
Training A New Generation of Leaders

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Lamenting the lack of motivation and activism in young adults is a recurring theme among people involved in civics and politics. Is a new generation ready to take the mantle of leadership? Judging from voter participation, it appears that the answer is no.

Research shows that about 30 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds vote. The concern is that disengaged citizens will be less inclined to enter public service in any capacity, and consequently, some of the country's most capable citizens may miss an opportunity to serve. Giving back to the community is crucial and the key ingredient for a thriving civil society, which, in turn, helps improve the lives of all citizens.

Fortunately, not all young adults are apathetic, and one group in particular is making an effort to become civically engaged -- home-schoolers.

Home-schooling has a long history in America. Most of the founding generation of America was either home-schooled or received education in small neighborhood schools. But home-schooling had almost died out by the 1950s due to the modern public school system.

Home-schooling began to re-emerge as people on the secular left and those with religious convictions reacted against the one-size-fits-all approach of education and the lack of religious teaching in the public system. Home-schoolers fought hard in the 1980s to gain recognition for their method of education, and during the next 20 years persuaded courts and legislatures across the land to allow parents to home-school. Now home-schooling is coming full circle.

The purpose of a home education has always been to provide a quality education and to train active citizens. For home-school families made up of evangelical Christians, this means teaching biblical principles. One of these principles is to serve others.

Most home-school teenagers are, indeed, belying the stereotype of a disengaged younger generation and consequently are gaining the attention of the national media. ABC's "World News Tonight" recently visited the campus of Patrick Henry College in Purcellville, Va., where the weeklong Generation Joshua Summer Camp was being held.

Launched in spring 2004, Generation Joshua is a program developed by the Home School Legal Defense Association. It provides civics training to a new generation of home-schoolers. The camp focused on the need for civic engagement and taught the principles of the founding of the country.

Part of the camp program was a mock election campaign that featured press conferences, commercials, political parties, fundraising, primaries, debates and speeches. The 120 campers received a taste of the give-and-take of real campaigns, and the candidates had to think on their feet.

It is certainly unusual for teenagers to take a week out of their summer to learn about civic involvement, but the members of Generation Joshua have made a commitment to serve in whatever capacity they can to improve their communities.

Most home-school families have a keen awareness of history and hold a biblical worldview. As a result, the majority of the home-school community recognizes that if too many citizens disengage, then the freedoms and liberties we enjoy in this country could be lost.

Generation Joshua is an attempt to ensure that the new generation will be prepared. The program is growing rapidly, and there are now more than 2,000 members. It is hoped that thousands more teenagers will join Generation Joshua and gain a vision for civic action.

David Corwin, who attended this year's camp, captured the goal of Generation Joshua. About his experience, he said, "Generation Joshua camp inspired me to want to be a leader, not just a follower, to take an active role in local and national politics."

It is an open question how successful the new generation of home-schoolers will be, but it is certain that the homeschool community will rise to the challenge and play any role it can to provide sound leadership for the nation.

Note: For more information on Generation Joshua see: <http://www.generationjoshua.org/>. A Wichita chapter has been formed.