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## What Our Kids Get from Giving

Children who help others learn to recognize their own strengths.

Children with ADHD are used to being on the receiving end. They get extra help at school, as well as assistance from tutors, therapists, and doctors. Now some schools are giving them a chance to be on the other end-and finding that it imparts some valuable lessons.

At Odyssey School in Austin, Texas, a fourth-through-ninth grade school for children with learning differences, including ADHD, community service is an important part of the curriculum. Each year, Odyssey's 50 students select five local organizations to assist. Recently, we spoke with the school's director, Nancy Wolf, to find out why pitching in is such a powerful learning tool.

We all want our children to be good citizens. How does volunteering address their special needs?

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SPECIAL NEEDS PARENTS ARE THE EQUIVALENT OF BATMAN, CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE INCREDIBLE HULK COMBINED WITH A SIDE OF MARY POPPINS

## Fostering Older Youth

Hope is something that older youth in foster care are looking for, and foster parents play a huge role in providing that hope. In fact, that's one of the most rewarding aspects of fostering teens and older youth.

People are often intimidated by the idea of fostering teens and older youth. Those years, after all, are the years of raging hormones! However, as one foster mom who enjoys fostering older youth put it, "Teenagers come home and close the door. They're a lot more independent!"

Sometimes people think, "*why does it matter, that youth is almost a legal adult?*" While it's true that these youth will be 18 shortly, think back to the years just before you became an adult. You probably still relied on your parents for a lot emotionally, and they helped you move forward with advice and support.

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## Slacker parents beware: Your babies may follow in your footsteps

By Emily Underwood

Don't quit, parents. When 15-month-old babies watched a grown-up try hard to solve a problem, they were twice as persistent at tackling a tricky puzzle themselves, a new study shows. The work suggests that perseverance can be learned at a very young age, especially if parents let their babies see them break a sweat.

The study took place in Boston's Children's Museum, where parents with babies were recruited on-site. Julia Leonard, a developmental psychologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, took an infant and its caregiver into a room equipped with toys, a booster seat, and video cameras that captured the baby's behavior. Facing the seated infant, Leonard got the child's attention by trying to pull a plastic frog out of a container sealed with a concealed flap. Next, she played with a keychain full of colorful keys that could be removed only by opening a metal lever.

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# Secrets of Your ADHD Brain

By: William Dodson, MD

**Most people are neurologically equipped to determine what's important and get motivated to do it, even when it doesn't interest them. Then there are the rest of us, who have attention deficit (and the ADHD brain that goes along with it).**

ADHD is a confusing, contradictory, inconsistent, and frustrating condition. It is overwhelming to people who live with it every day. The diagnostic criteria that have been used for the last 40 years leave many people wondering whether they have the condition or not. Diagnosticians have long lists of symptoms to sort through and check off. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* has 18 criteria, and other symptom lists cite as many as 100 traits.

Practitioners, including myself, have been trying to establish a simpler, clearer way to understand the impairments of ADHD. We have been looking for the “bright and shining line” that defines the condition, explains the source of impairments, and gives direction as to what to do about it.

My work for the last decade suggests that we have been missing something important about the fundamental nature of the ADHD brain. I went back to the experts on the condition — the hundreds of people and their families I worked with who were diagnosed with it — to confirm my hypothesis. My goal was to look for the feature that everyone with ADHD has, and that neurotypical people don't have.

I found it. It is the ADHD nervous system, a unique and special creation that regulates attention and emotions in different ways than the nervous system in those without the condition.

## The ADHD Zone

Almost every one of my patients and their families want to drop the term Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, because it describes the opposite of what they experience every moment of their lives. It is hard to call something a disorder when it imparts many positives. ADHD is not a damaged or defective nervous system. It is a nervous system that works well using its own set of rules.

Despite ADHD's association with learning disabilities, most people with an ADHD nervous system have significantly higher-than-average IQs. They also use that higher IQ in different ways than neurotypical people. By the time most people with the condition reach high school, they are able to tackle problems that stump everyone else, and can jump to solutions that no one else saw.

The vast majority of adults with an ADHD nervous system are not overtly hyperactive. They are hyperactive internally. Those with the condition don't have a shortage of attention. They pay too much attention to everything. Most people with unmedicated ADHD have four or five things going on in their minds at once. The hallmark of the ADHD nervous system is not attention deficit, but inconsistent attention.

Everyone with ADHD knows that they can “get in the zone” at least four or five times a day. When they are in the zone, they have no impairments, and the executive function deficits they may have had before entering the zone disappear. People with ADHD know that they are bright and clever, but they are never sure whether their abilities will show up when they need them. The fact that symptoms and impairments come and go throughout the day is the defining trait of ADHD. It makes the condition mystifying and frustrating.

People with ADHD primarily get in the zone by being interested in, or intrigued by, what they are doing. I call it an interest-based nervous system. Judgmental friends and family see this as being unreliable or self-serving. When friends say, “You can do the things you like,” they are describing the essence of the ADHD nervous system.

ADHD individuals also get in the zone when they are challenged or thrown into a competitive environment. Sometimes a new or novel task attracts their attention. Novelty is short-lived, though, and everything gets old after a while.

Most people with an ADHD nervous system can engage in tasks and access their abilities when the task is urgent — a do-or-die deadline, for instance. This is why procrastination is an almost universal impairment in people with ADHD. They want to get their work done, but they can't get started until the task becomes interesting, challenging, or urgent.