

Helping teens help others

Booklet is a guide to organizations that need volunteers

By Ann Efimetz

A new publication produced by Network Williamsburg aims to get area youth involved in altruistic endeavors throughout the community.

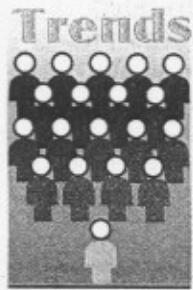
"The Youth Resource Booklet" is a comprehensive guide to area nonprofit organizations and the needs they have for volunteers and resources. Nearly 40 organizations are listed with contact information and specifics about their needs.

The 32-page book made its debut last week at an "Aware Fair" held at Walsingham Academy. It marked the first such event, with more planned for other area schools.

Representatives from 17 nonprofit organizations attended the fair. At the event's conclusion, each organization had garnered at least 20 student volunteers.

Some organizations had 50 kids sign up to help.

Karen Dutro, who is the executive director of Network Williamsburg, partnered with Patti DeBlass of



Schmidt's Florist for the project.

DeBlass recently began "Blooms that Brighten" which brings flowers to local shut-ins and those in nursing homes and other healthcare facilities.

Area school kids are often asked to fulfill service hours as part of their school's curriculum. Sometimes, they don't know what resources are available or what organizations may need volunteer help.

The goal is to encourage kids to get involved and stay involved in the charity they choose. It also helps parents learn more about various charities so they can help children in the decision process.

"We want it to be more of away of life to have students take on community service, and not just hours they check off a form," Dutro said. "I think kids volunteer more today. And even if they start volunteering to fulfill a requirement, they often form a connection and they keep doing it. And there is so much in Williamsburg and so many ways to volunteer."

Dutro said the idea of the book is to provide a clearing-house of information in a concise and user-friendly format. Each organization lists a short description of their services, a contact person, application, age requirements and suggestions for volunteering. The organizations also specifies what time of year volunteers are most needed.

The book also contains statistics from an article by the University Nevada Reno, "Young Volunteers: The Benefits of Community Service."

American teens volunteer 2.4 billion hours annually, which translates into \$34.3 billion to the economy.

Youth volunteering has steadily increased over the past decade, with approximately 30% of American teens volunteering at least once monthly.

Nearly 60% of volunteering teens volunteer an average of 3.5 hours per week.

It is believed that teens who volunteer one hour a week are 50% less likely to abuse alcohol, cigarettes or engage in destructive behavior.

Teens report the benefits of volunteering as, learning to respect others, learning to be helpful and kind, understanding of people who are different, development of leadership skills and becoming more patient.

Youth volunteers are more likely to do well in school, graduate and vote in elections.

The book cites information from the National Center for Education stating that school principals support student involvement in volunteer

activities because it helps students become active members of the community, encourages altruism and caring for others, increases career awareness and reduces student involvement in risky behaviors.

Dutro realizes that not all kids are comfortable volunteering one-on-one. The book can help by offering information regarding collection drives. Many organizations need supplies and other items throughout the year.

"Kids can hold collection drives or help in fund raising activities," she said. "There are opportunities that vary, and there is really something for everyone."

Dutro said that it's her goal to distribute the book throughout the WJC schools and at various organizations throughout greater Williamsburg.

"I will keep printing them as we need them," she said.

More — The books are free and can be obtained by contacting Network Williamsburg at www.networkwilliamsburg.com or at 945-1285.

