

Family Services of the Mid-South

www.fsmidsouth.org

The Hope You Give as a Volunteer

With this e-letter Family Services of the Mid-South launches a new effort to tell the world about events and issues that affect families in our community. It is also an opportunity to let folks know the latest news about the agency.

In this letter we will relate events and news of the day to suggestions for you and your family to consider. We hope it creates conversation around the kitchen table or lunch room where you work. Not all the topics will be heavy with deep personal meaning but hopefully will give you reason to think and often to smile. Always, we want to build our understanding of family life and the essential components of those relationships.

We begin this month with the topic of volunteering. Hardly a day goes by that my child's school does not ask for volunteers for some project. They want us to work on the landscaping. What they mean is they need dads to dig a trench! If not the school it's the soccer team, or our church or our friends. Every high school now has some community service hours requirement. People are so expected to volunteer its almost non voluntary! And, yet we volunteer.

For many of us we volunteer in hopes of some reward or pay back such as new computers for our kid's school or looking good



on a college application. Some of us volunteer with organizations that are important to us for personal reasons. My mom has Multiple Sclerosis so I participate in their efforts to raise money for research. Often, we are touched by some tragic event and look for volunteer opportunities to respond. Some of these efforts are short lived but all make a difference.

It is important that volunteering have two essential components: First it has to have purpose for our lives and second, it has to have purpose for the lives of others. The purpose for our lives can be as simple as it is a fun activity, being with friends, meeting new people using skills not work related. Many of us substitute donations of cash with our time and we feel a sense of re-

ward and thus feel good about ourselves. Whatever the reason, it has to satisfy us to volunteer. However, volunteering has to contribute to the well being of others or it falls flat. When we give of our time we want to know that it is helping someone else. It may happen that a child has heart surgery or has a new coat. The child has been helped and that's what matters to us. I can't do surgery or sew but I can help a child.

When we volunteer we often go too far or not far enough. We can get in over our head or we don't realize the commitment we have made and fall short of really helping. I believe this is the major cause of volunteer burn out. If you choose to volunteer make sure you really look at the task at hand. If the school wants you to

dig a 200 foot trench to install a sprinkler it may not be for you. If you hate asking people for money, avoid fundraising committees. A good volunteer program recognizes volunteers have needs and acts accordingly. It matches the organization needs with the needs of volunteers. If

you feel the organization is creating "busy work" for you it does not really need you. If the organization has clearly defined roles and expectations for you and orients you to the tasks you can be sure your time is appreciated and respected.

At Family Services we take great pride in the volunteers we work with every day. Because of the Crisis Center we are always recruiting, training and mentoring our volunteers. One can feel they have contributed to the well being of others without getting over committed to solve all the world's problems. We have and need volunteers from all walks of life. We crave diversity within our volunteer ranks as it dramatically improves our services. We hope you will consider volunteering and we won't ask you to dig a trench!