



LITTLE BUDDHAS

BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS. SARASOTA IS NO STRANGER TO ACTIVISM AND PHILANTHROPY, ESPECIALLY DURING THIS, THE SEASON OF CHARITY. *SRQ* MAGAZINE TAKES A LOOK AT SOME OF THE WAYS OUR YOUNGEST DO-GOODERS CAN GIVE BACK. **BY AMY NANCE**

It's practically tradition for an older generation to say of the younger, in a scandalized tone, that they aren't exactly measuring up. The axiom goes something like, "When I was a kid . . ." or bypasses explanation altogether in favor of something more comprehensive, e.g., "Kids today." It's easy to see why the refrain has enjoyed such lasting popularity. We're subject to images of today's generation that paint them as anything but the greatest. They are, in short, vapid, solipsistic and Facebook-obsessed. They are overweight, don't care to read and have become inured to violence.

Thankfully, critics can retire these ideas. "Kids today" are sensitive to a range of issues that have directly affected their lives—from the environment to terrorism to poverty—and they are actively responding to

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these concerns. According to the James Irvine Foundation's 2001 report "Changing the Face of Giving," 59 percent of teens surveyed in 1996 did service work that averaged 3.5 hours per week and 42 percent gave money to charity. These kids are the beneficiaries of that democratizing force, the Internet, and they are using it in record numbers to connect with the world, which they understand—more so than any previous generation—as a global village. This is the generation hailed as "piggy-bank philanthropists" by the *New York Times*, a group hip to e-philanthropy and the embedded giving efforts of campaigns like ONE. They are kids who are giving away bar mitzvah gifts, who want donations to their favorite charities instead of birthday presents. They are teen stewards who are awarding grants from their youth philanthropy boards and elementary students using their allowance to support charities. They are fast-becoming a generation marked by its consciousness and engagement, the gravitas of its giving.

The young things are, it turns out, up to some good, and they're reworking the philanthropic landscape in the process. For kids these days, the quaint lemonade stand of yesteryear has evolved into a major fundraising opportunity. Witness the national success of such ventures as Alex's Lemonade Stand, started by four-year old cancer patient Alexandra Scott to raise money for cancer research. Every year, Scott set up a stand on her front lawn and then donated the money, inspiring thousands of kids across the country to join her. By

the time she died in 2004, she had raised \$1 million for cancer research. Even trick-or-treating is getting a Generation Millennials update. Last Halloween, thousands of kids in the U.S and Canada treated their neighbors to Fair Trade chocolate, hoping to draw attention to the problems facing the cocoa producing regions of the Ivory Coast. You might say this effort, dubbed "reverse trick-or-treating," is UNICEFs hipper, savvier, younger sister.

YOUNG AMERICA

The Sarasota County Youth Development Organization is unique in that the kids who participate are also responsible for making decisions related to development and budget. "Our young people are interested in helping their peers, so we provide them with ways to do that," says Director Karen Bogues. Through the STAR Leadership Training program, participants receive a substantial education in community history and government operations and then get to serve as full voting members for county institutions. "This initiative gets youth working on advisory boards to city government, nonprofit boards of directors and boards focused on education," says Bogues. In other words, these teens find themselves in the enviable position of getting to enact good policy. "The research tells us that this generation is most aware of the needs of their community," says Bogues. "The barrier is that they don't get asked to do something about it."

Most young activists get involved through school initiatives. Bogues points to Riverview High School's popular mentoring program, which involves teens tutoring elementary students, as well as the district's WEB program, where eighth graders are trained to mentor the incoming sixth graders. Mentoring initiatives like these pass down the spirit of volunteerism to younger kids and help generate diversity within youth philanthropy. As for engaging the youngest kids, Bogues is thoughtful. "If you look nationally at some of the great youth philanthropy stories, it's often about the youngest kids. For them, giving seems to be inherent. We're taught early in life to help each other, but that message disappears. It's the older ones who need reinforcement."

The Red Cross Sarasota Youth Corps' more than 100 kids are trained to perform CPR, shelter, fundraise and advocate water safety. "Here we're concerned with hurricanes and weather hazards like lightning and rip tides," Kathy LaPietra, director of volunteers, says of the thrust of the training. "But we also work on more global outreach, with our Pine View School club sending school supplies to the Dominican Republic." The kids who participate in the Corps are pro-

foundly affected by their involvement and continue to volunteer well into adulthood, according to LaPietra, who points out that one of her most active participants went on to establish a Red Cross Youth Corp at The University of Miami.

Amber and Nicole Reynolds, teen sisters who volunteer 30 hours a month with the Corps, have been able to find niches within the program. Amber helps with pet safety and Nicole is head of communications at the headquarters for the Corps. Both were inspired to join the Red Cross by their father's involvement in it. "He made it sound like so much fun," says Nicole.

Indeed, nothing is as persuasive to a nascent philanthropist as an altruistic home life, where giving is part of the routine. Sometimes, kids need a push from their parents, LaPietra says. "Some come in with apprehension because their parents told them to come," she says. "They wind up embracing the chance to help people." There are several approaches to integrate giving into family life. Provide access to socially-conscious media like books and documentaries on such topics as global warming and poverty. Listen to youth radio and podcasts (check out www.kid-cast.com for programming). Read the newspaper—together—and talk about what's happening over dinner that night. Empower kids to use their allowance for good. If they're young, keep the choice simple, e.g., "Do you want some of your Christmas money to be donated to the Humane Society to help animals?" For the holidays, buy toys from companies such as Karito Kids that are involved in philanthropic projects. Stuff stockings with an awareness wristband from All Faith's Food Bank or shop online gift catalogues that let you purchase goods for needy communities in someone else's name (try www.globalgiving.com or www.heifer.org).

EASY WAYS TO PRACTICE PHILANTHROPY

- 1. Act randomly.** Even kindergartners can participate in the concept of a random act of kindness, Bagues says. "There are small things anyone can do that can really make an impact. Focus on where their talents can be useful, whether it's helping a classmate with homework or helping a neighbor." For ideas, check out the Random Act of Kindness Foundation's website, www.actsofkindness.org.
- 2. Play consciousness-raising games.** Club Penguin is a safe, virtual playground where kids ages 6-14 the world over can connect with each other and learn about global citizenship. The club is tied to major humanitarian projects, which the "penguins" can participate in.
- 3. Clean house.** Experts on youth philanthropy cite the holiday season as an important time to instill the value of giving. Make it ritual for your kids to clean their bedrooms over break using boxes labeled "Keep," "Give" and "Recycle/Trash." Ask them to consider what they use and how they use it. If they're on the fence about an object, ask them if someone else might benefit more from it than they would.
- 4. Surf the web.** Dozens of online communities link kids to local volunteer opportunities. For teens, www.dosomething.org offers the perfect mix of pop culture and global awareness, encouraging kids to adopt a cause and then providing them with the resources to support it. Younger kids can join the Peter Pan Birthday Club (www.peterpanchildrensfund.org) and turn one of their birthday parties into an event that benefits a children's hospital.
- 5. Share a meal.** Kids need to see the results of their activism to become engaged. LaPietra suggests trying out the food bank. At All Faiths, kids can participate in the annual holiday food drive or sort and serve food on site. Since All Faiths partners with other charitable organizations, kids get a chance to serve several groups at once.

Deeply *Mist-ifying*.

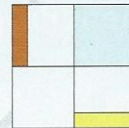
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