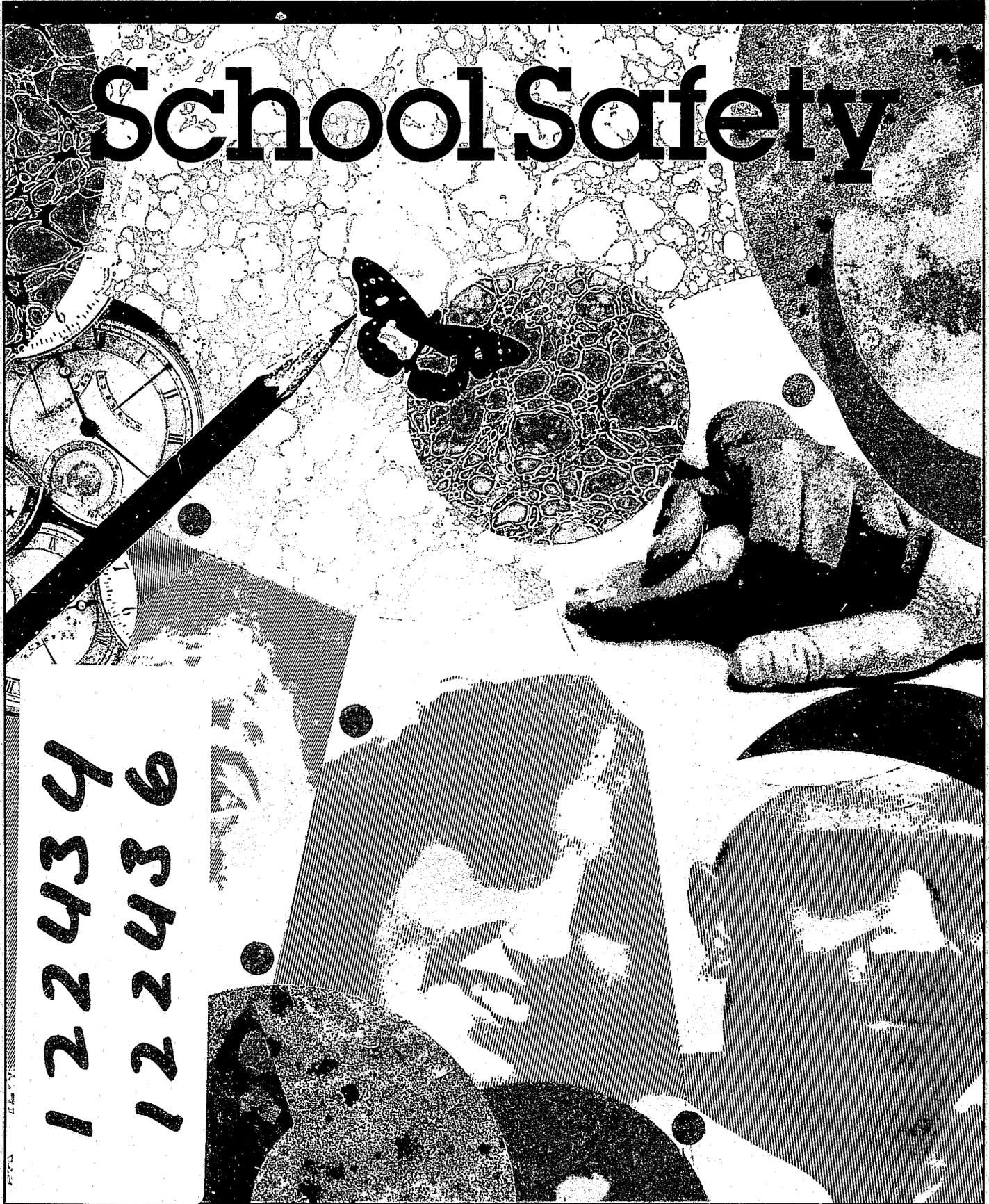


Youths and elder citizens both benefit by sharing their resources and experiences.

School Safety



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Ronald D. Stephens, Executive Editor
 Stuart Greenbaum, Editor/Art Director
 Brenda Turner, Suzanne Harper, Associate Editors
 Cynthia Randolph, Photocompositor

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About the cover:

The coming decade will inherit a new wave of senior-youth partnerships that move beyond symbolic gestures to mutually beneficial programs and changes in attitudes. Illustrations by Karen Watson. Copyright © 1990.

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BY CLIFFORD JOHNSON

Youth service opportunities prove "What goes around, comes around." Students help others and, in turn, receive a sense of purpose and greater self-esteem.

Youth service: Beyond *noblesse oblige*

The push for youth service in America is gaining steam. At the local level, a rich mix of new service opportunities for youths is emerging in schools and communities. At the state and national levels, advocates and policy-makers are developing policies that encourage and support service activities. The combination has created a movement that has the potential to reinvigorate the ethic of service among the nation's youth.

Today, service goes beyond *noblesse oblige* — the responsibility of the fortunate to help those less well off. Youth service efforts have taken hold in poor communities as well as affluent ones. Young people from all economic backgrounds, races and ethnicities — including both the academically talented and those at risk of school failure — now are engaged in service activities. Martin Luther King Jr.'s observation, "Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve," has become the rallying cry of the current movement.

Responding to a challenge

Giving youths opportunities to engage in service activities builds self-esteem

Clifford Johnson is director of the family support division for the Children's Defense Fund, a non-profit, non-partisan research, educational and lobbying organization headquartered in Washington, D.C.

and gives young people a meaningful role in their communities. With the proper guidance, encouragement and supervision, young people respond well to new challenges and responsibilities. Adolescents can be found today tutoring school-age children or befriending the elderly in nursing homes. Teens help out in day care centers, build access ramps for handicapped persons, and help to protect and maintain parks and other natural resources. The experience gained through service can make a lasting difference, giving young people a sense of purpose and a reason to remain in school, strive to learn and avoid too-early pregnancy.

Service is one way to connect young people to the well-being of their communities. Emerging youth service programs hope to tap a vast reservoir of youthful talent and energy, channeling it into activities to meet the nation's needs.

As an empowering, character-building experience, service also can help prepare youths for adult responsibilities, including productive roles in the job market and as citizens to lead the nation into the next century. Increasingly, service programs today include training, education, prevention and employment components for participants. Such components enrich the service experience and promote participation among disadvantaged youth.

Structured service programs for youths fall somewhere in the middle of

a continuum that represents the diversity of service today — from loosely structured volunteerism on one end to highly structured training and employment programs on the other. In addition to federal civilian service programs, such as the Peace Corps and VISTA, current service programs include:

- School-based service programs in which students tutor and perform other tasks in the community, sometimes receiving academic credit.
- Campus-based service programs that enlist college students in a wide range of community projects and activities.
- Conservation and urban corps programs that enable young people to work in crews in parks or community-improvement projects while acquiring skills, receiving modest compensation for their efforts, and taking pride in their contributions to the community.
- Part-time community- or city-based service programs, including some focused on the summer months.

In addition to these programs, it is important not to overlook emerging programs sponsored or co-sponsored by traditional youth-serving agencies and religious organizations. Increasingly, these groups structure their service opportunities to deal with other developmental components as well. For example, 4-H Clubs offer activities that include teaching communication and

coping skills to young adolescents, substance abuse prevention, and postponing sexual involvement. The Broad Street Presbyterian Church in Columbus, Ohio, sponsors a number of activities for youths, including self-development seminars on sexuality, conflict resolution and job readiness. During the summer, the church helps young people find volunteer and paid jobs.

Youth service in the schools

School-based programs vary enormously. Thousands of American schools organize community service activities that involve young adolescents as well as older teens. In addition to traditional voluntary service as part of an extracurricular activity, more and more schools are integrating service activities as part of their regular curriculum.

Some schools offer credit for a community service class, while others include a few hours of field work service activities in conjunction with regular classes. For example, biology students may work at a food cooperative or teach nutrition to low-income elderly people. Some school districts now require students to perform community service in order to graduate.

Service cannot be performed in a vacuum; communitywide encouragement and support are needed for everyone to benefit. Issues and potential pitfalls to keep in mind include transportation, scheduling, safety, liability and financing. In addition, implementing mandatory service may bring limited benefits to both the students and the community. As Robert Frost wrote in 1914, "Pressed into service means pressed out of shape."

Resource guides with additional information on school-based programs are:

- *Youth Serving the Young*, published by Youth Service America, 1319 F Street, N.W., Suite 900, Washington, D.C. 20004, 202/783-8855.
- *Reaching Out: School-Based Community Service Programs*, published by the National Crime Prevention Council, 733 15th Street, N.W., Suite 540, Washington, D.C. 20005, 202/393-7141.



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- *A Guidebook on Volunteer Service and Youth*, published by the Independent Sector, 1828 L Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, 202/223-8100.

Service for disadvantaged youth

Typically, disadvantaged youth are thought of as recipients of service, not givers. But by serving others, disadvantaged youth can reduce their chances of dropping out of school or experiencing other poor outcomes. Young people respond well to the responsibility of service and they sense the value of their efforts. This, in turn, increases their self-esteem and the likelihood that they will become productive adults.

Service possibilities for disadvantaged youth abound. With imagination and determination, program organizers can combine resources with needs, overcoming perceived barriers or resistance. The programs described here provide a

cross-section of efforts that may be operating as discrete units in schools and communities across the country.

Magic Me
 611 Park Avenue
 Baltimore, Maryland 21201
 301/837-0900

Part of the challenge for youths participating in Magic Me, a model service program that links the young with the old in nursing homes, is to overcome their fears of working with the elderly. In the process, students rediscover their own self-worth while making a valuable contribution to the community.

Working primarily with young adolescents not doing well in school, Magic Me first trains students about how to approach nursing home residents and the special needs of the handicapped. Trained students then visit an area nursing home during the school day and are

paired with a resident partner. Each pair works together throughout the school year on different projects designed to foster a genuine and meaningful relationship. All nursing home visits are supervised by a trained Magic Me staff member or volunteer.

The interaction of young and elderly persons includes activities such as writing, drawing, composing songs or simply taking a walk in the park. At least once a month, students meet at school to discuss their experiences, successes or failures, and ways to improve their partnership with the residents.

The Magic Me program has been replicated in more than 40 sites in the United States and Europe.

*Valued Youth Partnership Program
Intercultural Development Research
Association*

5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350
San Antonio, Texas 78228
512/684-8180

The Valued Youth Partnership Program (VYP) is a cross-age tutoring program for Hispanic students at risk of dropping out of school. At-risk high school students are identified as valued youths and given the opportunity to serve as tutors for younger children. In addition to helping tutees make gains in school, tutors sharpen their own basic skills, improve their self-esteem, and remain in school.

VYP first trains tutors through courses designed to develop their reading, writing and communication skills, as well as providing them with a practical awareness of child growth and development theories central to the tutoring activities. After completing training, participants work as tutors five to eight hours a week and earn the minimum wage for their efforts. Other components of the VYP program include field trips designed to expose students to economic and cultural opportunities and to successful adult role models. Parents also are included in at least one meeting to help support and encourage their children to remain in school.

*Project OASES
Pittsburgh Middle Schools
850 Boggs Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15201
412/488-2531*

Project OASES (Occupational and Academic Skills for the Employment of Students) is a school-based program focusing on community service for at-risk eighth-grade students. The program provides a non-traditional educational opportunity for these at-risk students to learn marketable skills.

In order to participate, students first must sign contracts stipulating their commitment to the program and agreeing to attend all classes. A highly structured, full-year program, Project OASES combines a half day of academic instruction with training in construction procedures and safety. Teachers work with students and their parents, monitoring academic progress. Instructors identify a community project such as building park benches or access ramps for the handicapped, and students work as a team to accomplish the task.

*Early Adolescent Help Program
33 West 42nd Street
New York, New York 10036
212/719-9066*

One of the goals of the Early Adolescent Helper Program (EAHP) is to provide young adolescents with an outlet to assume responsibility and to explore adult roles. Among other opportunities, students serve as helpers at early childhood centers and programs for school-age latchkey children.

EAHP collaborates with schools and other sponsoring agencies to help train and place the young student helpers. Students placed at early childhood centers may help supervise children's play, initiate learning activities, read to groups of children, or provide individual attention. Their efforts provide an important service, as regular teachers often are unable to give one-on-one attention to the children in their care. The adolescent helpers learn that they can make a difference. □

Generations United

Generations United is a national coalition with more than 100 member organizations committed to increasing public awareness about intergenerational issues and programs. To promote endeavors that bring generations together for service to the community and to one another, Generations United produces and disseminates program information and materials to its member organizations, their constituencies and the public. For additional information, contact Generations United or the following member organizations:

Generations United
c/o Child Welfare League of America, Inc.
440 First Street, N.W., Suite 310
Washington, D.C. 20001-2085
202/638-2952

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America
230 North 13th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107
215/567-7000

Generations Together
University of Pittsburgh
811 William Pitt Union
Pittsburgh, PA 15620
412/648-7155

National Association of Service and
Conservation Corps
1001 Connecticut Ave., N.W., #827
Washington, D.C. 20036
202/331-9647

National Association of State Units on Aging
2033 K Street, N.W., Suite 304
Washington, D.C. 20006
202/785-0707

The National Network of Runaway &
Youth Services, Inc.
1400 I Street, N.W., Suite 330
Washington, D.C. 20005
202/682-4114

New Age, Inc.
1212 Roosevelt
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
313/663-9891

Public/Private Ventures, Inc.
399 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106
215/592-9099

Temple University Institute on Aging
University Services Bldg. (083-40)
Philadelphia, PA 19122
215/787-6708

Youth Service America
1319 F Street, N.W., Suite 900
Washington, D.C. 20005
202/783-8855