Survey: More US teens volunteer than work part time

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5:40 PM PST, February 23, 2009

SEATTLE (AP) — American teens are setting an example for their parents through their volunteer work, according to a new poll by Harris Interactive.

The random national telephone survey released this week by the Federal Way-based charity World Vision found that more teens volunteer to support a charitable cause — 56 percent — than have a part-time job — 39 percent.

Parents and guardians said 82 percent of the teens in their lives do something to support charitable causes, including volunteering, recruiting others to a cause, wearing a button or T-shirt or donating money.

Forty-six percent of the adults surveyed said they volunteer their time, but they also take credit for inspiring their children to volunteer.

The Harris Interactive poll was conducted in the United States between Jan. 29 and Feb. 2 among 2,003 adults.

Sara Johnson, a teacher who advises the student service club at a private high school in a suburb south of Chicago, says she's seen a resurgence of teen involvement in social causes since President Barack Obama was elected in November.

"I think that kids are realizing more and more how important it is," said Johnson, who teaches English at Illiana Christian, in Lansing, Ill., near the Indiana border.

Johnson, 29, said she saw a similar surge in involvement after Hurricane Katrina, and believes this generation of teens is more involved in charitable work than her generation was.

The Harris Interactive survey found a quarter of teens have become more involved in charitable causes or organizations as a result of the economic downturn, but the economy has also led to cuts in allowances, and has teens working more hours at a paying job.

Unlike many public high schools across the nation, Illiana Christian does not require its students to clock public service hours. Senior Melissa Martin said some kids are too busy with other commitments like sports and music, but most of her classmates do volunteer.

"Our school shows a rare passion for service. It's something I'm really proud of," said Martin, who is editor of the school newspaper and chairs a group organizing a fundraiser for World Vision this coming weekend.

Ninety-five students at Illiana Christian have signed up to participate in a 30-hour fast in support of hungry children around the world.

Some of the school's more than 650 students are too busy and some just aren't interested, said Suzanne Hammer, a junior who is helping Martin plan the fundraiser.

"Personally, I don't understand why you wouldn't get involved if you can," Hammer said. "I think everybody should make a conscious effort to serve others."

Alynn Woodson, director of volunteer engagement at Habitat for Humanity International, said she has noticed a new enthusiasm among teen volunteers for the Atlanta-based organization, which has had a structured youth program since 1987.
"I've worked at Habitat for about eight years now. Over that time it's been great to see the increase in youth volunteering. But throughout that time, I've never seen it be quite so energetic as I'm seeing now," Woodson said Monday.

"Students are feeling very energized by this new president encouraging them to go out and serve," she added.

Habitat for Humanity celebrates the 20th anniversary of its alternative spring break program this year and is expecting more than 12,000 young people to help build homes for low-income people around the nation.

Food banks are also benefiting from the increase in teen volunteering, although representatives of a Washington state hunger relief organization, Northwest Harvest, said they do not track the age of their volunteers.

Stephanie Davison, volunteer manager for Northwest Harvest, said volunteer numbers are up 35 percent this fiscal year, which began in July. Part of the credit goes to the agency's new central warehouse, which can accommodate larger groups.

Davison said youth groups, school classes and even individual teens are calling the food bank looking for a place to volunteer their time.

On the Net:

World Vision: http://www.worldvision.org

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