



## **Start a New Trend . . . Family Volunteering**

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In today's fast-paced world, it may not seem possible to squeeze another minute into your busy schedule. But many of us know volunteering is an important concept for children to learn. When children see their parents and other family members volunteering, it reinforces the importance of volunteering. According to Susan Ellis, author of *Children as Volunteers: Preparing for Community Service*, "The earlier children learn about and participate in volunteer efforts, the more likely they are to continue volunteering into adulthood."

Deanna Roby, 4-H Youth Development Educator in Kane County, said, "As you consider a family volunteer project, think about some of the positive benefits. You get to spend quality time together as a family, and it gives you an opportunity to get to know each other in new and different ways. Working together as a family can ease the apprehension of staring a new and unfamiliar project."

Roby said it also gives adults an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of volunteering. "It's a concrete way to share ideas about compassion and giving with your family," she said, "and it encourages your family to share a common goal."

Listed below are some ideas from a *FamilyFun* internet article by Rayna Khaitan on factors to think about when preparing to volunteer as a family.

- Brainstorm with your family about how you would like to help. Would you like to work outdoors or indoors? Would you like to do hands-on work? Would you like to work close to home or in a neighboring community of need? Are there issues that interest your family? Do you want to volunteer with established, formal programs or do you want something new and different? Maybe there is something you can get other families from your neighborhood involved with. It's important that everyone who's going to participate in this volunteer opportunity participates in the discussion and is happy with the outcome. Choose together what you want to do.
- Do you want to work along side each other as a family? Or could members of your family work at the same location but complete different tasks? Consider the age of the children in your family – younger children shouldn't be left alone. Also consider the task and location of where you are volunteering.
- Make it fun. Volunteering will most likely be done in your leisure time, so make sure it is something your family will enjoy.

- To get possible ideas for a family volunteer project, you will want to consider what skills and talents your family brings to the table. Family hobbies and interests can be helpful and you may want to make a list of things that you already know how to do. Or better yet, consider the things you and your family would like to learn to do. You may also consider goals you have for your family and incorporate them into your plan. Finally, an online search of volunteer opportunities or a visit a local volunteer center might also garner opportunities for your family.

“The bottom line with anything you try as a family volunteer project,” said Roby, “is that you want your children to remember this experience as fun, quality family time where they helped others. If you accomplish these things, you most likely will have a new leisure time activity to participate in and you will be encouraging your children to volunteer at a young age,” she concluded. “Hopefully, they will continue volunteering into adulthood with their own families.”

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Sources:

Children as Volunteers: Preparing for Community Service by Susan Ellis, Anne Weisbrod, and Katherine H. Noyes

Volunteering with Your Family, [www.idealists.org/kt/familyvolunteer.html](http://www.idealists.org/kt/familyvolunteer.html)

The Joy of Family Volunteering, by Rayna Khaitan, [www.familyfun.go.com/holidays/the-joy-of-family-volunteering-701646/print-all/](http://www.familyfun.go.com/holidays/the-joy-of-family-volunteering-701646/print-all/)