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# Mixed Messages: What Do We Really Think about Young Volunteers?

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

May  
2000

Over the last month, I've received a mini-barrage of e-mails from pre-teens and young teens (ages 9 to 14) plaintively asking for help in finding volunteer opportunities for someone their age. I also recently facilitated a meeting in DC which explored how middle schools might stimulate more creative service-learning assignments from community agencies for their younger students. All of this makes me ask: *what do we really think about young volunteers?*

It's easy to "talk the talk." Proponents of school-based community service want to integrate such activity into every grade, even elementary school. Projects such as "Family Matters" seek to encourage parents to volunteer along with their children of all ages. America's Promise includes the right of youth "to serve others" as one of its five goals. Are agencies ready to put youngsters to work?

There are lots of conflicting issues here. No one argues the value to the child of learning about volunteering early in life. In fact, research shows that the younger a person is when first experiencing volunteer service, the more likely s/he will be to continue community involvement as an adult. But at the same time, agencies face other factors:

- Increased concern for risk and liability, both for harm to any client or consumer, and also to any volunteer (let alone very young ones).
- Child abuse prevention legislation requiring police and background checks on every adult who will be working with a child.
- Expectations expressed by the school or teachers, with requirements developed without input from the agency.
- Questions about the abilities of young volunteers, given the public challenges to education today.

- It's hard enough to coordinate adult volunteers effectively. What variables will be added (and problems magnified) when the volunteers are young?

There are, of course, various models for involving youngsters in volunteering. Some are:

- School groups volunteering together under the supervision of their teacher or a faculty advisor. This may be service-learning (integrated into the curriculum) or volunteering as an "enrichment" activity or through a student club.
- Established youth groups coming together to give service, under the supervision of their adult group leader.
- Families volunteering as a unit, with the parents right there on site.
- Youngsters assigned to the same shift, and the agency recruits a college student or older volunteer to be the team leader for this special group.
- Motivated youngsters applying to volunteer as individuals.

My concerns fall into two categories: logistical and creative. What do agencies need to make the various screening processes, forms for parental permission, arrangements with the schools, and proper insurance coverage EASIER and LESS COSTLY to do and obtain? These and other logistical issues are best tackled collectively, through publicity, position statements, and general legislative advocacy by DOVIAs, state/provincial and national associations, and other groups with clout.

The creative challenges are perhaps more difficult--and are in the control of each director of volunteers. What exactly can a 14-year-old contribute to the organization? How about a 9-year-old volunteer? What skills must be demonstrated? What level of maturity?

If we in the volunteer field don't want to deal with this age group, let's say so honestly. But if we truly want young volunteers, we need to step up to the plate and nurture them. This includes advocating that Volunteer Centers and online registries of volunteers create special lists of service opportunities for prospective volunteers under 14. It breaks my heart to keep getting e-mails from pre-teens who feel rejected and hopeless about sharing their talents.

I have always said that volunteering allows people to rise (or fall) to their level of competence, not the level of their age or paper credentials. If a pre-teen wants a paying job, it is guaranteed to be menial. Volunteering offers the chance to do what that young person would never be paid to do. If we cannot welcome the bright, motivated youngster, who can?

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Posted 13Aug01

**Submitted by Tracey Lintott, University of Western Australia, Undergraduate, Western Australia, Australia**

I am a 19 year old, University student and I have been volunteering in various organisations since I was 12. I love volunteering, the rewards are payments in themselves. To see the smile on the face of a kid who is finishing last in a race because you ran the last 50 (or so) metres with him, or elderly people because they have children singing to them or peers because finally someone will listen, or a lost tourist because they now have directions is so awesome.. More young people need to be made aware of the opportunities that are out there and many more need to be created...YOUNG PEOPLE LOVE TO HELP... Age should not be a barrier.

Posted 5/31/00

**Submitted by Mary S.**

I think that we definitely need to include and recruit young volunteers. The rewards for our clients, the agency and the volunteers is overwhelming and also the rewards for the volunteer lasts a lifetime. What better way to provide them experiences they may never have another chance to receive. Of course, the design of the type of service and way in which it is provided must be carefully developed. This decision and design can be most rewarding and fun.

Posted 5/30/00

**Submitted by Lois Kuter, Volunteer Coordinator, Academy of Natural Sciences, Pennsylvania, PA**

I have been the volunteer coordinator at a science museum for 10 years and we normally have 250-300 volunteers active at any given time in our museum. Half of these are teens. Our minimum age is 14 and we have one special area--a hands-on area for children which includes working with live animals--where we train 13 year olds during the summer who continue during the school year. Volunteers are asked for a minimum commitment of one year.

We use teens in areas where there is a staff person on the floor working with them and where the work is appealing and interesting to them (besides our hands-on area, they work in our dinosaur exhibit, butterfly garden and help us care for 100 animals we use in all our education programs. We have found that teens are just as reliable as adults. The younger they start, the longer they seem to stay. Nearly 30% of the teens we have had here during the past 5 years (over 600) have contributed over 100 hours. 60% of those who start at age 13 contribute at least 100 hours during their time here.

Many teens start during the summer--sometimes with class trainings (mixed with adults or specifically for teens, depending on the area). They can then continue on a less intensive basis during the school year when weekends are the only option for scheduling. We also use a number of home school students, students from schools that release them during the school day for special projects, and high school interns--juniors and seniors who work intensively (7 hours a day) during a 3-4 week period. These are usually seniors or juniors from academically strong private schools who can be quickly trained.

We use teens because they can do a good job for us, and we need them (there simply aren't enough adults or college students available in this area!). We also use teens because their involvement in our museum programs helps us fulfill our mission "to expand knowledge of nature through discovery and to inspire stewardship of the environment." Teens take a lot of attention from staff, but they are worth it and our volunteer program is also an "education" program where teens learn valuable life skills as well as science.

*Posted 5/29/00*

***Submitted by Morgan Porter, Virginia Youth Service Council, Richmond, Virginia***

I am a 19-year-old volunteer in the Virginia Youth Service Council. I started volunteering on my own when I was in high school, but before that no opportunities came to me as a middle school or an elementary school student. I only wish they had. Volunteering is a vital part of becoming a mature member of society. We, as mature adults or young adults, need to do what we can to allow children to volunteer and give at their young (and impressionable) age. We shouldn't concern ourselves with the questions "What will this child give to this effort?" Instead ask ourselves "What can this volunteering opportunity give to this child?"

*Posted 5/25/00*

***Submitted by Betty Anton, Director, Volunteer Services, Allentown, PA***

I am the Director of Volunteer Services for a large hospital in Pennsylvania. We do not allow teens to volunteer until they are age 14. I see a big difference in the level of maturity of those over 14 with those under that age. In a healthcare facility, this is important. They just can't deal with the realities of seeing people in great stress, pain, trauma, etc. unless they are a bit more mature. That maturity comes with age. One thing that I really enjoy seeing is the inter-generational goodwill that exists between our more "seasoned" volunteers and these young people. It is truly a joy!

*Posted 5/23/00*

***Submitted by Mackey Stanley, Ex. Dir./ Faulkner County ADFY (Drug Free Youth), Arkansas***

I've worked with young volunteers since my daughter was younger, for approximately 8 years. Now that she's 17 every agency is asking her to volunteer for them, literally! What so many people don't understand is that she's as conscientious as she is because she started volunteering at the age of 10. Now that my son is 11, there are very few organizations that are willing to give him the chance to "prove" himself. Fortunately the local library for the blind found a volunteer job just for him - rewinding and repairing the returned tapes. It's a job tailored "for the guys" His volunteer manager is extremely pleased with him, his work, his attitude... The point is that someone has to give these children a chance. They are the hope for our future and they are the ones who will still be volunteering 10 and 15 years from now. As with all of us, they will rise to the expectations we expect from them. If you expect young people, boys in particular, to behave in a stereotypical manner, they will only be what you expect them to be.

*Posted 5/15/00*

***Submitted by Eve Sisson, Lee County Parks and Recreation, Florida, US***

We screen young volunteers very carefully, but we have made a place for them in our program. I too feel the volunteer experience is quite positive for younger children. We establish a supervisor who will be with the child at all times. That is usually the parent, who is also involved in volunteering. A Child Volunteer Participation Waiver is included with the Child Registration Form. It has worked very well for our program.

Teen volunteers are also accommodated in our program. I have also found a lot of inconsistency in their commitment. It limits the number of volunteer positions I can offer them. But as a Parks and Recreation Program we often use teens to assist with on-call activities, rather than a weekly scheduled activity. I would encourage being creative in allowing young children to volunteer in your programs. It is a wonderful activity to encourage in kids, and it does wonders for their self esteem.

*Posted 5/12/00*

***Submitted by Lindajoy Vantrease, Volunteer Coordinator, Redwood Empire Food Bank, California, USA***

I'm not to sure, this is my first time on the Web. I have concerns about what we can ask young volunteers to do. We are a Food Bank. We have set the age limit at 14 but will take to age 12 if responsible. How do we know if they are responsible, they have to work at least one shift with a parent. Can I send a youth out on a food pick-up run with a staff member or a older volunteer? What are the liabilities? How much should I expect from a 13, 14, or 15 year old? I don't know the guidelines. I hear more and more about the abuse issues and young volunteers. Do I have to be concerned about staff/other volunteers. I guess I am looking for answers and I'm not really clear on the questions. I went to a workshop on *Attracting and Retaining Volunteers* today at the Sonoma County Volunteer Center in Santa Rosa, CA this morning and your name came up. I hope to learn much more. Thank you for your time.

*Posted on 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Carlene Voss, Volunteer Program Coordinator-Masonic Home, CA, USA***

I work for a large non-profit in California. I am the Volunteer Program Coordinator. I have found that younger teens are usually not as reliable as their older counterparts. I especially see this with the boys. (I don't know why...I just see it in case after case) We're a health care facility and the young ladies are very respectful and caring and seem for the most part to be very responsible. I would be interested if anyone else sees this with young men....

*Posted on 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Tracy Alexander, Family Programs Specialist, The High Desert Museum, Oregon***

I supervise a Teen Volunteer Program with about 45 volunteers between the ages of 12 and 18. While our museum has been developing this program for more than 10 years, we still have a ways to go to truly involve these volunteers in the most effective way. We "talk the talk", but I am determined to get us to the point where we are really "walking the walk." Fortunately, there are innumerable funding opportunities out there that support my efforts.

It is important for organizations to know that with structure and faith, teens can take ownership of their own program and do a great job. This is how we operate now. Under adult supervision, many of the kids are "shift managers" and also run the administrative tasks of the program themselves- they have taken the lead and are proud of their positions, so they set a great example and make my job a lot easier! A recent trend toward "community service" has presented a bit of a challenge. Local school teachers have given class requirements to serve a small amount of volunteer time in the community, and since we are a popular place with kids (we have live animals as well as cultural history exhibits), I am frequently turning away volunteers.

It needs to be understood that providing volunteer opportunities for teens requires a tremendous amount of training and organization. Our program starts with a six-week session over the summer with an option to continue through the school year. Many of our volunteer positions require more than a day's training, and sometimes at least two years of experience! So parents and teachers need to understand that it is not so easy to accommodate each volunteer for a short-term service (this goes for adult volunteers too).

*Posted 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Linda Sifri, Volunteer Rep., Puget Sound Blood Center, Seattle, WA***

I just want to share an story about a 10 year old who came to me through the court system ("he was in the wrong place at the wrong time"). As the volunteer coordinator for a family shelter, I had this young man come once a week to work with a student his same age. I couldn't have been more pleased. I know this was an really special individual, but he continued volunteering for us on a weekly basis for more than a year. And he did it because he knew he was making a difference. In his case the only hardship was on his parents transporting him to and from the site. It might have worked out better for them if they volunteered with us also, but they let this be his project and they would make the long drive back and forth to support that.

Also, while working for the homeless shelter I had the opportunity to work with the local middle school home economics teacher. The school had a portable on its grounds. The class took it over for their community clothes closet. The shelter got so many donations of clothing - that we sent them on to the student, who washed, ironed and repaired the clothing. They also designed the forms for families to complete to be included in the program and set the rules. Then they sized and displayed the clothing in their "store". It was wonderful for our community and the students loved playing store, with no money involved. My volunteers helped to supervise the store during the hours it was open and the teacher was working with other students.

I have dedicated my volunteer coordinating to getting young people involved. Who will show them about volunteering if not these wonderful folks who are the backbone of most volunteer programs. We worry about them aging, but they still have so much to share and are such great roll models. Thank you for letting me express something I feel very strongly about.

*Posted 5/4/00*

***Submitted by CJ Burnheimer, , Ohio, USA***

Everyone at my facility thinks taking in a boy or girl under the age of 14 is wrong. I disagree. Learning how to give of ones self and time should start much earlier. We can no longer wait until people retire from their work life before we recruit them to volunteer. If we all start out earlier, we can "learn" a life of volunteering and service to others. Perhaps then we could stop collecting statistics on teen pregnancy, violence, etc.

*Posted 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Ellie Slaven, Volunteer Coordinator, California***

As a volunteer coordinator for an agency that works with the frail elderly, I have had many opportunities to work with youth as volunteers. I find that if the youthful volunteer comes forth on their own as opposed to fulfilling some sort of community service commitment, that it is a far better experience for all those involved. The young people really need to want to be there and not feel that they are obligated. This is why I have a problem with the schools requiring community service in order to graduate.

*Posted 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Sheila Pastore, Volunteer Coordinator, Palo Alto Art Center, Palo Alto, California, USA***

We love youth volunteers. However, municipalities have risk management restrictions among which is minimum age 15 for volunteers. This works out very well for recruiting volunteers for the Palo Alto (CA) Art Center. High School and University service organizations provide volunteers aged 15 and up. Most of these volunteers are excellent, especially the young women. (Young men in high school are often less conscientious.) Volunteers younger than 15 are permitted when they volunteer with an adult. National Charity League is an organization that brings mothers and daughters together to volunteer for special projects. They are organized in many middle and high schools. We find these volunteer teams to be exceptionally excellent in their commitment and performance as volunteers.

*Posted 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Kathi Ellis Manager of Community Relations Public Radio Partnership Kentucky USA***

At Public Radio Partnership in Louisville, KY, I have made a concerted effort to involve youth volunteers at all levels of the organization. Given the challenges of younger students not having transportation, that does to some extent limit their availability.

Twice a year we conduct our Membership Drive during which volunteers answer phones. I was delighted when one of the regular teen volunteers decided to recruit the Key Club at her school to answer phones. As she said "Teens, phones, it's a natural match." She signed up 12 students to work throughout the day on a Saturday. I went to one of their meetings to orient them before they arrived. There were a couple of students who got the time wrong, but arrived eventually--a great lesson for the teen who'd organized this; she's already figured out how to fix that next time. All the students had fun; the adult volunteers enjoyed their energy. And the original teen volunteer supervised them for part of the day (we use volunteer pledge producers to supervise phone volunteers.)

She was then asked by the volunteer editor of the volunteer newsletter to write an article about her group volunteering. I anticipate this group becoming a "regular" group. And, hopefully, they'll actually start listening to public radio!

*Posted 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Paula Podemski, Production Supervisor, Seattle Opera, Washington USA***

I administrate volunteers for the production department of a major opera company. We use young volunteers onstage as supernumeraries and children's chorus. However we miss out on interested high schoolers for our office volunteers because of the "criminal check" factor. I can't seem to get our Human Resources Director to change her mind about interns or other office volunteers under the age of 18. It would mean everyone here (up to 200 people) could be subject to a background check and she doesn't wish to do that. Any ideas? I am missing out on some very good music and drama students who want to learn about the administrative end, due to the "bad apples" of the world.

*Posted 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Marsha Riddle***

I have had the opportunity to have worked with a group, created at my agency in 1964 called VOLUNTEENS. The structure of the task to be performed over the years has changed and the type of task that the teens do is more varied today, however the opportunity has been available at the agency for 50 teens for 8-10 weeks during the summer for over 35 years. The structure is essential to success with the teens.

Every teen has a supervisor and an individualized job description created to meet specific needs. The teens may select from the variety of job descriptions. Once the mandatory training has been done, approximately 16 hours, the teens have an opportunity to learn the skills necessary to be successful at the job. To work cooperatively with an adult with a common goal and specific outcomes is a change for most youth. They really enjoy being successful and learning about serving other is but one of the experiences they have.

Failure to perform or not to do the job assigned results in immediate counseling, and failure to follow the rules and regulations results in termination, not by letter or a You just can't come back, but by honest feedback with involvement of the parent or guardian, teacher or leader. Everyone knows the programs success is dependent on working in a real environment with employees and other volunteers who must set and be examples for the persons served by the program.

Results have been wonderful for us over the years. Our Director of Staff Development and Training was once a 14 year old volunteer.

Setting standards, having rules and regulations, assuring that everyone including supervisors have the mandatory training, having individual supervisors who actually like young people, having job that actually need to be done and job descriptions that outline all the responsibilities, nipping problems in the bud.....

*Posted 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Donna Schumacher, DVS, Virtua Health - Voorhees, New Jersey, USA***

We are currently involved with a school based curriculum program which incorporates 2 hours of volunteering into the school day of at risk 14-15 year olds. It was quite a challenge at the beginning, but as we end the first year, we find that the departments to whom these children have been assigned have mentored and encouraged them to the point that they are asking these students if they would like to continue working during the summer.

The children are brought here every school morning by bus, they are accompanied by 2 teachers and 2 aides. We've learned that with this group, we must limit the number to 9 and they must be assigned to a department - can't wander the halls (doing water, ice, etc.) On the days that they are not here or the number of students is low (sometimes they are having testing, sometimes out sick), we HEAR from the departments because the the kids are so missed!!

*Posted 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Penny S. Deurwaarder, Volunteer Program Manager, Oregon Veterans' Home, The Dalles, Oregon, USA***

We have found ways to use youth volunteers in our facility and we are so thankful for them. This group ranges from special education youth, to youth groups, to job shadowing, and community service hours. The youth provide a special type of human interaction for our residents that other volunteers do not provide. They inspire the residents with their youthful energy and their lust for life.

We have developed a specific orientation for our youth volunteers that is much simpler than the regular orientation. The commitment that the youth volunteers (some as young as 7 & 8) have shown is sometimes stronger than adults. Our youth volunteers have developed a solid relationship with our residents and both sides look forward to the time they spend at the facility. It may not always be easy dealing with the paperwork and training for the youth volunteers, but we must continue to teach our young people the importance of volunteering within their communities, or someday we will run out of committed adult volunteers.

*Posted 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Anthea Hoare, Co-ordinator, Volunteer Resources, Allendale, Ontario, Canada***

I have been lucky enough to have a group of middle school kids come every week to help out with our major Thursday afternoon event. These kids are 9-12 ish, and four of them come regularly to help our elderly and wheelchair bound residents to attend the various functions. This is done in cooperation with the school who designates a teacher to be responsible for the program, and who organizes the students to come on a roster basis. I or a senior volunteer do the pick-up/drop off before and after the program.

I strongly believe that young people who get a good experience at this point will become firm and hooked volunteers for the rest of their lives. However, there are some things to remember. The younger they are the more guidance and support they need. You cannot expect 9 and 10 year olds to

be self starters - yes the odd one is, but most need help. Given that help they become wonderful helpers themselves. There need to be very clear delineations on what they may and may not do, and the rules need to be strictly enforced. It is also very easy for parents to use you as a baby sitting service, and I for one do not intend to become that.

I set clear time limits on when the volunteers are to be here, and insist that the parents are aware. Many of the young people who helped us over the summer program last year are still volunteering once or twice a week, in the evenings after school. They have enormous amounts of energy, tremendous enthusiasm and a willingness to learn. Yes they go over the top some times, but tell them firmly why that is not acceptable behavior and what the consequences to others might be, as well as to themselves, and they are usually quick to learn and to cooperate. Not only that, but I have found that they tend to police themselves and control each other.

They have some great ideas too, some of which can make a difference in how we do things - if we listen to what they have to say. The important thing is to channel the energy and the enthusiasm to be productive. I love the kids that help here - they make a huge difference in the lives of the elderly residents

*Posted 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Marion Clark, Director of Shared Ministry, St. Bartholomew Churc, Wayzata, MN***

I believe it is very important to find ways to involve young people as volunteers. When channeled in the right way they bring energy, enthusiasm and are hard workers. The key to success with young people is to find the right volunteer opportunity and training the adult supervisor. I have found that if young people volunteer as a group than it is very important for agencies to first work with the adult who will be supervising them.

For a successful experience the adult supervisor needs to understand what the young people can expect from the job and what is expected of them. Also, they are need to understand their role as supervisor, which is primarily to coach the young people.

Finally, before young people begin their volunteering, they need an opportunity to be educated about the service agency, its mission, how they will make a difference and who they will be serving. They also need an opportunity to express their concerns, fears and questions.

I believe the volunteer jobs we offer young people need to be worthwhile, not just busy work or the jobs no one else will do. Young people want to make a difference!

*Posted 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Debbie Woods, Outreach International, Missouri - USA***

I have always thought that school districts on the senior and junior high level should make a specified number of hours of volunteer service a requirement for graduation. As a youth leader in my church family, I have witnessed the gratification and growth that has taken place in kids as they serve others.

I believe we should take every opportunity to provide this type of experience for our youth. If that means jumping a few hurdles to work out all of the issues, then I believe it is well worth the effort.

*Posted 5/4/00*

***Submitted by Ada Nanning , Hull Child and Family Services,***

Philosophically, the idea of providing volunteer opportunities for youth is a positive one...For at risk youth - volunteering can enhance self-esteem, build positive community connections and provide career alternatives. A Key question: Who takes responsibility for managing/ arranging their involvement? I've noticed more initiatives lately where government is supporting youth volunteering...

*Posted 5/3/00*

***Submitted by Sandie Cunningham, Volunteer Coordinator, NJ, USA***

I am a V.C. with a hospice and we utilize young teens for various activities at patients' homes; yard work, cleaning, painting, creating memory books and videos. Also young teens can bake cookies at home, seek donations and create gift baskets of goodies or bath supplies. There is a whole world of activities youth can perform. Also, I have been able to create an orientation program for youth which takes 3 1/2 hours vs the 20 hour orientation given to adults. It can be done!

*Posted 5/3/00*

***Submitted by Andrea Cohen, Royal Victoria Hospital, Barrie, Ontario, Canada***

Unfortunately, we found that teens under 16 were not responsible and reliable when required to commit to specific days and times for a volunteer placement. We now have teens 16-19 years of age, but find that their priorities are understandably, school and paid employment.

In a Hospital setting, commitment is required as staff require continuity while they try to keep up to a hectic pace. When we did have a younger teen (13-15) we found that many times it was the parents' agenda and the students had not bought into the commitment. The outcome was that rather than performing the tasks outlined in their specific Position Description they tended to socialize with one another or just fade away.

There were always those that were extremely willing to comply and these students did make excellent volunteers. However, they were not in the majority. We now try to accommodate students looking to pursue a career in the Health Care Field and find that they are willing to undertake the responsibility as it meets their needs as well as those of the Hospital. In terms of elementary school children volunteering, a Hospital setting is not conducive to their involvement because the acuity level of our patients has increased dramatically.

*Posted 5/3/00*

***Submitted by Debbie Lanceri, CFC, New York***

I have always encouraged my children to volunteer with me. I think it should be brought into the

elementary schools to some extent. Instead of waiting until they are seniors and need hours to graduate. My children are 12, 9, 8, & 5 and they volunteer with five major organizations in our area.

*Posted 5/2/00*

***Submitted by Karen Dany, Region 1 Volunteer Manager, Florida Dept. of Health, Pensacola, Florida, USA***

Susan has addressed an area being dealt with within our Pensacola's Promise branch of America's Promise. As a volunteer coordinator involving health care, there really is no place for the young volunteer. My son wanted to do Job Shadowing Day in healthcare, and he was denied a place to go. He is a 7th grader who wants to be a physician. He was quite discouraged. I'm torn between the professional and personal arena over this issue. I'm open to other suggestions by others responding to this hot topic.

*Posted 5/2/00*

***Submitted by Sally Pfeiffer, Volunteer Team Leader, COSI Columbus, Ohio, USA***

For the past two years, I have worked primarily with volunteers in the 13-18 year-old age range. There is absolutely no substitute for the dynamic energy that these young people bring into a program. While there are some limitations - usually they cannot drive themselves to their service site - we should never sell short the capacity of young people for creative and productive work. As with all age ranges, there are some qualities of teenagers that are generally regarded as weaknesses that we, as volunteer administrators, should refocus on as strengths. For example, the tendency of teens to speak their minds can either be a headache or a source of new ideas. Seeing teens as resources for reaching out to the community at new levels enhances the diversity of our organizations.

*Posted 5/1/00*

***Submitted by Lucas Meijs, The Netherlands***

This month's topic is again an example of how difficult it is to integrate other groups into an existing volunteer work force. Susan describes what happens with nontraditional groups that want to volunteer. Indeed there are new and other practical problems. Also there is a need for creativity to make meaningful volunteer opportunities. But there is just also this problem of being afraid of other groups. So involving these young volunteers is part of diversity management.

The USA experience is again very insightful for the Netherlands. At this moment, service learning etc for a bit older groups is just introduced as an idea. It would be nice to be able to learn from the USA. On the other hand, pre-teen and young volunteering is already common in many of the large Dutch membership organizations such as scouting and various sport organizations. Within Scouting Netherlands, junior members get increasing responsibilities in organizing their own groups (which by the way are run by 17 to 25 year old volunteers and NOT parents). Within some sport associations young kids can get certificates to show how good they are in a certain sport (e.g. field hockey) which they can only get if they also have volunteered for their own (membership) sport association.

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