THE FAMILY STRENGTHENING THE COMMUNITY

Before children can stand on their own in the outside world they need to develop skills relating to *responsibility, caring and teamwork* both in the home and in the communities surrounding the home (or otherwise designated or related community).

Volunteering is one of the best ways that young people develop self-esteem, social skills, hobbies, leadership skills and citizenship skills. It also allows for career development and a more effective career life.

Parents can come together in groups or identify a social agency, church or service club that assists in the deployment of volunteers to agencies if it can provide the best mix between service and experience / skills / needs. Parents can also set an example by being involved volunteering alongside their children.

Volunteering is a valuable pathway to the personal growth of all. All of us can seek to help others in more difficult economic and health related circumstances. Following are some suggestions for action by volunteers.

- ✓ Commit time and resources to the needy, elderly, disabled.
- ✓ Help raise money and school supplies for disadvantaged children.
- ✓ Volunteer with a community centre or other charitable organisation.
- ✓ Organise an escort and patrol service in your community for those in fear of night travel, etc.
- ✓ Commit your talents or professional skills to a non-profit organisation.
- ✓ Organise a walk-a-thon or other fund-raising drive for a worthy charity.
- ✓ Become a mentor for a child, teenager or young adult.
- ✓ Institute a car-pooling system as an environmental preservation mechanism or to help those who have problems with public transportation.

Where possible, one can involve other members from your business organisation or school.

Also, you can:

- ✓ Become involved in your own neighbourhood watch, and PTA.
- ✓ Become trained and function as an informal “health promoter” and peer counsellor in your church, educational institution, workplace and community.
- ✓ Help in a youth club
- ✓ Visit hospital patients who have few visitors. Be sensitive and confidential with special problems such as HIV/AIDS and persons with mental illness. This will also provide groundwork for solving community issues.
- ✓ Visit persons in children’s homes and places of safety.

- ✓ Visit persons in prisons, youth in remand centres and the indigent in homeless shelters.
- ✓ Assist in or start a meal programme or soup kitchen for the homeless.
- ✓ Become aware of existing community organisations and make necessary improvements.

Become a role model for your community. Your influence is bound to inspire others.

The following community activities will help to preserve the environment and thus improve the health of all families:

⇒ plant trees and shrubbery to get ample shade to make your house energy efficient.

⇒ wash fruit and vegetable thoroughly (though not excessively) to remove pesticides and herbicides. Peel fruit if you suspect it to be waxed.

⇒ support environment-conservation policies at both national and international levels.

⇒ turn your environment crusade into a community, church and political effort.

Pressure governments, industries, institutions and communities to carry out and facilitate all the methods mentioned.

⇒ organise or support projects against 'evils' such as improperly disposed industrial waste, air pollution, nuclear waste, land mined, oil spills, 'sick buildings', improper solid waste management and destruction of marshes, mangroves, forests and wildlife.

⇒ invest your money in organisations that are friendly to life and nature.

⇒ "hunt the dump." Attack litterbugs! Clean the beaches. Protest.

⇒ plant trees and encourage tree planting campaigns, they have the added benefit of providing shading in areas of increasing temperatures.

⇒ insist on open green spaces, botanical gardens and re-forestation in your cities.

⇒ lobby for parks and forest reserves.

⇒ ensure proper protection in the workplace and farms.

Most importantly, seek to be involved in intercessory prayer for particular communities and those organisations, groups, families, leaders and individuals in need within them.

Volunteers will need adequate orientation, training, follow up, support and evaluation. Don't just leave them to sink or swim on their own.

Keep in mind that applying one's efforts to the community, even in small ways, strengthens the systems, and makes for a healthier community environment. The more people involved, the quicker progress can be reached and the more people can be helped.

The family is the basic unit of the community, nation and world.

HAPPY VOLUNTEERING!

Fiffer, Sharon and Steve. *50 Ways to Help Your Community*. Doubleday, New York,1994.