

Alternatives to Attending College

Study Abroad

Academic Programs

Volunteering

Animal Care Internships

Helping to Build Community

Home-stays or Exchanges

Before You Decide, Read This ...

Taking Time Off

For some teens, the prospect of starting college, specially going away to school, is scary. It's probably the first time that they will be totally responsible for their own schedule. But what if you truly don't feel ready to start school – for whatever reason – and you don't want to take on a full-time job after graduation? You might want to take a year off to pause and regroup.

Taking time off doesn't mean you should ignore the idea of applying to college. It's an excellent idea to make plans, especially if you'll be traveling. Apply to schools and make your choice, then ask for a deferred admission. You have to budget, too. Who will pay your way while you're traveling or doing volunteer work? Can you live at home? Get a part-time job?

Talking to Your Parents

Relationships with parents can be pretty turbulent for some teens, but the important thing is to keep talking. What if your post-graduation plans differ from what your parents have in mind? "You have to tell your parents what you want to do," says Laural, now in her second year of college. "And tell them why you want it. Sometimes kids have a preconceived notion of what their parents expect of them."

Noah, 17, agrees. "My parents are pretty cool," he says. "Both are open as long as I come to them with reasons to back up what I want. If I spend a lot of time and effort researching something, then they can see I have to put a lot into it, and they'll usually see my point of view."

Getting Advice

Even if your parents are cool, they probably don't know everything. For school and career guidance, visit your school's guidance counselor and talk with adult friends (for

example, godparents or friends of the family). Make an effort to talk to people in the fields that interest you. If you think you want to be an accountant, call some accountants and ask them about their work. Most people are flattered to get calls like this, and they'll take the time to talk to a student. Senior year is an exciting time in your life – a little scary, but full of possibilities. Enjoy!

You've seen stories on TV about animals in need or people who need assistance after a natural disaster. Some teens who live in cities have seen firsthand the growing population of homeless people. Others have had experience with a friend's or relative's illness.

So what can you do about any of those things, you ask? I'm just one person, you may think, and a teen at that – someone who adults don't listen to or take seriously. That's where volunteering comes in.

Volunteering to help out with something you believe in can be one of the most gratifying and enjoyable things you can do. Volunteering gives you an opportunity to change people's lives, including your own. And it can be fun. Read on to learn about some of the benefits of volunteering, and then check out our resources for how to go about doing it.

Plenty of Choices

A great thing about volunteering is that it isn't like school: instead of having the choices made for you about where to go and what subjects to learn, you get to pick. You can give some thought to what really interests you and who (or what) is most deserving of your time.

If you like animals, consider helping out a local shelter, which depends on volunteers to keep the cats and dogs healthy and happy. If politics is your thing, campaigning politicians from the president all the way down to the local county sheriff or town mayor can always use a helping hand. If you have a friend or relative who has or had a medical problem (like cancer, HIV, or diabetes, for example), you might be inspired to donate some time to an organization that raises money for research or spends time with people with the illness. If you like children, there are tons of opportunities – from being a Big Brother or Big Sister to helping out in an after-school sports program. You can serve food at a homeless shelter, volunteer to spend time at a retirement community, help out your church or synagogue, take part in a park cleanup day – the possibilities are endless.

And if you have more than one thing you love, you can combine the two: if you love kids and are great at arts and crafts, you can visit children's hospitals and lead art activities with pediatric patients. Or if you are passionate about pooches and helping people who are visually impaired, you might be able to volunteer at a seeing-eye dog school.

Start Out Slow

Another reason why volunteering is a bit different from school is that you can try it out at your own pace. Once you've decided what organization you'd like to volunteer for, you have the chance to just spend some time learning the ropes, following other volunteers,

and seeing how you like it. You will receive training for your assignments, which may be done formally by a supervisor or by working side-by-side with an experienced volunteer.

Another good way to get your feet wet with an organization is to take part in one of their walks, runs, bike rides, or cleanup days. Many large organizations (especially those related to the environment or finding cures for diseases) have day-long activities like these, and it's a great way to get involved, get some exercise, learn more about the organization, and meet the volunteer coordinators and other volunteers.

A Good Way to Meet People

Because your tastes and ideas change as you grow, you might feel like you have less in common with certain people than you did before. That's where another benefit of volunteering comes in. It allows you to meet people who have similar interests – they care about this issue enough to volunteer, and it allows you to share some common ground. You may make new friends of the same age or of different ages – or you might just get a new bunch of acquaintances. Either way, you come out ahead.

Expand Your Mind

Volunteering is a great way to learn new skills – from learning to work as part of a team with all different types of people to setting and reaching goals. It allows you the chance to see what kinds of things you're best at and which things you enjoy the most. A volunteer job that you love can even help shape your ideas about your goals for the future.

Volunteering can also broaden your mind. It provides you with a sense of responsibility: people are depending on you in a way that no one may have ever done before. It may help you develop a new understanding of people who are different from you – people with disabilities, people in financial distress, children, or the elderly. You might come in contact with people who you might never otherwise talk to or spend time with – and in doing so, learn a lot.

It'll Make You Feel Good

This is one of the main reasons why volunteers say they devote their time to helping others, and it's not surprising. Volunteering makes you feel that you can make a difference in someone's life – that even though you're just one person, you do have the power to change things for the better. It can make you feel good to be wanted, too – when people depend on you, it can change the way you look at yourself. Volunteering can make you feel proud of the goals that you've achieved for the organization – like helping to coordinate a walk that raised money for breast cancer.

Volunteering is also a great way to get a perspective on your own life. Sometimes it's easy to get consumed by worries about your grades or the fight you had with your friend or mom or dad. And although these things are very important in their own way, sometimes it can be helpful to get some distance and think about everything around you. Volunteering allows you to do this: it lets you focus on others and see that your involvement in the world can be very meaningful.

Finally, volunteering can help save you from being bored, it gives you a place to be where you can have a good time and keep busy.

It'll Make You Look Good

Naturally, you shouldn't do things just for the sake of pleasing other people – to really enjoy something, you have to be interested in doing it. In addition to all the other reasons, volunteering can also be an impressive thing to adults. It shows that you are reliable enough to make a commitment and show up at a place every week on schedule. It also shows that you believe it's important to make the world a better place – and that you're willing to sacrifice your time and energy to help do it. Employers and people who review college applications are almost always pleased to learn that a teen has volunteered because he'll not only bring skills to college or a job, but also ideas about how to build a stronger community.

The Next Step

When you've decided what you're interested in, it's time to find out where you can volunteer. You have several choices: you can look in your local phone book under "volunteer", call some charities directly and ask if they have needs in your area, ask friends or relatives for some names of places, look on bulletin boards in your library or in bookstores, or search the Web. [You can also click on the Resources tab on the right side of this article to see a partial list.]

Depending on the size of the organization, some have entire departments devoted to recruiting, training, and scheduling volunteers (many large hospitals or national organizations, for instance). Others may only have one person in charge of volunteers. Either way, it's best to ask for a volunteer coordinator when calling. Be ready to answer some questions they may ask when you call, like:

- Why do you want to volunteer for our organization?
- What do you know about our organization?
- How many hours a week would you be able to volunteer?
- What are your interests?
- Do you have any special skills?
- Do you have a way to get here?

Most places will then ask you to come for an interview, which is usually pretty casual – they want to talk to you face to face and if they haven't yet asked the questions above, they will do it at the interview. Whether your interview is on the phone or in person, don't forget to ask questions of your own. Because volunteering is a two-way street, it's a good idea to think about certain issues ahead of time. You might want to ask:

- What will be expected of me if I volunteer here?
- What kind of training will I receive?
- How many other volunteers are there?
- How many hours do you expect me to volunteer each week/month?

If it's a good fit – meaning you like them, they like you, and you like the work – volunteering can be an incredible experience.

Study Abroad

British American Educational Foundation: Post-graduate year at a British boarding school.

<http://www.baef.org>

GlobalQuest: Offers 12-week semester programs in international settings; the program was established in 1999 and initial semester offerings are based in Thailand; as GlobalQuest grows, they will offer semesters throughout the world; GlobalQuest is a 501©3 non-profit educational organization.

<http://www.gquest.org>

Rotary International Ambassadorial Scholarships: The Rotary Foundation's oldest and best-known program, was founded in 1947. Since then, nearly 38,000 men and women from about 100 nations have studied abroad under its auspices. Today it is the world's largest privately funded international scholarships program. Nearly 800 scholarships were awarded for study in 2005-06. Though grants totaling approximately US\$500 million, recipients from about 70 countries studied in more than 70 nations. Students must plan ahead for this scholarship.

<http://www.rotary.org/en/studentsandyouth/educationalprograms/ambassadorialscholarships/page/s/ridefault.aspx>

Study Abroad Experiential Programs

http://www.studyabroad.com/site_menu.html

Time Out Associates: *this is a paid membership service.* Time off is a process. To being the process you need to sit back and imagine yourself doing things you'd really love to do, in places you've always wanted to go. Whether you hope to take time out of the classroom for a new kind of learning, are looking to clarify goals, want an experience that will help you make choices about your field of study, desire a competitive edge in today's job market, or just need a break, time off can change your life.

<http://www.whereyouheaded.com>

United World Colleges: A two-year international school experience for students 16-19, offering the International Baccalaureate (IB) program with a curriculum equivalent to advanced grades 11 and 12; Through international education, experience and community service, United World Colleges enables young people to become responsible citizens, politically and environmentally aware, and committed to the ideals of peace and justice, understanding and cooperation, and the implementation of these ideals through action and personal example. – UWC Mission Statement

<http://www.uwc.org>

World Learning: One of the oldest reach out internationally programs; pragmatic idealists; highly regarded; programs include School for International Training, World Issues Programs, semesters abroad, and the Experiment in International Living.

<http://www.worldlearning.org>

World Wide Classroom Library of International Programs: WorldWide Classroom (WWC) is an international consortia of schools which offer intercultural and educational programs, and welcomes international visitors; these programs include: Study Abroad, University Study, Adult Enrichment, Foreign Language Immersion, Teacher Workshops, Executive Courses, Teen Camps, Volunteerism, Internships, Cultural, Craft and Heritage Programs; programs are mostly hosted by Universities and Private Language Schools.

<http://www.worldwide.edu/>

Worldsmart: Community service worldwide; international travel/intercultural living; participants are performers (on stage musical performance).

602.327.7351

Tucson, AZ

<http://www.upwithpeople.org>

Academic Programs

The Association of Boarding Schools

1620 L. Street N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20036

(202) 973-9700

<http://www.schools.com>

Audubon Expedition Institute: An environmental programs in which students are placed into various settings for the first 2 years and then spend the last 2 years as a student at Lesley College.

<http://www.lesley.edu/gsass/audubon/index.html>

Chewonki Foundation: The Chewonki Foundation is a non-profit educational institution organized in 1962; the diverse programs of the Foundation are drawn clearly and cleanly from our educational mission and include a summer camp, a semester of academic and personal challenges for high school juniors, a variety of educational group programs, and wilderness excursions for adults, families and individuals.

<http://www.chewonki.org/>

City Year ~ “Give A Year. Change the World.” City Year was founded on the belief that young people can change the world. City Year’s vision is that one day a year of service will become an opportunity for and common expectation of every young person. City Year’s signature program, the City Year youth service corps each year unities more than 1,400 young people age 17-24 for a demanding year of full-time community service, leadership development, and civic engagement. There young leaders come from diverse backgrounds and put their idealism to work by tutoring and mentoring school children, reclaiming public spaces, and organizing after-school programs, school vacation camps, and the Starfish Corps, Young Heroes, and City Heroes programs.

http://cityyear.org/dynamic_ektid142.aspx

Disney CareerStart Program: The Disney CareerStart Program is an opportunity for recent high school graduates to create a foundation for their future. Whether participants are college bound or preparing to enter the workforce, this unique program combines classroom and work experience, networking with Disney leaders, and custom-designed educational opportunities to create a pathway for success.

<http://disney.go.com/disneycareers/careerstart/index.html>

Dynamy: A not-for-profit experiential educational organization founded in 1969. It is the oldest and only residential internship program in the country with a mission to offer young people, ages 17-22, a “gap year” opportunity like no other. Dynamy believes that the crucial prerequisites for work-readiness and life-readiness are independence, self-reliance, courage, character, a habit of service, and an ability to build healthy relationships. Dynamy believes that these things can be learned, and learned best through experience. Dynamy programs integrate independent city apartment living with mentored internships, personal and college/career advising, urban and wilderness leadership opportunities, and the company of an incredible group of peers.

<http://www.dynamy.org>

Navajo Boarding School (Amizade at the Navajo Nation, Tuba City, Arizona): The Navajo Nation is challenged daily by the responsibilities of educating their children, maintaining their cultural identity, and promoting economic development, providing the best education possible to their children is the foundation to succeeding on all aspects. Amizade and the Tuba City Boarding School are working together to promote classroom success. Basic skills including reading and math are essential if the Navajo are going to fully realize their own individual and cultural potential. Service opportunities in Tuba City are arranged in partnership with the schools and involve tutoring and mentoring youth. By working with the teachers and school administration, Amizade volunteers complement the goals set in the classroom. Participants can expect directly contribute to the success of Navajo school children: tutoring in the classrooms, school-wide art programs, and special programming.

<http://www.amizade.org/>

Volunteering

Animal Care ... some *wild* places to start

Domestic Animal Sanctuary – Utah: Year-round volunteer program at a “no-kill” animal sanctuary near Zion National Park; the sanctuary has mostly dogs and cats but also some horses, goats, rabbits and a pot-bellied pig; roughly 1500 animals; forty to fifty people work there year-round; work involves cleaning, feeding, petting and grooming the animals, also poop-scooping, training, walking, and some computer work; interns cover own housing.

<http://www.arrowheadbb.com/itineraries.html>

Massachusetts Audubon Society: Offers a variety of exciting volunteer and internship opportunities for people of all interests, ages, and experience levels. Volunteers and interns greatly assist the Society in delivering its mission of conservation, education and advocacy, and provide an important link to the community. They also gain invaluable experience in their fields of interest, whether for pleasure or career advancement.

http://www.massaudubon.org/jobs/jobs_index.php?type=Internships

New England Aquarium: Our volunteer opportunities range from animal husbandry to aquarium administration, and many of our volunteers go on to pursue their volunteer areas professionally – our greatest need for assistance is during weekday business hours; some weekend positions are available on a limited basis.

- Applicants must be 18 years old to work hands-on with the animals
- Applicants who are at least 16 but not yet 18 years old are eligible to participate in our Aquarium Guide Training program.
- Most positions require a 6-month commitment

<http://neaq.org/community/vol/>

Helping to Build Community

Action Without Borders: Action Without Borders is a global coalition of individuals and organizations working to build a world where all people can live free, dignified and productive lives.

<http://www.idealists.org>

Americorps: Full-time national service projects; earn a \$4,725 voucher to pay college tuition; Americorps is the national service program through which 40,000 people each year tackle community problems from disaster relief to tutoring.

<http://www.americorps.org>

Amigos de las Americas: Volunteer to spend your summer providing public health services to our neighbors in Latin America.

<http://amigoslink.org>

Camphill: Dedicated to social renewal through community building with children, youth, and adults who have developmental disabilities; in a time where many are experiencing a crisis of spirit and search for meaning, Camphill offers a life of celebration, service, and community building in which all participants flourish.

<http://www.camphill.org>

City Year: A national service organization for young adults ages 17-23 who are interested in full-time community service, leadership development, and civic engagement; program in Boston, Chicago, San Jose, Providence, Columbus-Ohio, and San Antonio; community service dedicated to strengthening the bonds of communities;

highly-regarded; students receive a modest weekly stipend; students who complete 1 year of service are eligible for a grant toward college tuition.

<http://www.cityyear.org>

Global Works: Community service summer programs abroad; teen travel adventure programs; since 1989, Global Works has been leading the way in Community Service, Language Learning and Adventure Travel for high school students; through years of experience they have established a wealth of grassroots connections with communities and organizations at home and abroad; they extend to you an opportunity to be part of a unique and unforgettable journey; Global Works trips offer an exciting and rewarding experience by providing an additional “purpose” for travel; service projects become the impetus and “bridge” for meaningful cultural exchange and language learning; their groups work, play, and celebrate with communities and families around the world.

<http://www.globalworksinc.com/>

Habitat for Humanity: Volunteer to spend your summer providing public health services to our neighbors in Latin America; young people from the US develop leadership skills and an understanding of other cultures while participating in this unique program.

<http://www.habitat.org>

Up with People: (602) 327-7351 ~ A unique international organization which for 25 years has provided young men and women with year-long opportunities for cross-cultural education, diverse community service, on-stage musical performance experience and extensive world travel.

<http://www.upwithpeople.org>

Home-stays or Exchanges

American Field Studies Intercultural Programs (AFS): Intercultural programs; semester and yearlong home-stays and opportunities. AFS arranges exchanges for high school students in dozens of countries.

www.afs.org/usa or <http://www.afs.org>

Rotary Youth Exchange: Every year approximately 7,000 students ages 15 to 19 go abroad under the auspices of the Rotary Youth Exchange program, either for academic year or an extended period of time; the increased self awareness and global perspective that they derive from the experience would not be possible without the commitment of the many volunteer host families and the dedication of those Rotarians who serve as Youth Exchange officers.

<http://www.rotaryyouthexchange.net>

United States Servas, Inc.: Must be 18 years old; live with host families throughout the world; student chooses country and length of stay. (212) 267-0252

<http://www.usservas.org>

Youth for Understanding: International exchange program; live with a family and experience their country as a resident rather than a tourist; semester and year long; there are a variety of programs which offer unique opportunities for personal growth and development in a variety of settings, as well as those designed for serious in-depth study.
800-833-6243

<http://www.yfu.org>