

# TURNING STUDENTS ON TO COMMUNITY SERVICE

By Delores Kennedy Londis

**A**s the students entered my office, I could hear Kim's voice above the rest talking excitedly about the last patient she had helped to get ready to leave the hospital. Since Kim had been too shy to talk to anyone when she came for the interview at the beginning of the summer I listened in amazement.

I took the students to lunch. Hardworking "volunteens" putting in four hours a day at the hospital, they were about to share their

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*Delores Kennedy Londis is Director of Volunteer Services for Washington Adventist Hospital, Takoma Park, Maryland. She previously served for a number of years as Counselor at Takoma Academy in Maryland.*

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***Altruism brings its own, often hidden rewards.***

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experiences of the past few weeks. I wanted to hear the negative as well as the positive.

Kim was still talking about the things she had done. I asked: "What has volunteering this summer done for you? How has it helped or changed you?"

Kim answered, "I have always been really shy, and I wasn't sure I could do this when I came. But forcing myself to go into those patients' rooms, talking to them and actually

having them respond to me, was great for me. It was so hard at first, but it got easier every time I did it."

She added animatedly, "Another thing—I've decided how important it is to take care of your health. I hadn't really thought about that before." All agreed on this point. "And," she said slowly, "I think I understand my grandmother better. I love her, but couldn't understand what's been happening to her lately. Now I think I know how she's feeling—what getting old is all about."

As these students—ranging in age from 14-19—stated what volunteering had done for them, I asked myself, "Where in their school curriculum could these

young people ever have learned these lessons?" Their hours of volunteering for community service had taught them something many adults never grasp: altruism brings its own, often hidden rewards.

Only six weeks before, Kim had been a shy 14-year-old with bangs that covered almost half her eyes as if to shelter her from the outside world. When she came to my office to volunteer her services I asked her why she wanted to do this. Was it a school requirement? No, she said, she just thought that it would be an interesting thing to do.

I did not think that she would be successful. Along with another girl, Kim seemed too timid to interact with the patients. Both girls proved me wrong.

Looking back on my years as an academy counselor, I remember best those students who—at an early age—were already giving something back to society. But where did they learn the concept of service? Perhaps from church or home. Not all of our academies or colleges require community service as a condition of graduation.

### **A Sense of Community**

This is most unfortunate. Every student should take from his or her school experience not only a solid grasp of academics, but also a sense of community—a desire to give something back to society, a commitment to service and to assisting the less fortunate.

Many U.S. schools are embracing this concept. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching reported last summer that more than two-thirds of the 1100 high schools that responded to their questionnaire have service programs.<sup>1</sup>

In Detroit, 200 hours of voluntary or paid community-service work outside high school are required for course credit. In Maryland, the superintendent of education is pushing for community service to be a statewide requirement for graduation. In Connecticut's Greenwich High School, the social-studies faculty includes community service as part of its required Contemporary America course. In Los Angeles, 20 high schools are

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involved in the Youth Community Service program. Banneker High School, in Washington, D.C., sponsors a Community Service Labora-

tory Project that asks students to donate their time for at least one afternoon a week.

The author of the Carnegie report concluded:

Considering, then, the way young people grow up, someone—and that usually means the school—must help the coming generation understand the importance of being givers as well as takers. Otherwise, the behavior that follows the adolescent into adulthood may be that of a person who is unconnected and uncommitted—with no sense of responsibility to help others who may be in need.<sup>2</sup>

Coleman McCarthy recommended that:

Service programs ought to be a strong part of the high school curriculum. College admission directors need to put less weight on SATs and more on service. Too many students leave high school idea-rich but experience-poor. The rest of us can stop asking children the old favorite—what do you want to be when you grow up—and ask instead the question that stirs the soul: How do you want to serve society when you're ready?

### A Faculty Objective

What the Carnegie report did not mention is that Catholic and Quaker schools are at the forefront in exposing the young to the joys of service. Three Maryland Catholic schools with which I am affiliated list *providing the opportunity for service* as one of the faculty's four educational objectives.

When David Hornbeck, Maryland state superintendent of education, made his proposal for community service, "people outside the educational establishment tended to support it and local educators tended to be opposed. He thinks his colleagues were against making a community service a requirement for graduation primarily because they did not want to get involved with an additional requirement they had to implement and monitor."<sup>4</sup>

Carnegie President Ernest L. Boyer broached the idea of a service requirement for high school students in his 1983 reform study *High School*. He argued that young people "should be given opportunities to reach beyond themselves and feel more responsively engaged."<sup>5</sup> That argument is the core of this new report—and the driving force behind the programs the report describes.

Teenagers in America grow up in the shadows of adult life. Students do not see formal education as having a consequential relationship to who they are, or even, in a fundamental way, what they might become. Like the rest of their world, the school is run by adults.<sup>6</sup>

### Dual Payoff

Service programs can get students more involved in the school and larger community, Boyer says. And the payoff is twofold:

Above all, our study seems to reinforce the view that a well-implemented school

*Public and private schools welcome volunteers to tutor their students.*

*Young people can aid in disaster-control efforts after floods, tornados, and other natural disasters.*

service program can counter the notion that schooling is irrelevant. It also can challenge the too-widely held assumption that teenagers "have little to contribute and no one wants what they have."<sup>7</sup>

School systems in several areas, including the state of Maryland, are being required to offer students a chance to earn credit for taking part in a service project. In Atlanta, Georgia, seniors have no choice in the matter: they will have to perform 75 hours of unpaid, volunteer service and write a 500-word essay or journal on the experience in order to graduate.

### Required or Voluntary?

Some educators object to Atlanta's required community service. They argue that only a voluntary program will enlist the most dedicated and enthusiastic students. Principal Michael McDonnell's Hudson, Ohio, high school supports that view. In his program, students can elect to take courses for credit in a successful student-run community service program.

"I don't want to require a person to volunteer," says McDonnell.<sup>8</sup> He

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blacks. Recognition should also be given to the influence of blacks in the church, including C. E. Bradford, C. L. Brooks, and Henry Wright.

## The Challenge

Integrating black history into the

### Books for Primary Children

- A Name to Remember*, by Pearl Boatwright. Brief account of the life of Marian Anderson.
- Color Me Broken*, by Lucille H. Giles. Johnson, 1965. Coloring book with 21 full-page pictures of black Americans.
- Sweet Potato Pie*, by G. T. Walker. Brief account of the life of Mary McLeod Bethune.
- George Washington Carver*, by Samuel and Beryl Epstein. Ages 7-10.
- The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*, by Langston Hughes. Ages 8-11.
- The Child's Story of the Negro*, by Jane Dabney Shackelford. Grades 2-5.

### Books for Intermediate Children

- A Weed Is a Flower*, by Aliko. Prentice-Hall, 1965. The life of George Washington Carver.
- Booker T. Washington*, by Lillie G. Patterson. Garrard, 1962. Story of the educator and founder of Tuskegee Institute.
- Crispus Attacks*, by Dharathula H. Millender. Bobbs-Merrill, 1965. "Childhood of Famous Americans" Series.
- Frederick Douglass*, by Lillie Patterson. Garrard, 1965. A short but interesting account of America's outstanding orator and abolitionist.
- Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman*, by Dorothy Sterling. Doubleday, 1954. An exciting account of the life of the "Moses of her people."
- Martin Luther King: The Peaceful Warrior*, by Ed Clayton. Prentice-Hall, 1966. Youth of Dr. King, and account of the Montgomery bus boycott, civil-rights activities, march on Washington, and the winning of the Nobel Peace Prize.

### Books for Elementary and High School Students

- Booker T. Washington*, Shirley Graham. Messner, 1955. His lifelong struggle to win first an education for himself, and then schools for his people.
- Famous American Negro Poets*, by Charlemae Rollins. Dodd, 1965. Lives of 12 black poets, from Jupiter Hammon of the 18th century to contemporary Gwendolyn Brooks.
- Great Negroes Past and Present*, by Russell L. Adams. Afro-Am., 1963. One hundred fifty-six biographical sketches, arranged into 13 categories.
- James Weldon Johnson*, by Ophelia S. Egypt. Crowell, 1974. Covers the most important aspects in the life of this writer.
- Lift Every Voice*, by Dorothy Sterling and Benjamin Quarles. Doubleday, 1965. The lives of W. E. B. Du Bois, scholar, teacher, and author; Mary Church Terrell, pioneer for peace, equality, and women's rights; Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute; and James Weldon Johnson, teacher, lawyer, poet, author, and diplomat.
- Martin Luther King*, by Margaret Boone-Jones. Childrens Press, 1983. The high points of Dr. King's life.
- Matthew A. Henson*, by Charles Graves. Putnam, 1971. This easy-to-read biography is devoted largely to Henson's long association with the arctic explorer, Peary.
- Picture Life of Jesse Jackson*, by Warren Halliburton. Watts, 1972. The easy text and photographs make this appealing to young readers.
- W. E. B. Du Bois: A Biography*, by Virginia Hamilton. Crowell, 1972. An objective approach to a controversial figure, through his writings and activities.

social-studies program requires a deliberate effort and commitment by teachers. Students must learn that through diversity there is to be unity and acceptance. As you teach, model and nurture attitudes of respect and understanding. Pray for wisdom and guidance as you accept and teach that "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). □

†From *Holy Bible: New International Version*. Copyright © 1978 by the New York International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers. Italics supplied.

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contends that mandatory service can dampen students' altruistic spirit and sap the program's vitality.

In spite of the disagreements about mandatory service, several major education groups, including the Education Commission of the States and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, endorse the *idea* of student service. While few states have developed policies or guidelines for such programs, all but 11 have provisions permitting local school systems to offer academic credit for community service.

## Where Should They Serve?

Do Adventist academies and colleges have a responsibility to instill the importance of community service in students? Or should we limit SDA student service to work within the church? Jesus went about doing good to all who had need, regardless of the religious party to which they belonged or their status in society. His love was freely given to the "outsiders" of His time, not merely to His disciples. This suggests that Adventist Christians today should meet the needs of their communities simply because in a special way God is in those who are suffering. "Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," Jesus said in Matthew 25.

The student-missionary program at the college level has made a significant contribution. But very few students get involved. Those who do talk about how their lives were changed. However, students don't have to go to a foreign country to experience the blessings of such service. They can perform many services right in their local communities. Most local and county governments have a volunteer bureau or a central office where one can discover what opportunities for service exist within the community. This type of service would help our schools feel a part of the local community and move our students out of their insulated environment.

## How to Start

How does a school establish a community-service program? First, those seeking to begin such an endeavor should make sure that it has the full backing of the school board, superintendent, and the principal. If the program is to succeed, strong enthusiastic support is necessary. Some promotion may be needed to convince certain faculty members that worthwhile learning can take place outside their classrooms. Unless they understand and support the program, it is unlikely to succeed.

Depending on the size of the school, one or more coordinators need to be appointed. Most pro-

grams rely on a small group of persons who, in addition to working for the service programs, generally perform other duties in the system. The ambitious program at 300-student Hudson High School in Ohio is supervised by one community volunteer who is also a part-time teacher. Basically, however, the program is run by students, who do their jobs exceptionally well.

The coordinator would be responsible for job placement and the central office; or the guidance director (or a combination of coordinator and counselor) could be responsible for the paperwork, and the community organizations would carefully supervise student volunteers.

The students and coordinators should meet weekly to discuss their work, any problems involved, and their feelings about their experiences. The coordinator must believe wholeheartedly in the program and its goals and should be able to communicate effectively with students and parents, school administrators and faculty members, and representatives of community groups.

### Survey Community Needs

If a service program is going to be of real service, the school must have a good idea of the kinds of volunteer help needed by the community. The place to start is the Voluntary Action Center, a branch of a state agency. The VAC will be happy to provide a list of places that use volunteers, as well as job descriptions and contact persons within those organizations. The VAC may even be willing to provide a liaison person for the school. The energy of teenagers is a valuable commodity, and most organizations welcome their enthusiastic help.

A questionnaire can also be sent to schools and community agencies, asking them to describe their needs and the functions that a volunteer student might perform. The coordinator(s), perhaps working with an advisory committee that includes the principal, parents, teachers, and students, could then decide on those prospects that seem most worthwhile.

Schools should consider service opportunities in each of these categories: care (short-term and long-term), education, health, recreation, rehabilitation (physical, mental, and spiritual), and welfare. They should contact both public and private organizations and institutions to inquire about the need for volunteers.

In most cases, students will perform their volunteer activities after school, on weekends, or during the summer. A minimum of 120 hours is required in order to receive a Carnegie credit for service. Students generally receive a Pass/Fail grade based on an evaluation by their job supervisor.

### Insurance Considerations

Insurance will be an issue for any school system without a policy covering students who work out of school as part of a school-approved program. Generally speaking, students engaged in an activity program officially sponsored by and/or supervised by the school should be covered by the student accident insurance program that is in effect for the school. However, the type of activity, place performed, and extent of supervision will determine which type of insurance policy will cover the activity. The school should consult with its insurance agent or other person coordinating the insurance program for the school.<sup>9</sup>

A really first-rate volunteer program takes considerable time and planning on the part of school administrators. However, as a volunteer director, I know how significant volunteering can be to teenagers. Students, time and again, speak of personal fulfillment and of discovering their own strengths and a sense of self-worth. Service is not just giving, it is also receiving.

In summary, the goal of volunteer service is to help students see the connection between what they learn and how they live. The spirit of the program is, I think, best captured by Vachel Lindsay who wrote:

It is the world's one crime its babes grow  
dull, . . .  
Not that they starve, but starve so  
dreamlessly,

Not that they sow, but that they seldom  
reap,  
Not that they serve, but have not gods to  
serve  
Not that they die but that they die like  
sheep!<sup>10</sup> □

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Charles H. Harrison, *Student Service: The New Carnegie Unit. A Carnegie Foundation Special Report* (New Jersey: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Coleman McCarthy, "High School Kids Learn by Serving," *The Washington Post* (February 28, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Ernest L. Boyer, *High School*, quoted in "Community Service Joins the Curriculum," *The American School Board Journal* (May 1987), p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Schools may wish to contact the Life Insurance Company of North America, located in Philadelphia, concerning its Volunteer Insurance Service coverage. Additional information may also be gained from the Volunteer Service Association at 4200 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20016.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Boyer's foreword to *Student Service: A Carnegie Report*, p. xi.

## BOOK REVIEWS

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writes "in private schools both middle-class and disadvantaged students spend more time in content classes and are exposed to more of the information that belongs to literate culture." There may be other factors. Teachers in private schools are far more apt to have academic degrees and to spend more time with fewer students, according to a recent study by Pearl Kane of public and private school teachers.

Finally, there may be a connection between the culture of a private school—its mix of traditions, goals, ethos, style, human interaction are all heavily dependent on the strong linkage of common ideas and communal discourse and the developing literacy of its students. Many private schools have a long way to go to reach the nirvana of knowledge outlined on the Hirsch list. But the setting seems to be favorable for making steady gains. —Robert L. Smith. □

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*Robert L. Smith is Executive Director of the Council for American Private Education, Washington, D.C. This review is reprinted by permission from the September 1987 CAPE Outlook.*