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Prudent Portfolio: Summer is a Perfect Time for Children to Invest in Sweat Equity

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By Peter Chieco

Free time for your children may be in short supply during the school year as their time may be occupied with a focus on academics, athletics and extracurricular activities.



Peter Chieco

But once [summer vacation](#) rolls around, there may be unclaimed hours or days which can be filled with a worthwhile pursuit: community service.

Teaching children to “give back” through volunteering or fundraising teaches critical lessons about charity, empathy and good citizenship. In addition, volunteering in childhood may be a precursor to financial philanthropy as an adult. Numerous studies show that older adults who volunteer reap physical and mental health [benefits](#), suffer less from depression and report greater life satisfaction.

Summer is a great time to take positive steps through volunteering, and often the lessons are best learned through “sweat equity,” the time commitment and physical effort of helping as opposed to just giving money.

Participating in organized events, such as charity walks or park clean-ups, is one possibility.

Is there an organization where your children can volunteer? If they like animals, perhaps an animal shelter or wildlife center needs an extra pair of hands. Libraries and places of worship often appreciate summer help, as do recreational facilities. Perhaps your children can share their sports skills or musical know-how with younger ones.

Holding a fundraiser may be another option, and it could be one which enhances a child’s experience of being part of a process, from organizing an event to implementing it to delivering a check to the chosen charity. A lemonade stand stands the test of time, but there are other creative possibilities that kids can generate such as car or dog washes, neighborhood tag sales or talent shows that charge admission.

Donations of goods may be another avenue. Young children may be surprised to learn that not all kids have access to toys or sports equipment, for instance. Having your children sort their possessions into “to keep” and “to give” piles is a [start](#) and may open their eyes to how much they’ve accumulated.

Summer is a good time to weed out their outgrown clothes, especially winter gear. Children can help choose a recipient, such as a local shelter. Remember, though, to check with the agency to see if it has a wish list; many don’t want or have space for someone’s discarded junk. Some items could be detrimental. A broken toy, a recalled crib or an outdated car seat does not make a good gift.

Connecting with the elderly is beneficial for both the children and the seniors involved. Perhaps an elderly neighbor needs a hand with household or garden chores. Or perhaps the community senior center or elder home can use “friendly visitors” to provide companionship and brighten the residents’ days.

In fact, this type of intergenerational interaction has been shown to increase seniors’ health and life expectancies by helping alleviate loneliness, while the impact on children can include more advanced cognitive, social and emotional skills.

The goal is to help shape young adults who care for the well-being of others, and who want to make an impact on the people and places around them. This concept may express itself later as they grow to become investors who care about broader social and environmental issues as well as issues that affect people in our local communities, such as hungry children.

Feeding hungry children across the globe was the goal of Morgan Stanley's own Global Volunteer Month, which takes place every June. Ending childhood hunger may be a lofty goal, but with the dedicated and energetic efforts of volunteers from Australia to Hawaii, the impact can be felt. Many of those same volunteers who participated last month may have once been kids who volunteered during the summer.

Youngsters who spend part of the summer volunteering in their communities may be setting up a pattern for a lifetime habit of charitable giving and heightened awareness of the sustainability needs of our people and planet, creating a better world for all.

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