

Get your students in

Join the Make Service Count Challenge

by Karen Hatcher



If you think today's youth don't possess a sense of community responsibility, think again. According to the Jefferson Awards National Report on Volunteering and Service in America, 2011 edition, public service among young Americans is increasing, and they are using their creativity, technical skills, and entrepreneurship to address local and global concerns. In a recent study of thousands of students and hundreds of nonprofits, it was found (among other things):

- The youth voice is refreshing, energetic, and important. The best youth volunteer programs involve youth in different levels of policy making and decision making.
- Leadership skills are significantly enhanced among students through public service.
- Volunteering as a student instills life-long habits of public service.
- Through service, young Americans can learn the skills to change their lives and to change the lives of others within their communities.

The Corporation for National and Community Service reports that more than 63 million Americans volunteered in 2009, a jump of 1.6 million over 2008; this was the biggest spike

The promise of America is freedom and opportunity. The responsibility and joy is service.

Sam Beard, founder and president, Jefferson Awards for Public Service

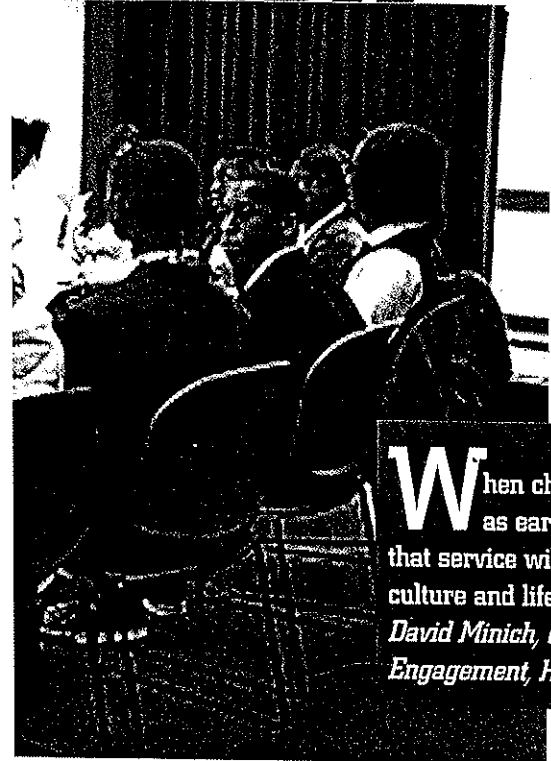
in volunteering since 2003. The report also showed that teen volunteer rates have doubled in a generation, increasing from 13 percent in 1989 to 28 percent in 2005.

In New Jersey, 1.5 million people volunteer each year on a regular basis, contributing 173.7 million hours of service to their communities. As a percentage, New Jersey's youth make up about a quarter of these volunteer hours, and the number is growing. Youth are bringing their

energy, enthusiasm, and creativity to food drives, cancer walks, disaster relief efforts, and so much more.

The benefits of youth service are many: The community or nonprofit organization receives a direct benefit while the volunteer may experience the benefit of expanded perspective, of being part of something larger than oneself. There also seems to be evidence of academic benefit to students who volunteer. A recent report, "Civic Engagement and High School Academic Progress" by Alberto Davila and Marie T. Mora, The University of Texas-Pan American, indicated that "civically-engaged high school students tend to make greater academic progress and are more likely to graduate from college than their peers." These are trends that we as adults should build on and Students in Action NJ seeks to do just that. Students in Action NJ is a program of

action



When children get introduced to volunteering as early as possible, there is every chance that service will become central to their personal culture and life-long passions.

David Minich, director of Global Volunteer Engagement, Habitat for Humanity International

Jan. 16—and ending it during Global Youth Service week in April 2012. Once again, we're challenging New Jersey students of all ages to create, execute, and enter their service projects into the Second Annual NJ Make Service Count Challenge.

Students may create projects addressing needs in their schools, communities, state, country, or the world. Projects may fit into

these students at the Jefferson Youth Service Awards ceremonies in May 2012.

Many students want to volunteer but often don't know where to begin. Students in Action NJ partners with the Governor's Office on Volunteerism and its extensive network of nonprofit and service organizations. Through this connection, our website (www.sianj.com) maintains a resource page complete with links to project ideas, groups looking for volunteers, and templates for building a successful service project.

Students in Action high school program

In addition to the NJ Make Service Count Challenge, Students in Action NJ also offers a leadership development program for New Jersey high schools. The program, designed to train student leaders to drive service in their schools, works well for both high schools with well-developed service programs and those who are just beginning to institutionalize service within their schools.

The seven goals of the Students in Action high school program are:

1. Engage school community. Build significant awareness and interest in volunteerism.
2. Create effective leadership. Apply team leadership skills to lifelong civic engagement.
3. Expand volunteer capacity. Expand both volunteer hours and the number of volunteer projects by making it easier to volunteer.
4. Expand financial capacity for volunteers. Raise funds to invest in volunteerism within each school.
5. Tell stories in the community. Build greater community awareness of the positive impact of youth.

the N.J. State Governor's Jefferson Awards, a part of the national Jefferson Awards for Public Service.

Second annual NJ Make Service Count Challenge

Youth service should start well before high school. Children of all ages have the passion, good ideas, and a desire to improve life around them. This was evident in the number and breadth of projects submitted in the 2011 Make Service Count Challenge. Last year's submissions included a campaign to fight smoking, an anti-bullying initiative, environmental clean-ups, food and clothing drives, handyman projects, a campaign to raise awareness about child slave labor, fund raising efforts for national and international disasters, and more. (A complete list of 2011 selections is included on www.sianj.com.)

This year, Students in Action NJ is a partner organization with the national Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service Campaign. We're launching the challenge on MLK Day—

categories such as easing hunger, improving health, cleaning up the environment, being a good citizen, raising awareness around peace and justice issues, or any other creative expression of students' desires to make the world a better place.

The Make Service Count Challenge allows entries from individuals, teams, groups, clubs, classes, or entire schools. It is open to all students in New Jersey from kindergarten through college. Service can take many forms and should be an expression of what the students deem important.

The deadline for entries is Friday, April 20. Students in Action of NJ will choose up to 50 outstanding

projects for recognition throughout New Jersey and honor

Everyone can be great because anyone can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't even have to make your subject and verb agree to serve.... You only need a heart full of grace.... a soul generated by love....
Martin Luther King, Jr.

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6. Grow and expand. Increase overall high school volunteerism in other schools.
7. Innovate. Leverage best practices quickly and learn how to be more effective.

The high school program offers a total of six conferences through the school year (three in Newark and three in Glassboro), designed to empower student leadership teams to take on the goals of the Students in Action program and to develop the leadership skills necessary to build a culture of service among their fellow students. The Jump Start conferences were held in the fall, and the Skill Building Conferences are scheduled for Jan. 12 at Rowan University and Jan. 20 at Rutgers Newark. Those high schools interested in participating may still join the program at the January conferences.

Since time is of the essence, teachers who would like to register high school students for the Jan. 12 or 20 leadership conferences should contact Karen Hatcher at 732-339-8178 or Karen@sianj.com. Information about the Make Service Count Challenge and the Students in Action NJ programs are available at www.sianj.com. Look for Students in Action on Facebook at www.facebook.com/studentsinactionofnewjersey.

Service recognition for adults

New Jersey residents of all ages may be nominated for a Jefferson Award and can find out more about the program at www.njgovernorsawards.com. Nominations will be accepted through Jan. 31. 

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