



### **Give Your Child the Gift of Giving to Others – Now and Throughout the Year**

During the holiday season, thoughts often turn toward helping those in need, through donations of time, food, clothing or money.

But helping others shouldn't stop when the New Year starts. Instead, use the timeliness of the topic to begin a yearlong commitment to community service – and strengthen your own family ties in the process.

Family service can be considered an extension of service-learning programs, which are teaching and learning strategies “that integrate meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities,” according to Learn and Serve America, a national organization that supports and encourages such activities.

In Indiana, Learn and Serve America provides grants to schools, colleges and not-for-profit groups supporting efforts to engage more than 6,600 students in community service linked to academic achievement and the development of civic skills

While service learning takes place in conjunction with school curricula, the principles behind these programs apply to family involvement as well. According to Learn and Serve America, service learning programs are positive, meaningful and real to participants; focus on cooperative rather than competitive experiences; promote deeper learning; and provide personally meaningful experiences to participants.

Researchers Eugene C. Roehlkepartain of the Search Institute and Jenny Friedman, founder of Doing Good Together, an organization that encourages family volunteerism, wrote in a March 2009 report, ‘While doing important community work, service-minded families are growing children and teenagers who are more likely to become civically engaged, thoughtful, caring and generous adults.’”

In fact, Doing Good Together reports, a 2002 study showed that adults who volunteered as children were two times more likely to be involved in community service as adults who didn't.

Another good reason to get your child involved: Reports show that children who volunteer just one hour per week are less likely than other youths to get involved in

destructive behaviors such as smoking or drug and alcohol abuse, Doing Good Together adds.

Parents and guardians benefit as well, by gaining more quality time with their children, increasing their family's sense of cohesion and well-being and gaining connections to the broader community.

Ready to get started? Here are a few tips from Learn and Serve America and Doing Good Together:

- Talk to your children about the benefits of community service and why it is important to your family.
- Involve all family members in the process of selecting a volunteer opportunity. Consider the ages of your children, their personalities and interests, and their talents.
- Help your children build interest by first taking on a short-term assignment or activity.
- Before beginning your service work, talk with your children about what will happen and how they are expected to behave. Set goals for the project, such as how many hours you will devote to it, what day(s) you will work and what outcome you hope to achieve.
- After the project, make time for reflection. Have a family discussion about who you helped, what was accomplished and how the service project reflected your family values. Also address any challenges or disappointments that may have occurred and discuss what you learned from them.
- Network with other families who are committed to community service. This allows your children to share their own experiences, compare notes with other youth and build awareness of additional service opportunities.

For more information on family community-service opportunities and service learning, visit [www.servicelearning.org](http://www.servicelearning.org), [www.doinggoodtogether.org](http://www.doinggoodtogether.org), [www.familycares.org](http://www.familycares.org) and [www.thevolunteerfamily.org](http://www.thevolunteerfamily.org).

To explore opportunities for volunteering in the Indianapolis area, contact the United Way of Central Indiana, 317.923.1466, <http://www.uwci.org/index.asp?p=4>; and its Youth as Resources of Central Indiana program, <http://www.uwci.org/index.asp?p=416>, 317-920-2560.