

Research-to-Results ^{Brief}

Child **TRENDS**

...information for program providers, funders, and the general public on meeting America's need for volunteers.

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BABY BOOMERS AND BEYOND: AN UNTAPPED RESOURCE FOR VOLUNTEERS IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS

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BACKGROUND

Despite the negative image of many adolescents and the perception that they are more influenced by peers than by adults, research consistently finds that most adolescents value positive relationships with parents, teachers, and other adults. Research also shows that adolescents who have positive relationships with caring adults are more likely to thrive and are less likely to engage in negative behaviors than are adolescents who lack such relationships in their lives.¹ Out-of-school time activities with unpaid volunteers can be a cost-effective way to create such positive relationships. Programs need to recognize older adults as a large pool of potential volunteers who can be mentors, tutors, or coaches. Americans in the baby boom generation and older also need to be encouraged to volunteer to work with disadvantaged children and youth.

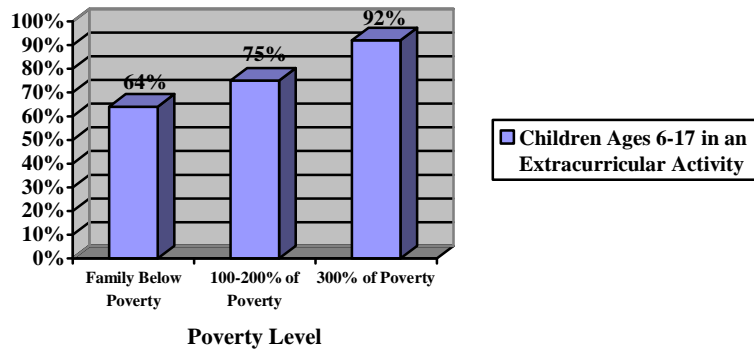
MEETING THE NEEDS OF AT-RISK CHILDREN THROUGH OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS

Most children and youth have positive relationships with their own family members. For those who do not, a person outside their family, such as a mentor or tutor, can be a crucial source of attention, guidance, and support. Even for adolescents from families with substantial economic and social resources, positive relationships with adults outside their families can be beneficial. Families have endorsed this notion over the years by enrolling their children and adolescents in sports teams, clubs, religious groups, and formal organizations, such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and 4-H.

Unfortunately, opportunities for involvement in out-of-school time activities are more available in affluent communities, and advantaged children and adolescents are more likely to participate.² For example, only 64 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 17 from poor families participated in an extracurricular activity, compared with 75 percent of children in families with an income of 100-200 percent of the poverty threshold and 92 percent of children in families with an income of more than 300 percent of the poverty threshold.^{3,4}

Low-income families are less likely to have the money to enroll their children in out-of-school time activities, such as summer camps and traveling sports teams. If families cannot afford to pay for out-of-school time activities, then low-cost or free activities can fill the gap. Some programs are starting to hire staff members to provide these services,⁵ and this approach merits close watching. However, given limited resources, out-of-school time programs rarely have the funds to provide free long-term and intensive services to the large numbers of children who might benefit from them. Indeed, the research firm Public/Private Ventures suggests that paid mentors should focus on the relatively small number of very high-risk children. What about children who are at risk, but not at extremely high-risk?

Children Ages 6-17 From More Affluent Families Are More Likely to Participate in an Extracurricular Activity



The need for low-cost but relationship-rich programs underscores the value of involving volunteers. How many might be needed? Child Trends’ researchers estimate that 30 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 17—or approximately 15 million children—are from medium-risk families. We estimate that another 6 percent—or 3 to 3.5 million children—are from very high-risk families. Children from high-risk families may require services that go beyond what a volunteer could provide. We have included them in our estimates of children who might benefit from having a volunteer mentor, coach, or tutor, to explore the implications of seeking to serve all children who are from medium- or high-risk families.⁶ If we assume that some children from very high-risk families, such as homeless families, are missed in many surveys, then we might use 19 million as a generous estimate of the number of children in moderate-, high-, and very high-risk families.

Are there sufficient numbers of adults to meet the need for volunteers to mentor these vulnerable children? More specifically, are there sufficient numbers of adults who have the time, health, and resources to serve in this capacity?

MATCHING “AT-RISK” CHILDREN TO MENTORS

One natural source of volunteers might be the millions of so-called “baby boomers,” that is, people now in their forties and fifties and beginning to turn sixty who have more free time as their children grow up, or who are thinking of retiring or reducing their work hours. What is the potential for these baby boomers to serve as mentors, tutors, coaches, and friends for the nation’s 19 million children from higher-risk family backgrounds?

To address this question, we examined multiple sources of data to estimate the number of adults who are between the ages 45 and 74 who might become volunteers. We selected this age group because, in general, it is made up of people whose own children will either be grown or will be old enough that the parent might be able to take on a relatively intensive volunteer activity. In addition, we considered only those adults in good health.

We found that there are more than 73 million adults in this age group who describe themselves as being in excellent, very good, or good health.⁷ This represents nearly four adults for every child between the ages of 6 and 17 in medium- and high-risk families.

However, if people believe that volunteers need to be from the same race or ethnic group as the child, the pool of potential volunteers is much smaller. For example, there are 6 million black adults between

the ages of 45 and 74 who are in good to excellent health. This represents just 1.2 black adults for every black child between the ages of 6 and 17 in medium- and high-risk families.

Of course, some of these healthy, mature adults in the potential pool of volunteers lack the interest or the skills to work with children or adolescents, or they are already engaged in other types of activities. In addition, many may not live near the communities where “at risk” children live. Therefore, some flexibility in seeking and using volunteers seems necessary. Many younger adults will want to serve, and some volunteers will want to work with groups of children, for example, as a coach or scout leader, rather than with an individual child. The larger point is that the United States has a large reservoir of healthy, mature adults. The challenge will be to attract, train, and sustain them as committed volunteers.

There is, though, only a scant surplus of healthy, mature adults of color in the potential volunteer pool. This relative shortage may reflect a number of factors. For example, older black Americans have higher rates of illness, disability, and death than do their white counterparts, and Hispanics are a disproportionately young population. To fill this volunteer gap, baby boomers from other races and ethnicities might be recruited as volunteers, and younger adults might also be recruited.

Many existing programs rely on baby boomer volunteers. Across Ages, a mentoring program designed to curtail substance use among high-risk children, matches older adults (55 and older) with students with the goal of increasing knowledge and reducing the prevalence of substance abuse. Other programs such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, National One-to-One Mentoring Partnership, and Experience Corps focus on volunteers to create and sustain a positive relationship with at risk children and youth.

Support for recruiting, screening, training, and working with baby boomers and older Americans needs to be available to enable programs to take advantage of these potential volunteers. Also, baby boomers and others need to be encouraged to make a commitment to developing positive, caring, and sustained relationships.

NEXT STEPS: RECRUITING AND RETAINING BABY BOOMER VOLUNTEERS

The following resources may be useful for organizations.

- Civic Ventures: *Ten Ways Your Organization Can Realize An Experience Dividend*
Available online at: <http://www.civicventures.org/publications/articles/TenWays/>
- Corporation for National and Community Service: *Organizing Seven Strategic Focus Areas to Optimize Recruitment of Baby Boomer Volunteers*
Available online at: http://nationalserviceresources.org/epicenter/practices/index.php?ep_action=view&web_id=33622
- Chronicle of Philanthropy: *Tips for Recruiting and Managing Older Volunteers*
Available online at: <http://philanthropy.com/jobs/2003/10/08/20031024-636748.htm>

The following resource may be useful for organizations and individuals seeking volunteer opportunities

- Volunteer Match
Available online at: <http://www.volunteermatch.org/>

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- ¹ Hair, E.C., Moore, K. A., Garrett, S. B., Kinukawa, A., Lippman, L. H., & Michelson, E. (2003). The parent-adolescent relationship scale. In K. A. Moore & L. H. Lippman (Eds.), *What do children need to flourish? Conceptualizing and measuring indicators of positive development* (pp. 183-202). New York: Springer Science+Business Media.; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2003). *Community programs to promote youth development*. Washington, D.C. National Academy Press.
- ² Moore, K. A. (2006). *Cumulative risk factors among American children* (Research Brief). Washington, DC: Child Trends.
- ³ Original analyses of National Survey of America's Families, 1997, 1999, and 2002 waves combined.
- ⁴ For a family of four, an income of 100 percent of the poverty threshold was \$18,244 per year and 200 percent was \$36,488 per year in 2002. United States Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/threshld/thresh02.html>.
- ⁵ Smith, T.J. (2004). *Guides for the journey: Supporting high-risk youth with paid mentors and counselors*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.
- ⁶ Moore, K.A., Vandivere, S., & Redd, Z. (2006). A sociodemographic risk index. *Social Indicators Research*, 75, 45-81.
- ⁷ Data are from the 2004 National Health Interview Survey.

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