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The National Crime Prevention Council is a private, nonprofit tax-exempt [501(c)(3)] organization whose principal mission is to enable people to prevent crime and build safer, more caring communities. NCPC publishes books, kits of camera-ready program materials, posters, and informational and policy reports on a variety of crime prevention and community-building subjects. NCPC

offers training, technical assistance, and national focus for crime prevention: it acts as secretariat for the Crime Prevention Coalition of America, more than 4,000 national, federal, state, and local organizations committed to preventing crime. It also operates demonstration programs and takes a major leadership role in youth crime prevention. NCPC manages the McGruff "Take A Bite Out Of Crime" public service advertising campaign, which is substantially funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Proceeds from the sale of materials funded by public sources are used to help support NCPC's work on the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign.

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National Crime Prevention Council 1000 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Thirteenth Floor Washington, DC 20036-5235 202-466-6272 www.weprevent.org

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**Numerous studies show** that one of the most important influences on children and their ability to become productive, well-adjusted members of society is the presence of at least one caring adult in their lives. Youth who have faced daunting life obstacles point to a caring adult — a coach, an aunt, a neighbor, a teacher — as the reason they "made it." But what does this mean? And does it help prevent crime?

It means that these children are less apt to get involved in destructive behaviors. They are less likely to commit crimes, resort to violence, use drugs, or abuse future spouses or children. They are better prepared to meet life's challenges and disappointments. Through positive relationships with adults, they learn good decision-making skills, how to settle differences without violence, and sound morals and values. But mainly, their relationships with adults make them feel valued and help build their self-confidence.

You already have what it takes to be a caring adult. You don't need special skills or talents. You don't need years of education or a degree in child psychology. What you do need is the commitment to spend positive, focused, quality time with a child.

There are many reasons for you to become a "caring adult" in a child's life. Everyone in a community suffers when its residents are not healthy and law abiding. Crime, violence, and drug abuse drive prices higher because of shoplifting, lower property values because of the presence of gangs, and restrict activities because of fear of crime. However, the opposite is also true — everyone benefits when a community is safe — businesses thrive, residents take part in civic activities, and children feel safe playing in their neighborhoods.

It's not just the presence of an adult that makes a child resilient against crime, peer pressure, addiction, or delinquency. A child's sense of self-worth, altruism, competence, power, and hope are additional factors in resiliency. Children and youth also need to have certain skills to help them become well-adjusted. But what is particularly powerful about an adult in the lives of youth is that an adult can help teach, build,

and model these characteristics.

You've heard it before, "It's not the quantity, it's the quality." Some would argue that when it comes to spending time with a child, both are true. Children and youth need dependable adults in their lives on an ongoing basis. But they also need quality time where an adult truly focuses on them one-to-one. Spending time with a child while thinking about a deadline at the workplace is not quality time. Quality time simply means spending time with someone to the exclusion of all else — no phone interruptions, doing a dozen things at once, or thinking about one thing while doing another.



You already have the skills and interests that will appeal to kids. Don't worry about whether they are learning anything from you or not; in even the most ordinary, routine ways children and youth are learning from you. While fixing a meal, they learn math skills as they measure ingredients. When playing tic-tac-toe, they learn decision-making and problem-solving skills. When building a fort with a youngster, you're helping the child build self-confidence as that child discovers what he or she is capable of doing. But the main message you are sending is that you like being with them and that communicates to them that they are likeable people. It's not so much what you do as that you're doing it together.

Just talk — you don't need a master plan as to what to say or when to say it. As children grow, they need the opportunity to just talk things out. Ask them questions about music, politics, school, a recent event in the news and allow them to exchange ideas with you. The simple act of talking

## and it doesn't take much time

allows them to compare their thoughts and feelings to someone else's. It also provides the chance for them to reflect upon their own experiences. When we reflect upon our personal experiences, we learn about ourselves, others, and the world around us.

Remember the saying, "Strike while the iron is hot"? Keep an eye out for natural

opportunities to make a particular point or raise a particular issue. Often called "teachable moments," these are naturally occurring opportunities to reinforce, send, or talk about any of life's lessons. Perhaps while you are spending time with a young person you witness an act of discrimination. Use the opportunity to explore what his or her feelings are about the event. Share yours. Don't lecture. Talk.

Have fun. This should be a chance to enjoy each other's company. Not every get-together has to have a lesson or a planned activity. You can just hang out — go to a playground, go swimming, take a picnic to the park or beach. Remember some of the best made plans go awry. Sometimes we're tired and cranky. Some activities may turn out badly. Sometimes the weather won't cooperate. It's okay when that happens.

So you're convinced that you have the know-how but you don't think you have the time. You don't need to dedicate huge blocks of time. It is more important that you are a dependable, caring presence in a child's life. Look for activities that fit with your schedule. You may be able to do things on weekends but not week nights — go hiking, bowling, or swimming. Maybe you work nights and are available during after-school hours — help with homework or go to the mall. You may find that there are times of the year when you are more available — explore seasonal commitments such as coaching, gardening, or fishing. Maybe you can only dedicate an hour a week to a child — make a weekly lunch date, play date, or exercise date.

# I don't know any kids. Schools, religious institutions, recreation programs, social service agencies, PTAs and PTOs, and youth-serving agencies can all help you meet kids. Co-workers or specialty groups (such as groups for single parents) or other adults may also be able to introduce you to kids. There are probably kids in your neighborhood who could use an adult friend. You may see them after school or on the weekends. They may be playing alone or with other kids. They may seem to be involved in positive activities or they may not.

You also can volunteer in places where children and youth gather — community centers, day care centers, schools, recreation leagues, libraries. You can join clubs that welcome youth — hiking clubs, book clubs, chess clubs. Or you can take or give lessons in an area that you are interested in — fishing, swimming, dancing. Look for activities that don't discriminate by age. Join a neighborhood watch group, attend community block parties, or patronize community facilities — parks, stores, public swimming pools.

### Where are their parents? Parents are usually the chief conveyors of standards and values as

usually the chief conveyors of standards and values as children grow, but they cannot offer all the broadening of horizons that children need and seek. As peers and friends become more important in children's lives, parents begin to take a backseat. As an adult who has built up a relationship with a child or is considered a friend, you have the opportunity to offer guidance without being seen as an authority figure. As a friend you are viewed as a wielder of adult authority — superior wisdom, knowledge, and skill — rather than adult power — superior force.

Some parents may need extra help. A single parent may have to work two jobs to provide for his or her kid(s) and can't spend as much quality time as he or she would like with them. And there are parents who are absent emotionally (and even physically) from the household for a variety of reasons, such as alcoholism, drug addiction, or depression. Physical, emotional, financial, and a host of other personal and family problems may account for a child not receiving the adult attention he or she needs.

### how to get started

### What if I want to spend time with other people's children?

If you're not working through a formal organization, you should always meet and talk with the parent(s) of any child you want to spend time with. A parent needs to know who his or her child is spending time with, and they should have a chance to know and trust you before they trust you with their child. They should know how to reach you in an emergency. They should know where you live and work — both addresses and phone numbers.

Also, you need to know whether the child has any medical issues such as asthma or allergies, and you should know how to reach the parent if there's an emergency. Each and every time you get together with the child make sure you have a parent's permission to do so.

Make sure your insurance is up to date and covers any injuries sustained at your house, in your car, or on your property. If you are planning on being involved in activities that have a greater risk of physical injury — such as sporting activities — you may want to get written permission from the parent.

You also need to protect yourself against accusations of improper behavior. This is one reason why it is so important to make sure that you have a parent's permission every time you get together with a child. Other things you can do to protect yourself are to spend time with groups of children or make sure that other adults are around when you're with a child. If you are spending time with an older child, be alert to any signs that they may have a crush on you or that they may be interpreting your behavior incorrectly. If you suspect that either is true, it is probably best to terminate the relationship.

Occasionally, include the parents in your activities. Set aside time to visit with the parents separately from the child. This gives them the opportunity to get to know you, to share information about their child with you, and to learn to trust you.





I don't know what to do. You may not have children, but you were a child. Think about your childhood.

What did you like to do best? What did you like to do least?
Is there anything you started doing as a child that you're still doing today?

A good way to find out what kids are interested in is to read their magazines, listen to their music, and visit their Web sites. Another way to find out is to ask. You can help children develop their own skills and interests by giving them an opportunity to try out different activities. You don't always need to do what they like to do; you can do what you like to do and let them join in, watch, or listen.

Another way to break the ice is to start with a particular task. You may offer to help a child with a particular project for school, you may agree to teach them how to sew, you may practice soccer together, or you may invite them to help you with a project you're working on. When you're focused on a particular activity, relationships evolve naturally.

And remember, you don't need lots of money to spend time with a kid. Community centers, schools, religious institutions, neighborhood parks, civic groups, libraries, and your imagination offer a wealth of activities that are free.

As you begin looking at activities to do together, remember that children mature at different rates, but there are some general guidelines that can help you determine what activities are best for which age group.

GO FISHING

COOK A MEAL

MAKE A WEEKLY LUNCH DATE

GO FOR A BIKE RIDE

BECOME A PEN PALTO A KID IN ANOTHER CITY

COACHATEAM

PICNIC

LISTEN TO MUSIC

TEACH THEM HOW TO PLAY AN INSTRUMENT

GO TO THE MALL

JOIN A BOWLING LEAGUE

GO CAMPING

PLANT AND TEND A GARDEN

**READ TO THEM** 

GO TO THE MOVIES

VISIT FRIENDS

GO FOR A WALK

HIKE

CANOE

BUILD A FORT

GO TO THE LIBRARY

JOIN AN EXERCISE OR MARTIAL ARTS CLASS

GO TO THE GYM

PAINT PICTURES

TEACH THEM TO KNIT

TOUR MUSEUMS

JUMP ROPE

START A BOOK CLUB

SCULPT A STATUE

WRITE A SONG

**BIRD WATCH** 

LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE

PLAY GAMES

TAKE THEM TO WORK

VOLUNTEER

Ages four and five Children at these ages are curious, eager, and anxious to learn, and they learn through their real-life experiences. They need experiences that challenge and stimulate their thinking. Rather than just reading a book about animals with them; let them see, hear, smell, and perhaps touch the animals by taking them to a petting zoo.

This age group is extremely active. They expend a great deal of energy and periodically need to rest, but they cannot sit still for extended amounts of time. Take frequent breaks and rest periods.

Four- to five-year-olds are developing fine motor skills and are able to preform a number of basic tasks such as cutting, pasting, and coloring. They are also increasing muscle development. Give them opportunities to run, jump, and climb.

Ages six and seven Children at these ages are excited, optimistic, and eager to learn. Hands-on projects and experimentation let them reflect their interests, abilities, and learning styles. They are developing problem-solving skills from their experiences so cards, board games, working with tools, and arts and crafts projects are good activities for this group.

At this age, children are increasing their verbal ability and gaining a new interest in communicating through writing. And although they are still as active as younger ages, they are better able to control their energy to focus on a task. They don't need as many breaks or rests.

Help these children develop social skills — helping, cooperating, negotiating, talking — by involving them in small groups. They have a strong sense of fair play, an interest in games, and an investment in rules that allow the game to unfold successfully. They need encouragement and positive feedback to energize them and make them feel genuinely special.

Ages eight to ten Children in this age group are gradually achieving independence and yearn to be included in more mature activities. They are much more capable of concentrating for extended periods of time. They are more curious about the nature of things around them, for example, how something works or where to find information. To challenge this group's increasing vocabulary and reading skills, provide them with reading and writing activities — maybe you can keep a journal together that you trade back and forth each time you see each other.

They also need help learning good decision-making skills. Offer them opportunities to begin making decisions on their own. Start with simple ones such as where to go for lunch. Explore with them the decisions they have made or need to make — help them look at the possible outcomes. Help them see that sometimes the easy decision is not always the right decision.

Eight- to ten-year-olds are motivated by pleasing their peers. They spend more time with their friends and less with their families. Because of the increasing role of peers in shaping the behavior of these kids, it is important to provide children in this age group with opportunities to practice peer resistance skills. Engage them in conversations about what they would say or do if a friend offered them drugs, wanted them to steal something from the drug store, or asked to see their answers to questions on a test. Use examples from your own life and relate ways you handled similar situations when you were growing up. They need strategies to deal with negative peer pressure and to deal with the rejection, frustration, disappointment, and failure that comes with increased social interaction.

thingstodo

Ages II to I4 Girls usually start puberty during these ages; boys usually begin puberty two years later than girls. They are often uncomfortable with their changing bodies and the way that these changes may set them apart from their peers. These early adolescents often experience a decline in self-esteem.

These young people need the opportunity to build the self-confidence that may be diminished because of the physical effects of puberty. Involving adolescents in something positive reduces their opportunities to develop self-destructive behaviors. Teens will develop feelings of self worth from having done something good — neighborhood clean ups, graffiti paint outs — for the place in which they live and will feel more connected to their community. In building self-confidence, it is important for teens to experience some immediate results, as well as to work toward larger goals over time. Check out volunteer activities that you and your young person might do together — visiting the homebound, working in a soup kitchen, renovating housing for the needy.

These teens develop their self-concept in terms of how others relate to them. The need for close friends becomes crucial. Up until this time, children have had their emotional needs met by their parents. Friends and peer groups help teens make the transition from parental dependence to independence.

Ages 15 and 16 Middle adolescence generally marks the increase of sexual impulses and of attention to grooming and cleanliness. Teens at this age are able to solve problems because they are able to understand conditions, reason with the conditions, try out various solutions systematically, and discard those that don't fit. They are also flexible in their thinking — they can come up with many possible reasons for an outcome. Because they can think beyond what is present to what might be possible, they become increasingly inventive, imaginative, and original in their thinking.

At this age, teens begin to assume adult roles. As they begin to discard their childhood inferiority, they begin to see themselves as the equals of adults. As they compare the real to the possible they become idealistic and critical at the same time. Some teens see themselves as essential to the salvation of humanity — as opposed to earlier ages when they expressed their views verbally; teens at this age are ready to back up their views with actions.

A major task of this age group is to determine who they are and who they want to be. They must have the opportunity to try out the different roles they are to play in society. They need to be able to try out different jobs. They need to begin to take on leadership responsibilities as well as learn how to follow others. Now is a good time to involve youth of this age group in a "cause." Find out what they feel strongly about and help them get involved. Consider occasionally including them in activities with you and your adult friends. Ask them to teach you a special skill they may have, let them decide what activities to do together, turn over the reins and let them take the lead.

### What about "problem" kids? Recent

research shows that one of the last sections of the brain to mature is the one in charge of making sound judgments and calming unruly emotions. What does this mean? Teens are in the process of "hardwiring" their brains. The more they exercise their brains by controlling their impulses, understanding abstract thoughts, and practicing critical thinking skills, the better it will serve them in the future. Because teens' brains are still forming, even teens who have gotten into trouble can still learn restraint, judgment, and empathy.

If you are interested in working with a child who may have already been in trouble or who may be considered at high risk, you may want to investigate formal programs that are set up for these youth. You may need special training, and the children may need more structured atmospheres. But keep in mind that these children are not beyond hope, and your friendship may be one of the things they need to help steer them in the right direction.

What if it doesn't work out? There are many reasons that a relationship with a young person may not work out. You may change jobs; one of you may move; either of you may take on additional commitments. Or perhaps they get involved in other activities — friends, school, sports. When it becomes clear that you are no longer able to spend time with a child, be honest and up front about what is going on and why. Don't fade into the background by not showing up when you have something planned or not returning phone calls. Even if you think there are personality differences that are too great for you to ever get along, you must tell the child of your intentions without blaming him or her.

### Where can I go for more

information? Congratulations on making a decision to make a positive impact on a young person's life. There are many places you can go for more information in your community. There are also national groups that have local chapters that can be of help. We've also included some Web sites you can visit and some books you can read.

### Local Resources

Schools (public and private)
Local law enforcement
Religious groups
Civic and fraternal organizations
(e.g., Kiwanis, Lions, Knights of

Social service agencies
Recreation leagues
Health clubs

Dance, exercise, or martial arts studios

### Books

AARP. Report on the 1994 Study of the Use of Volunteers in Police Agencies. Author: Washington, DC. 1994.

Carroll, Andrew, and Miller, Christopher. Volunteer USA. Fawcett Columbine: New York. 1991. ISBN 0449905772.

Coleman, Paul. How to Say It to Your Kids. Prentice Hall Press, 2000. ISBN 0735201773

Coloroso, Barbara. Parenting Through Crisis: Helping Kids in Times of Loss, Grief and Change. Harper Resource, 2000. ISBN 0060198567.

Cutler, Donald. Dear Parents Please: Your Kids Want to Talk With You About Alcohol and Other Drugs. Broadhearth Publishing, 1995. ISBN 0964708116.

Ellis, Susan J. The Volunteer Recruitment Book. Energize, Inc.: Philadelphia, PA. 1996. ISBN 094057618X.

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Fields, Doug. Help! I'm a Volunteer Youth Worker. Zondervan Publishing House, 1993. ISBN 0310575516.

Freedman, Marc. The Kindness of Strangers: Adult Mentors, Urban Youth and the New Volunteerism. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA. 1993. ISBN 1555425577.

Freedman, Marc. The Kindness of Strangers: Reflections on the Mentoring Movement. Public/Private Ventures: Philadelphia, PA. 1992.

Glennon, Will; et al. 200 Ways to Raise a Boy's Emotional Intelligence: An Indispensable Guide for Parents, Teachers, and Other Concerned Caregivers. Conari Press, 2000. ISBN 1573240206.

Henkart, Andrea Frank and Henkart, Journey. Cool Communication: A Mother and Daughter Reveal the Keys to Mutual Understanding Between Parents and Kids. Perigee, 1998. ISBN 0399524002

Morrow, Kristine V., and Styles, Melanie B. Building Relationships With Youth in Program Settings: A Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Public/Private Ventures: Philadelphia, PA. 1995.

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Schaefer, Charles E. and Digeronimo, Theresa Foy. How to Talk to Your Kids About Really Important Things: For Children Four to Twelve. Jossey-Bass, 1994. ISBN 1555426115.

Schwartz, Pepper. 201 Questions to Ask Your Parents/201 Questions to Ask Your Kids. Avon Books, 2000. ISBN 0380805251.

Scott, Newman. Center Straight Talk with Kids: Improving Communication, Building Trust and Keeping Your Children Drug-Free. Bantam Books, 1991. ISBN 0553293524.

Shaffer, Susan Morris and Gordon, Linda Perlman. Why Boys Don't Talk and Why We Care: A Mother's Guide to Connection. Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, 2000. ISBN 0967961106.

Stepp, Laura Sessions. Our Last Best Shot: Guiding our Teens Through Early Adolescence. Riverhead Books, 2000. ISBN 1573221600.

Tracy, F. and Tracy, Louise Felton. Grounded for Life: Stop Blowing Your Fuse and Start Communicating. Parenting Press, 1994. ISBN 0943990955.

Trujillo, Michelle L. Why Can't We Talk?: What Teens Would Share If Parents Would Listen. Health Communications, 2000. ISBN 1558747788.

Wuthnow, Robert. What It Means To Volunteer: Lessons From America's Youth. Independent Sector: Washington, DC. 1995.

### National Resources

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America

230 North 13th Street Philadelphia, PA 19107 215-567-7000 • Fax 215-567-0394 www.bbbsa.org

Boys & Girls Clubs of America

1230 West Peachtree Street, NW Atlanta, GA 30309 404-487-5700 • Fax 404-487-5787 www.bgca.org

Boy Scouts of America

1325 West Walnut Hill Lane PO Box 152079 Irving, TX 75015-2079 972-580-2000 • Fax 972-580-2502 www.bsa.scouting.org

Camp Fire Boys and Girls

4601 Madison Avenue Kansas City, MO 64112-1278 816-756-1950 • Fax 816-756-0258 www.campfire.org

Girl Scouts of the USA

420 Fifth Avenue New York, NY 10018-2798 212-852-8150 \* Fax 212-852-6515 www.girlscouts.org

National Congress

of Parents and Teachers 330 North Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100 Chicago, IL 60611 312-670-6782 • Fax 312-670-6783 www.pta.org

National 4-H Council

7100 Connecticut Avenue Chevy Chase, MD 20815-4999 301-961-2800 • Fax 301-961-2894 www.fourhcouncil.edu

One to One: National Mentoring Partnership

1600 Duke Street, Suite 300 Alexandria, VA 22314 703-227-2200 • Fax 703-226-2581 www.mentoring.org

YMCA/YWCA

www.ymca.net • www.ywca.org Check local listings for a branch near you.

### Web Sites

Genera

Developmental Stages of Children www.ncac-hsv.org/stages.html

Understanding Teens Fact Sheet www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~ohioline/hyg-fact/5000/5300.html

Rearing Moral Children www.npin.org/library/1998/n00023/n00023.html

Parent Resources www.npin.org/library/texts.html www.parentingresources.ncjrs.org

Talking to Kids

Topeka Capital Journal "Talking to teens is difficult but not impossible" www.cjonline.com/stories/010701/famteentalk.shtml

Talking with kids about their day www.familyeducation.com/article/0,1120,1-9269,00.html

Communication and your 4- to 5-year-old www.kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/comm 4 to 5.html

Effective Communication Techniques (Parenting Today's Teen) www.parentingteens.com/booklets6.shtml

How to hold a conversation with anyone, anywhere www.overseasdigest.com/odsamples/conversation.html

Conversation starters

www.nytimes.com/learning/parents/conversation

Talking with your child www.nea.org/helpfrom/connecting/tools/talking.html

Spending time with your teen www.uwyo.edu/AG/CES/FAMILY/CYFAR/FACT SHE/Spending Time.htm

Communication tips, spending time with your teen parentingteens.about.com/parenting/parentingteens/library/weekly/a a060199.htm

Positive Parenting: Menu Items — Talking to Kids (series of age-specific suggestions) www.kidshealth.org/parent/positive/

Keeping Up With Their World

Liquid Generation www.liquidgeneration.com/index2.html

Young teens www.chaoskids.com

Comedy Central
www.comcentral.com

enigma

www.parascope.com/enigma.htm

Film

www.atomfilms.com

Parent's guide to games

www.computernews.com.pk/issue/june2000/news-14.htm

Games, gamers, and gaming culture

www.knowledge.hut.fi/projects/games/gamelinks.html

Magazines

Cosmo Girl —

www.knowledge.hut.fi/projects/games/gamelinks.html

Eve — www.evemag.com

Girl Crush Zine — www.girlcrushzine.com/index2.html

Seventeen - www.seventeen.com/cgi-bin/imteen/index.jsp

teen voices - www.teenvoices.com

terrificchik — www.terrifichick.com (12-14)

breakupgirl — www.breakupgirl.com/

teen.com - www.teen.com/

teennewsweek.com — www.weeklyreader.com/teennewsweek

Teen People Online —

www.teenpeople.com/teenpeople/flashhome

mp3.com — www.mp3.com

Things To Do

Gardening with kids

www.aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/kindergarden/pnote.htm

Working with kids keeps you young and makes you feel old www.4-c.org/youngold.htm

Kids Domain (links for small people)

Neuroscience for kids

www.faculty.washington.edu/chudler/fair.html

Miscellaneous

www.ilil.essortment.com/freekidsactivi rayn.htm www.freebcity.com/html/top | Olinks/kidsstuff.htm www.disney.com

Volunteering

Volunteer Match www.volunteermatch.org

Idealist

www.idealist.org

Connect for kids www.connectforkids.org/homepage | 548/index.htm

Outreach to youth www.boost4kids.gov/topics.cfm?ID=34

American Society of Directors of Volunteer Services (health care)

www.asdvs.org

Association for Volunteer Administration www.avaintl.org

Corporation for National Service www.cns.gov

E-volunteerism.com www.e-volunteerism.com

Join Hands Day www.joinhandsday.org

Make a Difference Day www.makeadifferenceday.com

Points of Light Foundation www.pointsoflight.org

SERVEnet

www.servenet.org

Virtual Volunteering Project www.serviceleader.org/vv/forvols.html

Volunteer Match www.volunteermatch.org

Youth Service America www.ysa.org

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