

3.7 Community Support

Finding Community Support

Society has become more complex. Families often are far away from relatives who can be counted on to help out in a crisis. Increasingly, there are more households headed by single parents. And, even in families with two parents, it is becoming increasingly common for both parents to be at work during the day.

The modern family needs a wide range of services to survive and flourish. Fortunately, public and private agencies already provide many of these supports: diagnosis and treatment of health problems, financial aid, child care, parent education, information and referral, hotlines, legal assistance, and recreation services.

Sometimes these resources are hard to find. You may have to make an effort to find out what's available in your community. Local governments, churches, schools, and hospitals usually are helpful in locating services.

You, too, can benefit from these supports. By participating in the give and take of society, you may feel less isolated and more a part of your community. Working with others can enable you to grow personally and learn what you have to offer to others. And it's always helpful to know that other people have similar problems.

Within your local community are services that can strengthen your family and expand the opportunities available to you and your children. Make an effort to find out what services are available in your area and make use of them.

Almost every community has individuals and institutions that provide support. Knowing about these services can improve the quality of life for both you and your children. Take some time to fill out the information below. Use the internet, phone directory, library, or public agencies to help you find information.

Babysitting services

Contact colleges, high schools, women's organizations, relatives, and friends.

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____

Recreation

Contact local and county recreation departments, museums, sports clubs, community pools, YMCA, or YWCA.

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____

Single parent groups

Contact Parents Without Partners, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, or singles clubs.

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____

Clinics

Contact your local health department or hospital. Ask about dental exams; checkups for eyes, speech, and hearing; chest exams; mental health services; and clinics for well babies.

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____

Counseling

Contact churches, hotlines, clinics, or family service agencies.

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____

Name _____
Address _____

Phone _____

Child care services

Contact your state Department of Social Services, Health Department, day care centers, nursery schools, or Head Start centers.

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____

Getting Involved

There are many ways to get involved with your community and make a positive contribution. You can volunteer your time to help a charity or participate in a community engagement activity. You may want to get involved in fundraising or helping to increase local awareness about an issue.

Finding A Place to Volunteer

You will want to select a volunteer activity and an organization that best suits you. To discover what's out there, you can start by looking in the government section of your local phone book. The telephone book lists government agencies that fight for all types of causes. If a particular agency you're interested in doesn't use volunteers, they may be able to give you information about one that does.

If you have access to the internet, surf on-line. Type in the word "volunteer" or a word related to a particular cause of interest to you and search.

Networking is another great way to learn about organizations that are in need of volunteers. Talking to friends, family and business associates, is one of the easiest and most reliable ways to investigate organizations. When you know people, even if it is through a formal relationship, you get a sense of what's important to them, both positive and negative.

Networking happens in many ways. It often occurs naturally, but you can encourage it to happen. If your family or friends are involved in volunteering, ask them about their experiences. If you know a leader, a director, or a board member of an organization, don't hesitate to ask that person for information and advice. Whenever someone is doing something that sparks your interest, get them to tell you more. Many people go about

their lives without ever mentioning their volunteer jobs. So, in order to find out you'd have to ask.

Another place you can look is with companies. Many have community service programs. If they don't, the public relations or human resources office may have information about companies they work with informally. Check with the company you work for. They may have these kind of ties and some of your co-workers and their families may be involved.

Of course, if you belong to a religious organization, ask members about community service. Many churches, synagogues, and mosques have community outreach programs.

You can even learn about short volunteer opportunities through the radio, television announcements, newspapers, newsletters, or posters in public places. You can ask the health organizations in your area when they'll need more help throughout the year. Leave your name and phone number with organizations so that they can contact you as opportunities become available. Feel free to accept or decline offers to fit your time and interest. When the need for a special opportunity arises that sounds interesting to you, then try it.

Other Sources

Volunteer Centers

Volunteer centers, voluntary action centers, or volunteer bureaus advocate for volunteerism in their communities. They provide education and support for volunteer efforts and act as central clearinghouses for local volunteer opportunities. There are more than 350 volunteer centers operating in the nation. These centers serve over one hundred thousand private organizations and public agencies. To find a volunteer center in your area, look in the White Pages under "Volunteer" or "Voluntary". You can also check the Yellow Pages under "Social Services" or "Community Organizations".

United Way Offices

United Way has over 200 chapters in the country. They match individuals with volunteer opportunities in their communities.

Public Libraries

Libraries have many helpful reference books you can use to research organizations. Ask a librarian for a local or regional directory of non-profit or social service agencies.

Municipal Offices

The mayor's office, some of the various offices in your city town hall or community center are likely to have directories or a list of local service organizations. You can also attend

town or city council meetings to become more aware of organizations and happenings in your community.

Local Court and Criminal Justice System

More and more judicial systems need volunteers in counseling and rehabilitation programs. You can find your local court or criminal justice system in the Yellow Pages.

Local Businesses

Chamber of commerce, businesses, consumer councils and individual manufacturers, merchants and bankers have opinions about problems in the community and the best ways to solve them. Talking with your community's business leaders can help you identify volunteer opportunities or create some.

Other

You can also find what opportunities are available in your community by calling local hospitals, the school system, the community affairs office, churches and synagogues with community outreach programs or just look around your neighborhood to see what needs to be done and how you can make a difference.

Direct Service Work

Direct service comprises hands-on involvement and the implementation of organization's program. Direct service can be one-time only projects, an on-going commitment, working with a group, working alone, in a set location or moving from place to place, the category holds tremendous variety. Many direct-service assignments consist of very basic activities but are very badly needed by the people or causes served. It encompasses anything from sitting with the elderly in a nursing home to complicated technical work. The possibilities are endless.

Tap into your own creativity to find new and exciting ways to give. Direct service is easy to give and is something both adults and children can do. It's something that you can do on your own or with your family. Below is a list of direct service you might perform.

- Become a companion at a hospital.
- Bring cheer to a nursing home for a few hours or weeks.
- Provide care at a shelter for battered families.
- Assist animal keepers at your local zoo.
- Become a mentor to a young person.
- Lead a monthly sing-a-long at a hospital.
- Provide advice on mortgages, property management and insurance at community center.

- Assist a crime victim with sustained personal support.
- Conduct nature walks at a botanical garden or park.
- Read to children at a nursing home or hospital.
- Provide nutrition advice at a community center, soup kitchen, or homeless shelter.
- Lead a bicycling club at a youth center.
- Become an ombudsman for a nursing home, monitoring his or her care and practical affairs.
- Organize the slide collection at a museum or historical society.
- Do the bookkeeping at the community center.
- Assist with patient care in a hospital.
- Perform musical or theatrical presentations in hospitals, prisons, and schools.
- Make greeting cards for sick children.
- Work with animals and pet in a pet-assisted therapy program.
- Teach photography in an after school program or at a youth center.
- Offer to help teenagers with college application essays.
- Provide business counsel to a beginning entrepreneur.
- Prepare beds and meals at a homeless shelter.
- Tutor kids in math or algebra.
- Provide pro bono services in law, medicine, management, taxation, or real estate.
- Join a Big Brother/Big Sisters program and be a role model.
- Provide support and reassurance for patients and families in hospitals emergency and waiting rooms.
- Encourage your children to save their pennies for a charity they care about.
- Read text books to a blind student.
- Work with families to stop child abuse.
- Clean out your garage and give away out grown bikes and sports equipment.
- Be a receptionist at a clinic or hospital.
- Circulate a petition and collect signatures concerning an issue that is important to you.
- Help to rehabilitate housing for the elderly or disabled
- Join a clean up project in a neighborhood, inner-city district or park.
- Help relocate families that have lost their homes.
- Spend time at the hospitals holding failure-to-thrive babies whose survival may depend on simple human contact.
- Offer your clerical skills to a school's art groups or social-service agency.
- Join a group that rescues animals endangered by pollution.
- Train to staff a crisis hotline.
- Assist in a clinic or blood bank.
- Become a school volunteer, helping out in a classroom, cafeteria, office or playground.
- Coach a local sports team.
- Socialize with guest in a homeless shelter.
- Collect food in a reclamation program
- Sort and distribute mail in a nursing home or hospital..
- Comfort children in a hospital.
- Sponsor a troop of Girl Scout, Boy Scouts, or Camp Fire Kids.

- If you speak a foreign language: Offer to tutor students.
- Organize a stamp, coin, or baseball card club at a youth or senior citizen center.
- Donate your computer programming skills to non-profit group.
- Volunteer to work at you local Special Olympics program.
- Conduct tours in a museum.
- Provide tax counseling for senior citizens.
- Offer to spend time helping out at your kids school.
- Teach English to recently arrived immigrants.
- Participate in conflict resolution for the community, neighborhood, or family disputes.
- Teach job skills to the disabled.
- Share ideas for community service with others.
- Cook for a soup kitchen, shelter, or meals-on-wheels program.
- Teach yoga, aerobics or modern dance at a community center.
- Gather with your friends to repaint a classroom.
- Join a telephone reassurance project, calling elderly or developmentally challenged people once a day.
- Counsel dropout or troubled youth.
- With your friends an/or family offer to run errands for the home-bound or drive them where they need to go.
- Become a court appoint advocate for a child in the foster care system.
- Assist in physical or speech therapy in a hospital or rehabilitation center.
- Serve as a trail guide in a park or nature preserve.
- Run a crafts class in an after school program.
- Transport elderly people to and from hospitals and doctors' offices.
- Become a volunteer firefighter.
- Volunteer to lend a hand at a battered women's shelter.
- Participate in a voter-registration campaign.
- Teach daily living skills to mentally challenged youth and adults.
- Join a walk-a-thon.
- Whenever you and your friends entertain ask guest to bring one item for the local food pantry.
- Welcome people who've moved in your community.
- Deliver meals or food packages to home bound/ sick and shut in people.
- Help with a local or national fund raising activity.
- Donate useful goods (books, clothes, shoes, and/or games) to a local charity, thrift store, homeless shelter, Goodwill Industries, Salvation Army or similar group.
- Organize a drive to collect donations (for example: food for Thanksgiving, or toys for Christmas).
- Join an emergency medical service.
- Serve dinner to the poor for Thanksgiving or Christmas.
- Donate old office computers to a non-profit organization.
- Escort hospital and nursing home patients on outings.
- Collect food and clothing for victims of an earthquake.
- Help clean up after a local fire or flood.
- Work with a local rescue group to find homes for stray animals.
- Get you office to adopt a park and help keep it clean.

- Teach first aid or water safety.
- Organize your colleagues to landscape a vacant lot.
- Develop an enrichment program for gifted students.
- Offer to find new homes for animals at the pound.
- Take underprivileged children on outings.
- Place bins at store to collect clothes for the needy.
- Start a coat drive now for those who may be cold next winter.
- Start a shoe drive and collect shoes that are in good shape to donate to an organization.
- Collect toys for the hospitals pediatric ward.
- Start a blanket drive for a homeless shelter.
- Host an inner city child in your home.
- Sponsor a bake sale for a local volunteer organization.
- Hold a neighborhood car wash for a local shelter.
- Act as a language interpreter in a hospital.
- Write a lobby letter for a social action group.
- Answer the telephones at a telethon.
- Correspond to people in need.

Sources:

American Red Cross
www.redcross.org

The United Way
www.unitedway.org

Volunteer Match
www.volunteermatch.org

Servenet
www.servenet.org

America's Promise
www.americaspromise.org

Community Support Exercise

True or False

1. _____ Modern families are less likely to need community support. They rely on extended families for support.

2. _____ There are private, public, and government agencies that have a variety of support services in each community.
3. _____ Direct service is the hands-on involvement and the implementation of organization's program.
4. _____ People tend not to share their volunteer experiences until you ask.

Answers:

1. False
2. True
3. True
4. True