

Getting Youth Involved - What Motivates Our Young People to Take Action?

– by Stacey O'Connell

Caring about and protecting our environment

is something that all generations can be passionate about. Having our younger people involved would be exciting and beneficial due to their high level of energy, and their commitment and creativity in addressing causes that are important to them.



In talking with high school students, three ideas came up repeatedly. The students are looking for opportunities to connect with things that they are passionate about, things that they can do locally, opportunities to see the short term and long term results of their efforts.

This age group (12-18) is very creative, connecting their creativity, and the things that they are passionate about with environmental issues could draw their interest and get them involved with the Sierra club. For example, Summer Camp, a musical festival in central Illinois, presents a weekend of music with a variety of bands, and addresses some important issues. The Concert weekend is set up with the goal of being as environmentally conscious as possible. They address each aspect of the concert in such a way as to leave the smallest carbon footprint as possible, and they show people how they are doing it. The concert organizers also invite non-profits to come in and attend to educate the crowd on green initiatives, water conservation, roof top gardening, feeding the hungry, and more. Pairing the music that many younger people love, with issues that need promoting go a long way to reaching the younger generation at this concert.



Another opportunity for us to get young people involved is to hold more events locally and pair with organizations in the community. Teens are very busy, and especially those teens that want to work for the things that they believe in. If we connected with more high school and Junior High Environmental clubs, and maybe even some Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, we could attract motivated teens to work on local events. The events need to be ones that they can get to quickly, work at for a relatively short amount of time, and it was expressed to be

very important to them that they could arrive at the event and immediately get to work. This is where the immediate gratification came in. Teens want to be immediately active, so keeping an event local, simple, and to the point is essential to reach a number of teens that are working around sports, jobs, and other extra-curricular activities.

Many teens I interact with have many good ideas regarding projects related to the environment as well as a high level of commitment to contribute to their community. If we can design projects that involve something else that they are also passionate about, such as music, and if we can make the projects easily accessible, and timely we can draw on their enthusiasm and attract their involvement. The teens said that they would also like to see the long and short term benefits of their involvement, which we can address in the next segment.

– Photo by Julia Freeman-Woolpert