

Volunteerism's new face

...Volunteering has become a significant part of teen culture. Fifty-nine percent of 12- to 17-year-olds said they'd volunteered in the past year, according to a 1996 study by the Independent Sector, the most recent national study on teen volunteering habits available. In a fall 1999 teen-age marketing and lifestyles study done by the marketing firm Teenage Research Unlimited, six in 10 teens said that volunteering was "in."

"A lot of people think we're this big community of bad kids, and half [of] us aren't like that at all," says Clara, a freshman at Grant High School. "This is one way to prove that."

It is, for many teens, the new norm, a given, reinforced by the community service requirements that many schools now require to graduate, and the increase of service learning — which combines classroom lessons with volunteer projects — in many school curricula.

Teen music reflects and celebrates the trend: The Backstreet Boys lend the name of their song "Larger than Life," and free concert tickets, to a contest promoting public service. Rage Against the Machine's album "The Battle of Los Angeles," full of calls to action and celebrations of activism, debuts at the top of the billboard charts, selling 430,000 copies in one week. The album's CD-liner notes explain how to contact or get involved with groups such as Rock for Choice and Women Alive. Hip-hop artist Lauryn Hill tucks information about her nonprofit, The Refugee Project, in the liner notes of her album "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill."

"It's part of the culture now," says Clayton Miller, 16, a junior at Lincoln High School who, along with his twin brother, Greg, has traveled to Mexico to help build homes for the needy and helped shop for groceries for Portland-area people who couldn't get to the store.

"It's kind of like learning how to read," Greg says. "When you are taught how to help others, it begins to come naturally after a while."

Teens say they are far from being passive drones, just going through the motions of required service. They acknowledge without judgment that there are a fair number of résumé padders and kids just serving their time who make up the volunteer numbers. But young people and those who work with them say what's interesting about teens right now is how many are choosing to do community service work beyond what is required of them, driving the trend and changing the way teen volunteers are viewed.

A couple of years ago, volunteers from the AmeriCorps program going into Portland-area high schools and middle schools to help coordinate service learning projects began noticing something: A lot of kids were approaching them after class, wanting to learn more about volunteering. The kids wanted to find out what they could do outside of school, where they could go for more information....

More than a decade ago, some foretold the increase in teen volunteerism. In their 1991 book "Generations," William Strauss and Neil Howe predicted that this generation of teens would be civic-oriented. "Teen peer leaders will express a growing interest in community affairs and a growing enthusiasm for collective action," they wrote.

In the four years following that prediction, the number of volunteers grew by 7 percent, from 12.4 million teens to 13.3 million, according to the 1996 Independent Sector study.

The number of schools involving students in community service has increased dramatically in the last decade, according to a 1999 U.S. Department of Education survey.

55 In 1984, 27 percent of high schools said they had students participating in community service. In 1999, 83 percent said they did, according to the study. Nearly half of the schools surveyed in 1999 said service learning was part of their curriculum.

60 And students are taking volunteering beyond the classroom in increasing numbers if you look at the service organizations teens choose. Membership in Key Club, an after-school service club for high-schoolers sponsored by the Kiwanis Club, has increased steadily for the past three years. Two years ago, there were 196,000 members. Now there are 205,000, according to the national organization.

65 At Grant High School the Octagon Club, a community service club sponsored by the Optimist Society of Lloyd Center, has grown from four members six years ago to more than 50 members this year. It's now one of the largest Octagon Clubs in the country. For one of its projects, students feed the homeless two times a month at Grace Memorial Episcopal Church. So many students were showing up that they had more help than they could use, says adviser John Mears.

70 A lot of teens are interested in doing volunteer work that is different from projects many teens may have done in the past, says Megan Buscho, a 15-year-old sophomore who helped set up the Youth Involvement Center at Cleveland High school and helps other students find volunteer opportunities that fit their interests.

75 "A lot of kids aren't interested in the usual kinds of volunteer opportunities like serving people in a soup kitchen," she says. "They're more interested in doing things that get to the root of the problem, like finding out what gets people in the soup kitchen in the first place and preventing that."

80 Some of what's behind this is teens' realization that they may not be able to vote, says Buscho. "But we can affect change before then. By getting out there and volunteering, adults can see what we are thinking about, what we care about, and we can influence how adults think about young people."

While teens such as Clara Ard are aware that volunteering is one way to mend the negative stereotypes adults may harbor about their generation, what's drawing them out to rainy riverbanks on the weekends or moving them to set a table for seniors goes beyond that, teens say.

85 Some perceive volunteering as a way to give back to their community. "The seniors at our church pray for our youth group regularly," Ard says, "and I think it's important to thank them."

It is a chance for teens to exercise their values — whether it's their religious convictions, political motivations or sense of social justice. Volunteering is a way for them to be connected to something larger.

90 "Helping others makes me feel so good," says Josi Henderson, 18, a senior at Grant. "I really feel like my day isn't complete without practicing some act of kindness." She credits her volunteer experiences in high school with helping her decide what she wants to do with her life. She wants to major in speech pathology in college and, afterward, join the Peace Corps. "I really want to devote my life to helping others," she says.

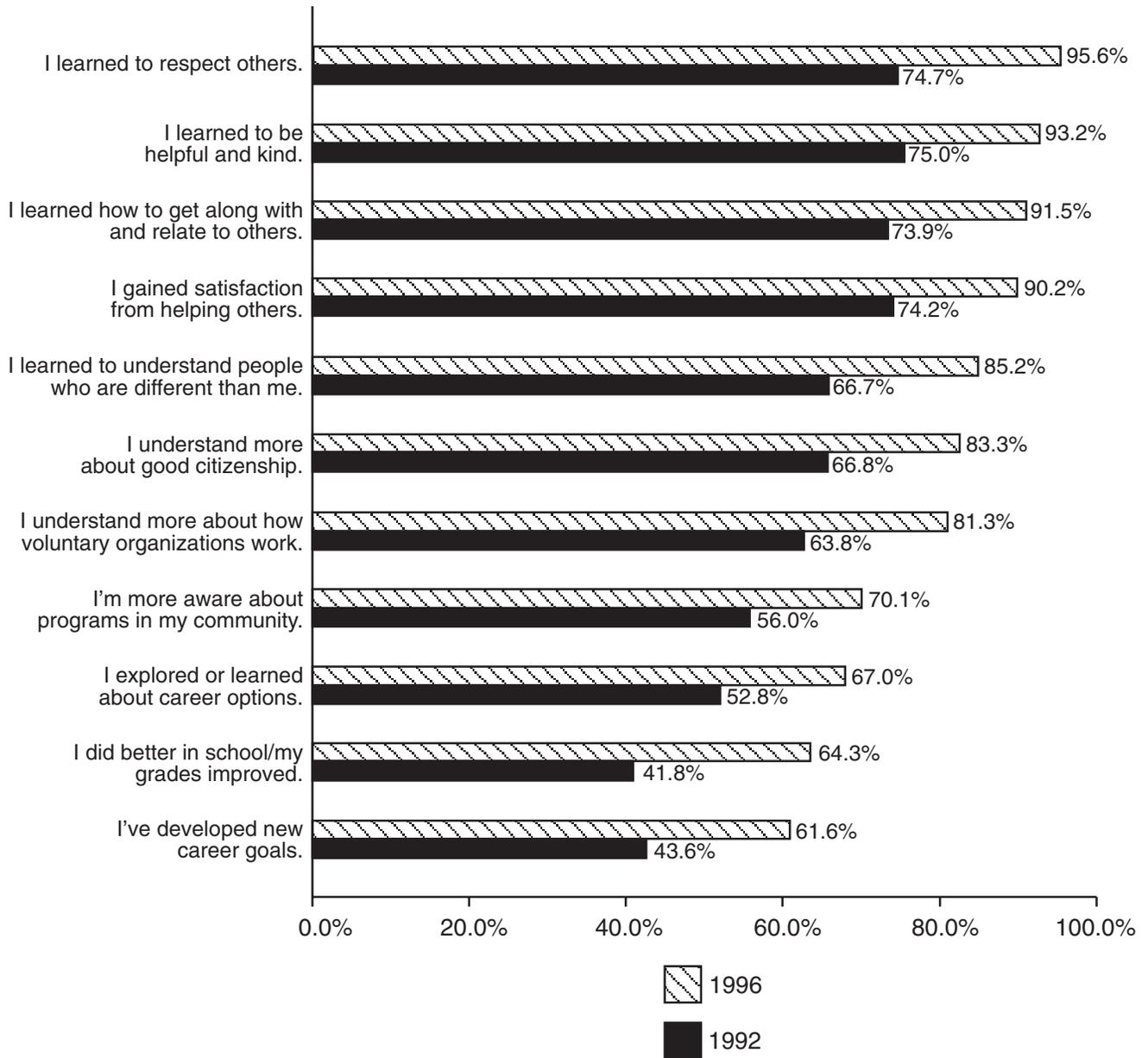
100 "I think our generation is changing the definition of what it means to be a good citizen," Buscho says. "It used to be that being a good citizen was about patriotism and being true to your country. Now the definition is: Know what's going on in your country, be involved, and then you can change things. Through volunteering, we can start doing things about the issues that affect us."

— Inara Verzemnieks
excerpted from "Volunteerism's new face"
The Oregonian, December 25, 1999

GRAPH

Importance of benefits gained from teen volunteering – 1996 and 1992

Benefits Gained *



* Based on the percentage of respondents who stated that a specific benefit was "Very important" or "Somewhat important."

Source: (adapted) Independent Sector, 2000

Multiple-Choice Questions

Directions (7–16): Select the best suggested answer to each question and write its number in the space provided on the answer sheet. The questions may help you think about ideas and information you might want to use in your writing. You may return to these questions anytime you wish.

- 7 In lines 7 through 9 Clara indicates that by doing volunteer work, teens can prove that they are
- (1) competitive
 - (2) skilled
 - (3) intelligent
 - (4) respectable
- 8 According to the writer, volunteering for social causes has been promoted by
- (1) highway signs
 - (2) nonprofit organizations
 - (3) musical celebrities
 - (4) political leaders
- 9 “It’s part of the culture now” (line 23) refers to the growth of
- (1) helping needy people
 - (2) performing benefit concerts
 - (3) mentoring young artists
 - (4) traveling to Mexico
- 10 As used in line 29, “passive drones” most nearly means people who
- (1) eliminate resistance
 - (2) avoid work
 - (3) use caution
 - (4) accept challenge
- 11 The prediction of an increase in the civic orientation of teens (line 41) is supported by
- (1) personal interviews
 - (2) expert testimonials
 - (3) studies and surveys
 - (4) questions and answers
- 12 As used in line 74, getting to “the root of the problem” most nearly means discovering the problem’s
- (1) origin
 - (2) effects
 - (3) solution
 - (4) frequency
- 13 Students who are too young to vote see volunteering as a way to demonstrate their
- (1) independence
 - (2) talents
 - (3) beliefs
 - (4) education
- 14 The experience of Josi Henderson (lines 90 through 95) is most likely included to demonstrate that student volunteer work may lead to
- (1) finding hobbies
 - (2) discovering a vocation
 - (3) building a résumé
 - (4) developing friendships
- 15 According to the graph, the greatest increase in benefit between 1992 and 1996 was in
- (1) getting along with and relating to others
 - (2) understanding about good citizenship
 - (3) exploring or learning about career options
 - (4) improving academically
- 16 According to the graph, for 1996 which benefit was most important to teen volunteers?
- (1) respecting others
 - (2) gaining satisfaction from helping
 - (3) understanding differences
 - (4) being aware of community

After you have finished these questions, turn to page 5. Review **The Situation** and read **Your Task** and the **Guidelines**. Use scrap paper to plan your response. Then write your response to Part B, beginning on page 7 of your essay booklet.