

Promises That Work

Marguerite W. Sallee



America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth is dedicated to mobilizing people from every sector of American life to build the character and competence of our nation's youth by fulfilling Five Promises: ongoing relationships with caring adults, safe places with structured activities, a healthy start, marketable skills, and opportunities to give back. When consistently fulfilled, the Five Promises can significantly advance the health and well-being of the next generation—increasing the chances of youth becoming successful adults.

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In 1997, leaders from across the United States attended the Presidents' Summit for America's Future in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to address the needs of children and youth. President Clinton, and former Presidents Bush, Carter, and Ford, and former First Lady Nancy Reagan representing her husband, challenged the nation to make youth a national priority. Joining them in their call to action were approximately 30 governors, 100 mayors, 145 community delegations, business leaders, and thousands of concerned citizens.

Colin Powell, who in 2001 would become Secretary of State, served as chair of the summit and subsequently as founding chairman of America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth, the organization that grew out of the summit. President George W. Bush affirmed his commitment to the organization after becoming president in 2001. The current chair is Alma J. Powell, wife of Colin Powell.

America's Promise is the managing partner of a broad alliance of communities and local and national organizations dedicated to bringing their collective

power together to fulfill our nation's obligation to assure that all young people have five fundamental resources:

- *Caring adults* in their lives, as parents, mentors, tutors, coaches
- *Safe places* with structured activities in which to learn and grow
- *A healthy start* and healthy future
- An effective education that equips them with *marketable skills*
- *An opportunity to give back to their communities* through their own service

These fundamental resources also are known as the Five Promises. And, research reveals that the Five Promises work. Children who experience the Five Promises are less likely to engage in negative behaviors and are five to 10 times more likely to succeed as students, citizens, parents, and employees who make meaningful contributions to their communities.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

The United States is a large and diverse country. America's Promise—The Alliance for Youth brings together corporations, faith-based institutions, civic groups, and other nonprofit partners committed to the belief that children are key to our nation's future. With national organizations and community champions working as one, the Alliance is producing positive outcomes for children and youth, one promise at a time. Here are several examples from around the country:

- In response to the President's call for a united response to the tsunami devastation in South and Southeast Asia, more than 100 youth-serving organizations dedicated to children and service and 10 highly regarded relief partners joined together to form the Quarters From Kids initiative. Quarters From Kids ensures that America's youngest, and the adults who work with them, can reach out to the victims of the tragedy by raising and contributing funds to established relief organizations. Contributions raised for Quarters

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From Kids from scouting troops, after-school programs, classrooms projects, bake sales, and car washes will be distributed to those in need.

- In Charleston, South Carolina, WCIV-TV has been informing viewers about the Five Promises and how they can help fulfill them locally. The station also adopted five schools in 2004 and sponsored Charleston's Promise School Event Days, an initiative to bring the Five Promises to the area's neediest children and raise community awareness. A top goal of the event was to recruit caring adults to serve as mentors, thereby improving students' lives and academic performance. "We're really trying to get mentors into the schools, because a mentor can

help change a child's mindset and help them redefine their expectations of themselves," says Ava Swain, sales coordinator for WCIV-TV.

- In Bloomington, Minnesota, the Allen family—David, Mary, and sons Treb (age 20) and Matt (age 18)—is actively involved in the Bloomington Youth Coffeehouse Initiative. With help from community volunteers and support from the Points of Light Foundation, which honored the family with its National Family Volunteer Award, the Allens raised funds to open a coffeehouse to serve as a safe place where Bloomington youths could spend time during non-school hours. Their coffeehouse is part of a community-wide effort to combat the high rates of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use among high school students.
- A group of industrious youths in Alleghany County, North Carolina, led food drives in each of the county's schools, collecting 30,000 pounds of food for the local food bank that serves the county's poor residents. Alleghany County is one of many counties in which the U.S. Department of Agriculture administers food and nutrition assistance programs to help give youths a healthy start. Among these programs is the National School Lunch Program, which operates in more than 100,000 schools and residential child-care institutions

to provide free or reduced-price lunches to an average 28 million children from low-income families every school day.

- Sappi Fine Paper North America sponsored a poster contest for sixth graders at the five elementary schools in Muskegon Heights, Michigan, where the company has a paper mill. Based on marketable skills, the contest asked students to consider their career ambitions and to draw a poster illustrating their goals and the skills they would need to achieve them. The contest drew dozens of creative entries. DeMario Thomas won first prize, receiving a \$500 U.S. Savings Bond. Four runners-up each received a \$100 U.S. Savings Bond. Sappi printed 2,000 copies of Thomas's poster, donating 1,500 copies to the five participating schools so they could be sold to raise funds.
- Following the series of hurricanes that devastated parts of southwestern Florida in 2004, the ManaTEEN Club, a youth service group in Manatee County, Florida,

seized upon an opportunity to serve. Its 11,000 members worked side-by-side with volunteers for AmeriCorps*VISTA, a government-sponsored program, and United Way, a nonprofit organization, to collect food and help find shelter for thousands of displaced neighbors.

All these local efforts, which span the nation and involve various sectors, were successful because the communities that led them believed in the power of the Five Promises to effect real change for children and youth. More importantly, the communities put their belief into action.

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