Student volunteerism can have a positive impact ... and help pay for college

Volunteerism can help young people grow into well-rounded, responsible individuals. When volunteering, kids can learn new skills, foster new friendships and contacts, and improve both their social and interpersonal skills. In addition, a 2011 study from researchers at the Stony Brook University School of Medicine found that people are generally happier and healthier when giving back to their communities. The study even recommended that health care professionals recommend volunteering to patients 12 and older, with the belief that helping others provides significant health benefits, including allowing volunteers to escape their stress and anxiety. And, there could even be a few added bonuses for volunteering!

Students between the ages of six and 18 who haven’t yet graduated high school have the chance to be recognized for their volunteering efforts and earn money for higher education thanks to Kohl’s Department Stores. For more than a decade, the Kohl’s Cares Scholarship Program has recognized more than 19,500 students, awarding nearly $4 million in scholarships and prizes. This year the organization will award nearly $400,000 in scholarships and prizes to more than 2,300 young volunteers who have made a positive impact in their communities.

Finding the right activity is often the most important step when fostering a love of volunteering in youngsters, and there are a number of great opportunities and causes that children can relate to.

* Embrace eco-volunteering.

Today’s kids are increasingly eco-conscious, and concepts like recycling, reusing and conserving fuel and energy are second nature to many young people. That makes eco-volunteering a natural fit for today’s eco-conscious students. Children can volunteer with organizations that remove trash from beaches and parks; plant trees to establish community green spaces; work to promote wildlife conservation; or further recycling efforts in their communities.

* Help the needy.

Volunteerism can open youngsters’ eyes to the plight of the less fortunate. Various organizations dedicated to helping the needy depend on volunteers of all ages to meet their missions. From soup kitchens to shelters to private clothing or food collection drives, opportunities abound for kids who want to help the less fortunate.
* Help the sick.

Many organizations that cater to the sick also provide volunteering opportunities to youngsters. Many kids who volunteer with such organizations are motivated to do so by a close friend or family member’s battle with a particular illness, but some kids even turn their own personal adversity into an opportunity to help the sick.

Such was the case with 18-year-old Tyler O’Briant of Tonganoxie, Missouri. After spending more than three semesters of high school in and out of Children’s Mercy Hospital battling chronic bacterial and viral infections, Tyler, a 2013 Kohl’s Cares Scholarship winner, decided to host a book drive and fundraiser, which ultimately raised more than $1,150 to purchase books and e-readers for the hospital waiting rooms, where young patients now have access to hundreds of books thanks to Tyler’s efforts.

* Visit the elderly.

Kids can learn a lot from their elders, and many organizations that work with the elderly offer volunteering programs for boys and girls. Individuals in group homes or hospitals often appreciate visits from youngsters, and kids can learn valuable life lessons in return.

* Tutor fellow students.

A child who is proficient in a given subject can lend a helping hand to fellow students who need some assistance. Working together to improve grades and school performance can improve others’ sense of self-worth and instill a greater sense of accomplishment in tutors.

Volunteering can foster a sense of social responsibility in youngsters, and may even help them finance their college educations. More information is available at www.kohlskids.com.

http://www.covnews.com/section/12/article/55334/