

Volunteer work can be a feel-good outing for all ages

August 17, 2010

I recently heard a commentary about "the catastrophic effects" of narcissism in our society.

Wikipedia defines narcissism as "the personality trait of egotism, vanity, conceit, or simple selfishness."

Selfishness? That was the theme of our extra-irritable week. Was it different when we were children? Back when we walked to school 10 miles uphill in the snow?

According to The Narcissism Epidemic, yes. To quote: "Narcissistic personality traits rose just as fast as obesity between the 1980s and the present."

As fall approaches, and our family's schedule fills with classes, lessons and activities, I've realized that we need to find time between the "it's all about me" for some "it's all about others."

My son, who spent a week in Haiti this summer on a mission trip, is excited to volunteer. While there, his team helped clear land for a school, run children's programs, move trash and more. He came home with 600 pictures and just as many stories. One photo shows him in a group of children surrounded by a sea of tents. All of the children have huge smiles including my son. Pointing to the photo, he smiles again. "Oh, that kid was really cool … and that kid … and that boy seemed like a little brother."

How awesome that at the age of 13 my son not only learned how rewarding it is to help others but that "others" are just like us.

Practically, we can't all travel to a Third World country this year, but there are plenty of places to help right here in Salem.

My friend's family has been volunteering at Union Gospel Mission for years. When I asked her about it, she paused to formulate her thoughts because "there are so many good things, it's hard to say."

"Sometimes we don't feel like going," she said, "but we always leave feeling great."

Her 11-year-old blurted out his answer immediately; "It feels good to help out people who are in need."

My daughter's friend recently lit up when I asked her about

Some options

Where: Marion-Polk Food Share

Location: 1660 Salem Industrial Drive NE

Phone: 503-581-3855

Website:
www.marionpolkfoodshare.org

Where: Willamette Humane Society

(2010 best of Mid-Valley Gold Medal winner for best Place to Volunteer)

Location: 4246 Turner Road SE, Salem, 97317

Phone: 503-585-5900

Website: willamettehumane.org

Where: Union Gospel Mission

Location: 345 Commercial St. NE, Salem

Phone: (503) 362-3983

volunteering at Willamette Humane Society.

Our previous conversations went something like this: Question. One word response. Question. Nod.

Website: www.ugmsalem.org

Asking about her volunteering experience was like hitting the conversational jackpot. Ka-ching!

She shared about how her mom has to go with her until she's 16, how she enjoys spending time with the dogs, and how she does it for fun. "It's really awesome!"

On the topic of awesome, my 7-year-old regularly reminds me that "you promised we could go back to that food bank place and volunteer."

My children worked hard sorting and moving donated food at the Marion-Polk Food Share warehouse. It was fun and rewarding. They loved it.

A year-and-a-half later, I have to ask myself why I haven't fulfilled my "promise" and signed us up to volunteer again.

The answer is sobering: we haven't made the time to look that far outside ourselves. That might not be a good thing. Just ask Narcissus.

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