member several times a week (24%) or at least once a week (21%). This is about equally true of those in all age groups. (Table 6)

How Family Volunteering Began

Most frequently, the decision to involve a family in community service comes from adults --30% say another adult became involved and got him or her involved, 27% say they themselves were

the initiator, with 16% saying that several decided together to become involved. However, children are sometimes the initiators of family volunteering – 14% say that a child became involved and got him or her involved as well. (Table 7)

Benefits of Family Volunteering

Asked to describe the main benefit they receive from family volunteering, more than half (51%) list personal satisfaction, while 17% say it is a matter of helping other people. (Table 8)

II DETAILED FINDINGS

Table 1

Profile of Family Volunteer Household Head

	N =	<u>Family Volunteers Together</u>	
		<u>Yes</u> (368)	<u>No</u> (634)
All		36%	64%
<u>Age</u>		%	%
18 - 34		30	35
35 - 49		39	24
50 +		31	41
<u>Education</u>			
Less than high school		9	20
High school graduate		36	41
Some college		25	18
College graduate		29	19
No response		1	1
<u>Education Summary</u>			
High school graduate or less		45	61
Some college / college graduate		54	37
<u>Income</u>			
Under \$20,000		18	26
\$20,000 - \$49,999		45	38
\$50,000 +		23	22
No response		14	14
<u>Ethnic/Racial Background</u>			
White		90	83
Hispanic		4	5
Black		4	12
Other		2	—

Table 2

Family Profile of Family Volunteers

Q. What is the make up of your family — that is, how many persons are in your family?

	N =	Age			
		<u>Age</u> (368) %	<u>18 - 34</u> (109) %	<u>35 - 49</u> (143) %	<u>50 +</u> (116) %
<u>Family Members</u>					
Two parents with one or more children	60	67	70	41	
One parent with one or more children	9	6	10	10	
Several adults with one or more children	5	5	4	7	
Adults without children	25	20	17	40	

Table 3

Which Family Members Participate

Q. Which family members do you do volunteer work with?*

	N =	Age			
		<u>Age</u> (368) %	<u>18 - 34</u> (109) %	<u>35 - 49</u> (143) %	<u>50 +</u> (116) %
<u>Who Participates</u>					
Some other adult	66	75	59	65	
Your spouse or partner	60	49	73	58	
Other children who are not your own	30	25	38	25	
One or more of your own children who are younger than age 12	22	22	35	8	
One or more of your own children who are between ages 12 and 17	17	4	36	9	

* Multiple Responses

Table 4

Type of Volunteer Work

Q. I would like to know what kind of volunteer work you do.*

<u>Type</u>	N =	<u>Age</u>		
		<u>Age</u> (368) %	<u>18 - 34</u> (109) %	<u>35 - 49</u> (143) %
Helping older people	60	60	51	72
Children or youth programs	58	60	71	42
Church or religious programs	57	58	51	63
Sports or recreational programs	49	52	62	31
School or public education programs	49	53	62	28
Environmental projects	31	36	33	24
Housing, shelter or aid for the homeless	25	28	20	28

Table 5

How Long Family Members Have Been Volunteering Together

Q. How long have members of your family been volunteering together?

<u>Length of Time</u>	N =	<u>Age</u>		
		<u>Age</u> (368) %	<u>18 - 34</u> (109) %	<u>35 - 49</u> (143) %
We started within the past twelve months	7	11	6	3
More than a year, but less than three years	11	23	6	5
Three years or more	80	64	88	88

* Multiple Responses

Table 6

How Often Family Participate Together

Q. How often do you and someone else in your family usually do volunteer work?

<u>How Often</u>	N =	<u>Age</u>			
		<u>Age</u> (368)	<u>18 - 34</u> (109)	<u>35 - 49</u> (143)	<u>50 +</u> (116)
		%	%	%	%
Several times a week	24	24	22	20	30
Once a week	21	21	18	22	21
Once or twice a month	36	36	42	36	31
Several times a year	16	16	15	18	16
Once a year, for example, at holidays	3	3	3	4	3

Table 7

How Family Volunteering Began

Q. How did people in your family first get involved in volunteering?

<u>How it Began</u>	N =	<u>Age</u>			
		<u>Age</u> (368)	<u>18 - 34</u> (109)	<u>35 - 49</u> (143)	<u>50 +</u> (116)
		%	%	%	%
Another adult became involved and got you involved	30	30	36	24	29
You became involved and got another family member involved	27	27	25	29	27
Several of you decided together to become involved	16	16	22	12	16
A child became involved and got you involved	14	14	9	23	9
Through the church	2	2	1	3	3
Some other way	8	8	7	9	9

Table 8

Benefits of Family Volunteering

Q. What would you say is the main benefit your family receives from volunteering? (open-ended)

<u>Benefit</u>	N =	<u>Age</u>			
		<u>Age</u> (368) %	<u>18 - 34</u> (109) %	<u>35 - 49</u> (143) %	<u>50 +</u> (116) %
Personal satisfaction		51	50	53	49
Help others		17	20	15	17
Being together with the family		5	2	10	3
Build friendship		1	2	—	3
Other		13	12	10	17
None / don't know / refused		5	5	6	5

Methodology

This mini-survey was conducted as part of the regular Gallup Organization Omnibus survey, a telephone interview survey among a nationally representative sample of 1,000 households. Interviewing was conducted during April 1994. The findings based on the full sample of 1002 households have a sampling error of $\pm 4\%$; those among the sub-sample of 368 households that report family volunteering have a sampling error of $\pm 7\%$, both at the 95% confidence level.

QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

FAMILY VOLUNTEERING

Q.1 (SCREENER) Please tell me whether you and at least one other member of your family do volunteer work together. It can be with anyone in your family, no matter how you are related, and it can be any kind of activity in which you are helping others or the community without pay.

- 1 Yes - Continue
- 2 No - terminate

2. Which family members are doing this volunteer work? (READ CHOICES. CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)

- 1 You
- 2 Your spouse or partner
- 3 One or more of your own children who are between ages 12 and 17
- 4 One or more of your own children who are younger than age 12
- 5 Other children who are not your own
- 6 Some other adult
- 7 (DO NOT READ) DON'T KNOW/NO ANSWER

3. I would like to know what kind of volunteer work you do. Does it involve: (READ CHOICES. CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)

- 1 Children or youth programs
- 2 Sports or recreational programs
- 3 Helping older people
- 4 Church or religion programs
- 5 Environmental projects
- 6 Schools or public education
- 7 Housing/shelter/aid for the homeless
- 8 Other (SPECIFY)

4. How long have members of your family been volunteering together? (ACCEPT ONLY ONE ANSWER)

- 1 We started within the past 12 months
- 2 More than a year but less than three years
- 3 Three years or more
- 4 Don't know / no answer

5. How often do you and someone else in your family usually do volunteer work? (READ CHOICE. ACCEPT ONLY ONE ANSWER)

- 1 Several times a week
- 2 Once a week
- 3 Once or twice a month
- 4 Several times a year
- 5 Once a year, for example at holidays

6. How did people in your family first get involved in volunteering? (READ CHOICES. ACCEPT ONLY ONE ANSWER)

- 1 You became involved and got another member involved
- 2 A child became involved and got you involved
- 3 Another adult became involved and got you involved
- 4 Several of you decided together to become involved
- 5 Something else
- 6 Don't know / no answer

7. What is the makeup of your family? (READ CHOICES. ACCEPT ONLY ONE ANSWER)

- 1 Two parents with one or more children
- 2 One parent with one or more children
- 3 Several adults with one or more children
- 4 Adults without children
- 5 Don't know / no answer

8. What would you say is the main benefit your family receives from volunteering?

- 1 Personal satisfaction
- 2 Helping other people
- 3 Personal enjoyment
- 4 Being together with family
- 5 Building friendships
- 6 Various other
- 7 Don't know / no answer

9. What is the last year of school or college that you completed?

- 1 College graduate
- 2 Some college
- 3 High school graduate
- 4 Less than high school graduate

10. What is your nationality or ethnic group?

- 1 White
- 2 Black
- 3 Hispanic
- 4 Other

11. INTERVIEWER, RECORD SEX OF RESPONDENT:

- 1 Male
- 2 Female



Characteristics of Family Volunteer Programs Highlights of a Recent Survey

The Points of Light Foundation and The Conference Board are studying the benefits of corporate volunteer programs that specifically encourage family participation. The following are the highlights of a recent survey seeking to identify key characteristics of such programs. The survey was sent to the 454 companies who responded to an earlier survey concerning corporate involvement in community volunteer activities.* A total of 166 companies returned completed questionnaires. Fifty percent (83 companies) reported that they encouraged participation of employee families in their volunteer programs. The following responses are from these 83 companies. (Note: In some responses the total may be greater than 100% because of the opportunity for multiple selections.)

1. Forty-three percent have encouraged family participation for more than five years; 57% have done so within the past five years.
2. When asked what categories best describe the households with the highest level of participation,
 - 38% said two parents, two incomes, and child(ren).
 - 13% said single parent and child(ren).
 - 43% said other combinations of parents, incomes and child(ren).

* Cathleen Wild, *Corporate Volunteer Programs: Benefits to Business*, The Conference Board, Report No. 1029, 1993.

3. The breakdown of areas best representing the focus of family volunteer activities was as follows:

- 70% Children and Youth
- 39% Environment
- 37% Education
- 28% Health or Security
- 22% Aging Populations
- 1% Civil Rights/Social Justice
- 19% Other

4. Measures used to encourage family participation included:

- 25% Grants to nonprofits
- 23% Special communication to family members
- 15% Compensatory or release time
- 11% Special training or other preparation
- 42% Other

5. Principal benefits to families reported or noted were:

- 70% Learning about the community
- 63% Quality time for family unit
- 57% Positive role models for children
- 55% Learning about social issues
- 46% Positive insight on company and workplace
- 35% Positive perspective on child or family social role

6. Principal benefits to companies and employees were:

- 70% Improved public and community relations
- 57% Greater employee commitment
- 15% More productive employees
- 12% Fewer hours lost for family responsibilities

7. Major obstacles to family volunteering reported or noted were:

- 52% Time pressures
- 45% Difficulty coordinating family schedules
- 31% Projects not designed to accommodate families
- 15% Conflicting goals: family company, community agencies

8. Major obstacles to company participation reported or noted were:

- 25% Difficulty in coordinating appropriate activities with agencies or nonprofit organizations
- 22% Lack of management interest
- 22% Lack of employee interest
- 16% Lack of financial resources