



# PARENTING FOR MORAL GROWTH

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOL PARENTS

## In This Issue

**“But my sister got to do a project...”**  
page 1

**Charity Begins At Home**  
Dr. Marvin Berkowitz  
page 1

**Book Review:**  
**A Teen Guide to Global Action**  
by Adriana Murphy  
page 4

**Jenny Friedman: Tips on Family Volunteering**  
page 5

**Consider Your Child’s Age When Choosing Service-Learning Activities**  
page 6

**A Note From the Editor**  
page 6

## “But my sister got to do a project...” or, one family’s approach to community service

The Peace Prayer of St. Francis eloquently reminds us of what we intuitively know, that “it is in giving that we receive.” When we give our time, energy, and resources to those in need, we gain as well, although those gains may seem ineffable, and correspondingly difficult to quantify.

But when measurement is key, as in the case of researchers who study what experiences are apt to shape us as moral agents, it turns out that helping others – community service – has proven significance. In her article in the upcoming CSEE publication, *Good Things to Do: Expert Tips for Fostering Goodness in Kids*, Nancy Eisenberg, renowned researcher on children’s prosocial development, lists ways that parents

can promote altruistic behavior in their children:

- Be attuned to children’s capacity for empathy and sympathy
- Heighten children’s awareness of the emotions of others
- Help children learn skills for dealing with their own emotions
- Help children develop perceptions of themselves as caring for others
- Support children when they have opportunities to give – community service

*continues on next page*

## Charity Begins at Home

by Dr. Marvin W. Berkowitz

One of the great practices in the Judeo-Christian tradition from the Old Testament is tzedakah, or charity. As a nation, America holds a tradition of giving to

needer countries and groups around the world. Individuals give to service groups that give to individuals. It is a great tradition and one we need to continue to foster by raising children to be charitable, which encompasses the character traits of caring, compassion, and generosity.

*continues on next page*

### *Berkowitz continued*

One way to do this is to involve children in charitable acts from an early age and throughout their childhood and adolescent years. If it is part of your family to be charitable, first make sure that your kids know about it. Tell them of the check you just wrote for a particular charity. Bring them along to a fundraising event and explain the purpose of the work that you care about, and why you support it. Tell the story of your involvement in helping others in need. I know of families that volunteer at a homeless shelter or soup kitchen preparing and serving meals every week. They take their children along with them because those kids learn more by participating in charitable acts than by hearing about them.

Recently, my wife was asked to volunteer at an event in which a local chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women was running a back-to-school store for needy children. Volunteers had organized donations of new clothes and school supplies from merchants, manufacturers, and others, and additional volunteers would staff the one-day giveaway.

Needy children were brought in to the "store" and a personal shopper (one of the volunteers) would take them around with a checklist (without their parents, who, if they were there, were waiting in a separate room). Each child got to pick out the items on his or her list, for example, a winter coat, a pair of shoes, a backpack, a toiletry kit, and pencils.

I suggested that my wife take along our son to help. She asked him and he agreed, somewhat reluctantly. It didn't

*continues on next page*

### *"Service" continued*

The Marcus family of Briarcliff, N.Y., provides a real-life case study corroborating Eisenberg's findings. Their social outreach has pivoted on the inspiration and energy of three siblings – Aaron (19), Danna (17) and Eliza (9). Listening to their mother, Abbe Marcus, describe the family's undertakings, one might be tempted to think her support of her children's community service approaches saintliness. But Abbe would assure you that all parents are capable of helping their children reach out to others. Following the lead of her kids' positivity and idealism, she learned to be mostly unflappable in the face of great challenges...with the possible exception of when she was trying to get 75 pairs of soccer cleats through Israeli customs.

With a background as a special educator who ran a department at a special needs center, Abbe frequently brought her young children with her to different outreach programs. An annual tradition for this Jewish family was to prepare and serve Christmas dinner at a local church. Clearly, Abbe modeled performing community service as her kids grew up. But when Abbe's oldest daughter approached her bat mitzvah in 2004, it was Danna, then thirteen, who triggered an ongoing chain reaction of family social outreach. As stipulated by the synagogue to which the Marcus family belongs, Danna was required to undertake a mitzvah project. Since the family was going to travel

“All parents are capable of helping their children reach out to others.”

to Israel, and since Danna, an avid soccer player, would be visiting and playing soccer with kids at a refugee absorption center for Ethiopian Jewish children, she decided her bat mitzvah project would be to raise money to purchase and subsequently deliver equipment for the refugee center's soccer team.

With the help of the United Jewish Federation, the organization arranging the visit to the refugee center, Danna began to explore her mitzvah project idea. Not surprisingly, one of Danna's first questions was, "How old are the girls we're going to be playing soccer with?" Danna was disappointed to learn that she would be playing soccer with boys, because the center had no girls' team. As Eisenberg's research suggests, Danna's natural response was to move from her own passion for soccer to considering the emotions of the Ethiopian girls, asking, "Don't the girls want to play soccer?" She learned the girls *did* want to play, but lacked funding. Suddenly the focus of her project shifted and expanded. After initially bringing uniforms and cleats, Danna returned home committed to raising the funds necessary to pay for a proper soccer field, a coach, and a tutoring program. Danna and a soccer teammate spoke at schools, synagogues, and churches of their experience at the refugee center, making their pitch to every group that would listen. A student who doesn't especially enjoy writing, Danna excelled at speaking in public about her experience with the

*continues on next page*

*Berkowitz continued*

sound as exciting as practicing bicycle tricks with his buddies, but he went.

It was a great success all around. The children who were "shopping" were enthralled and in a state of grateful awe. When our son saw that –and it was hard to miss– he began to grasp how fortunate he is. He could see how significant a pair of shoes or a new toothbrush can be to a child. And he got to experience how rewarding it can be to help someone else, as he gave advice to little girls about how attractive they looked in one coat or another. He saw their eyes sparkle and their mouths break into uncontrollable grins. He felt their joy and gratitude.

That is powerful stuff. The kind of stuff that builds character. ■

*This article originally appeared in Marvin Berkowitz's book Parenting for Good, published by the Character Development Group, 2005. Dr. Berkowitz is Professor of Character Education at the University of Missouri–St.Louis. Used by permission.*

## Parenting for Moral Growth

is a free publication for parents of CSEE member schools.

PMG is edited by CSEE Trustee Julie Stevens.

Layout is by Jenny Aanderud.

Contributions and comments are welcome.

Please send to <info@csee.org>

The Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education  
800.298.4599  
www.csee.org

*“Service” continued*

Ethiopian refugees. Ultimately, she succeeded in raising \$30,000 and making the girls’ soccer program a reality.

Seeing his sister’s success, older brother Aaron, began to search for another opportunity for community service. When Hurricane Katrina struck just before Aaron’s senior year, he chose to respond to the disaster in an immediate, personal way. Having learned from Danna’s example

to think on a large scale, Aaron approached his network of friends to marshal a group of volunteers. Again with direction from the United Jewish Federation, Aaron focused on two trailer parks established in the wake of the storm, known as Airport 1 and 2. The concept that developed involved first collecting needed supplies, such as diapers and baby formula, then spending spring break of 2006 distributing those supplies, cleaning flooded houses, and generally offering support to the residents of the trailer park communities. To address liability concerns and avoid insurance costs associated with teenagers working in potentially dangerous conditions, the trip was expanded to include parents. In all, 48 volunteers spent a week in New Orleans on the initial trip.

Notes Abbe, “As a result of having to find a way around costly insurance, we discovered a formula that really worked. We didn’t expect that one outcome would be the powerful experience of parents and teens

working on houses together, collecting garbage together, setting up food stations together, eating meals with hurricane victims together. Parents made comments such as, ‘Wow! I was able to interact

with my child in a way that I haven’t been able to in years,’ or ‘I was able to see my kid’s leadership skills firsthand.’”

And the teenagers also had a chance to see their parents in a new perspective against the backdrop of the storm-stricken environment of

post-Katrina New Orleans. Working together amidst a community that had suffered such loss had the unanticipated effect of taking the pressure off sometimes tense parent/teen interactions. Teens watched as their parents shared personal skills and passions in lasting ways. One father, a musician, established an after-school music program. Inspired by the work the founders of the non-profit Kids with Cameras, best known for an academy award winning film about children red-light district of Calcutta, a mother with a background in photography wrote a grant to the foundation to start a “kids with cameras” workshop in one of the trailer parks. (Check out the website: [www.kids-with-cameras.org](http://www.kids-with-cameras.org) and follow links to the photo gallery to see pictures taken by children in the trailer park.) Another mother who observed the residents’ difficulty obtaining propane, their primary fuel for cooking, introduced crock-pots as an alternative. She later returned to the

“I was able to interact with my child in a way that I haven’t been able to in years.”

*continues on next page*

### *“Service” continued*

trailer park with 200 crock-pots, having organized a crock-pot drive. In fact, the initial spring break trip spawned seven subsequent volunteer trips.

Last year the entire Marcus family, along with friends who had joined them in prior outreach projects, participated in a week long mission distributing medical supplies in Havana, Cuba. Abbe recalls, “Our kids were very articulate about how they wanted to reach out to others. They reflected on how they had helped Jewish Ethiopian kids, then in New Orleans they had helped other Americans, and in going to Cuba they wanted to help people in another country.”

Abbe describes an interaction between her youngest daughter, Eliza, eight at the time, and a Cuban child who wanted to thank the family for the supplies they were dispensing. The little Cuban girl had made a rag doll, which she gave to Eliza. Eliza still had the doll with her on a walking tour in Havana, when the family encountered three more young girls, shoeless, dressed in rags, who followed them for a time. Eliza’s first impulse was to want to give the doll to one of the girls, but when she realized she would be disappointing two of them by doing so, she decided to keep the gift. Having initially felt shy and a little frightening by the overwhelming squalor and poverty around her, Eliza had been afforded the chance to raise her awareness of the emotions of others, sort through and deal with her own emotions, and thoughtfully predict how her actions would affect others. In short, Eliza practiced skills that Eisenberg’s research has shown to promote empathy and sympathy, essential components of altruism.

Insights the Marcus family hopes will help parents who want to support their kids’ community service:

- **Find something your child is passionate about**, such as Danna’s love of soccer leading to a funded soccer program for Ethiopian refugee girls.
- **Take advantage of opportunities and support provided by existing programs**, as the Marcus family did with the United Jewish Federation.
- **Nepotism is good**, meaning that when your child is involved, the outreach work becomes more personal and compelling for the parent, and opportunities develop for all family members to be involved.
- **In reaching out to others, there is no failure**, because the goal is to make some sort of difference. As Danna says of the daunting prospect of raising \$30,000, “Well, it was just a number...whatever we raised would have been great!”
- **Prepare to experience the personal benefits of helping others**. Says Aaron, now a college freshman, “When I reflect on our work, I’m struck by the incredible opportunity I had.” Despite the fact that he spent spring break as a high school senior cleaning up storm-ravaged neighborhoods, Aaron recalls, “It never felt like we were giving anything up.”

In fact, the experiences shared by Aaron, his peers, his siblings and his parents demonstrate how enriching family volunteering can be for all involved. ■

---

*Julie Stevens is a parent and former school psychologist. She serves on CSEE’s Moral Development Team.*

## Book Review

### *The Teen Guide to Global Action: How to Connect with Others (Near & Far) to Create Social Change*

by Barbara A. Lewis  
Free Spirit Publishing, 2007

Review by Adriana Murphy

There is a saying among activists —“those who say it can’t be done are usually interrupted by those doing it”—and for any teen looking to pursue altruism in the face of cynicism, *The Teen Guide to Global Action* is must-have. The book is Barbara Lewis’ most recent work after her groundbreaking *Kid’s Guide to Social Action* and *Kid’s Guide to Service Projects*, titles that are in every community service coordinator’s collection nationwide.

Lewis’ book works from the premise that teens want to get involved in the world around them; that teens do not have to wait to get older to make a difference, they can do so right now. This book is a great example of how teens see themselves and want the adults in their lives to see them. It is the perfect resource for parents, educators or other adults in teens’ lives who want to help their teen develop the habit of problem solving in the service of others. *The Teen Guide to Global Action* offers inspiring, real-life examples of teens who have identified global concerns

*continues on next page*

# Tips from an Expert on Family Volunteering

The following is excerpted from an interview of Jenny Friedman, author of *The Busy Family's Guide to Volunteering: Doing Good Together*, Robins Lane Press, 2003. The complete interview and other family volunteering resources can be found at [www.familycares.org](http://www.familycares.org).

...Most commonly people are surprised to learn that family volunteering doesn't have to be overwhelming or terribly time-consuming... They realize that it's OK to spend just a few hours a month or even just a few hours a year volunteering, if that's the time they have. Suddenly, community service seems doable, not something they'll do later, when the kids grow up and they have extra time on their hands.

...Family service is so powerful because it...strengthens families through improved communication and time together, and meets critical community needs by encouraging philanthropy in both children and adults. But the most significant benefit, I think, is what it teaches children – kindness, compassion, teamwork, tolerance, community responsibility, good citizenship...Family volunteering... teaches values in a hands-on way, and within the context of the family, the environment where we learn the values that stay with us for a lifetime.

...It's best not to force volunteering (in which case it really can't be termed voluntary), but there is plenty we can do to encourage hesitant family members, kids in particular, to get excited about service:

- First, read and talk about social issues, caring and kindness together. These activities help get everyone thinking about making a difference in the community.

- When you're ready to commit to a project, involve everyone in the decision. Children will be much more engaged if their input is considered.
- Think about each family member's interests, talents and personalities.
- If kids have specific hesitations or concerns, acknowledge and address them.
- Appeal to your child's sense of compassion and empathy. ("Making a get-well card for this child would sure brighten her day. Wouldn't it make you feel good if you were so sick?")

...Make the volunteer experience fun...invite friends to take part, partner with other families, go out for ice cream afterward, or make a scrapbook of your experiences. ■

*Editor's note: FamilyCares.org is a program of HandsOn Network, Points of Light Institute. It inspires and equips families to volunteer in their communities. For hands-on opportunities to engage elementary and middle school children in volunteering, check out Kids Care Clubs, a program of HandsOn Network. There are over 1800 registered clubs in the United States and overseas. To receive information about starting a Kids Care Club visit [www.kidscare.org](http://www.kidscare.org)*

## Book Review continued

and then developed service projects to address them. Lewis offers sound advice on how to bridge the often daunting gap between being aware of global issues and taking action toward solutions. The book contains facts and statistics on global issues as well as quick tips for effective fundraising, volunteering and attracting publicity. Lewis also lists over 100 organizations and Web links.

Perhaps the best feature of *The Teen Guide to Global Action* is that it is a resource teens will actually use. Many teens want to effect social change but lack the knowledge and organizational skills to do so. Many of them simply go to the Internet to look up more information about an issue, such as sweatshops in Indonesia or the genocide in Darfur, but the information is so overwhelming that they don't know where to start. This guide points students directly to specific websites, many of which are supportive of teen efforts. Lewis takes students step-by-step to find a cause, research underlying issues, create a plan, and take action. There is even a quiz to determine in what kinds of global issues one might be interested.

*The Teen Guide to Global Action* not only provides teens with models of people their own age who decided to make the world a better place, but also gives *adults* more evidence that young people are effecting positive change around the globe.

---

*Adriana Murphy is a teacher of social studies and ethics and the community service coordinator at Green Acres School in Rockville, Maryland.*

## Consider your child's developmental level when choosing family service-learning activities.

### Ages 7-10

- are beginning to understand the needs of others and that their actions can make a difference
- enjoy personal contact with those whom they are helping
- benefit when offered options based on their interests, abilities, and attention spans
- are most engaged when their efforts lead to immediate, tangible results, even on a small scale
- participate most successfully in structured, directed activities

Activities for this age might include: making "care" packages for the homeless, creating habitats for wild birds, or helping to sort canned goods at local food pantry.

### Ages 11-13

- see themselves as the center of an increasingly complex world and want opportunities to experience this world through service to others
- appreciate activities that help them discover new interests and talents they didn't know they had
- are most engaged when their efforts focus on local, visible needs
- welcome the chance to work with other youth and adults

Activities for this age might include: working at a local senior center, tutoring an elementary school student, or helping a peer with special needs.

### Ages 14-18

- are capable of establishing ongoing relationships with people they encounter through their service activities
- are most engaged when their outreach offers variety and allows for serial or extended commitment to a particular task or work site
- respond well to a mix of local, regional, and global opportunities for action
- welcome the chance to practice citizenship skills and to take leadership roles in selecting and directing activities
- should be afforded regular opportunities to reflect on and evaluate their efforts with peers and respected adults

Activities for this age group might include: developing a literacy awareness program, working with various governmental agencies to monitor air and water quality, or preparing a community service directory.

The guidelines presented above are adapted with permission from "Developmental Factors in Designing Service-Learning Programs" by L. Richard Bradley, Ph. D. Dr. Bradley works with Learn & Serve Ohio as the state's service learning trainer, in addition to teaching service learning/curriculum integration courses at Ashland University, Ohio.

## A Note from your editor:

Schools with effective, well-integrated character education programs – where the school climate supports both academic rigor and exemplary moral behavior – are also schools that offer students **meaningful** roles to play within the school and in the broader community. From second graders invited to help craft classroom rules to high schoolers serving on honor councils or in student government, responsibility for ensuring the good of the whole is shared by all. These are schools that embrace an

authentic democratic process. Within the bounds of what is developmentally appropriate, seven-year-olds and seventeen-year-olds give input that is valued by adults, and work along side adults to improve the functioning of their school.

This issue of PMG explores ways that young people, with their families, can play meaningful roles through volunteering. While this focus was planned well in

*continues on next page*

### *Editor's Note continued*

advance of the current economic downturn, finding ways to support those in need or putting energy toward a worthy cause may be especially timely at this unique moment in our history. No one can doubt that we face an immediate future when helping others will be increasingly necessary.

That “in giving we receive” may also be particularly true in the months ahead. Some reasons for **now** being the ideal time to volunteer as a family:

- When surrounded by intractable, complex problems over which we have little control, finding an immediate, positive action mitigates feelings of powerlessness or hopelessness (true for both kids and adults)
- Considering the needs of others helps us gain perspective on our own personal challenges (true for both kids and adults)
- Research shows that volunteerism is associated with a sense of well-being, increased self-worth, serenity and relaxation
- The idealism and energy of young people can be a perfect counterweight to the doom, gloom and cynicism dominating current events
- We simply can't afford to ignore or underestimate the potential of young people to make a positive contribution to society ■

## What Makes Service Effective in developing leaders for tomorrow

The past decade of research looking at the relationship between service learning and what has been called “civic outcomes” suggests that students who are involved in good service programs develop:

- better awareness of community needs
- better knowledge about government
- greater concern for social issues
- greater concern for the welfare of others
- greater belief that they can make a difference in their communities
- greater intentions to serve in the future
- better connections to schools and other organizations and
- better social networks

What makes an effective program? A few of the key elements include:

- that the project is challenging: that it stretches students both cognitively and developmentally
- that there is a way to measure students' success and their performance
- that students have a voice in selecting, designing, implementing and evaluating their project
- that the project promotes communication and interaction with the community
- that students have adequate preparation for their project (what the task is, what their role is, what the people they will be working with are like, etc.)

(Source: “The Impact of Participation in Service Learning on High School Students' Civic Engagement.” Circle Working Paper 33, May 2005 the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement)