

Alumni Profile  
**Harishi Patel**

CivicWeek: Cincinnati 2003, CivicWeek Alumni Trip: Iowa 2003

Harishi Patel's life changed the day he watched the documentary "Invisible Children." The documentary, which portrays the suffering that a twenty-year civil war has inflicted upon the children of Uganda, presented Harishi with a choice. In his words, he could either simply continue down the path of being socially conscious of the world's problems, or he could act and do something about them.

Now a senior at the University of Illinois at Chicago, he has clearly chosen the latter. Harishi, along with a group of equally concerned friends from school, traveled to Uganda to better understand the situation there. While in Uganda, he was truly affected by the plight of the children. "All children have a right to live their lives free from the fear of being taken from their homes as they sleep at night," he said. "And all children deserve education, food, shelter, family and above all acknowledgment and appreciation."

Wanting to put a face to the statistics that, in Harishi's words, we are "constantly bombarded by in America, of people dying, of children with AIDS," he and his friends formed the organization Project FOCUS, which strives to give a voice to the children of Uganda, yearning to express themselves.

This summer, Harishi will travel with Project FOCUS back to Uganda, to the community of Lyantonde, a village devastated by poverty, AIDS, and, Harishi says, in need of a response that "extends beyond material support and touches upon the human need to share experiences with others." In the community, Project FOCUS plans to engage children orphaned by AIDS and other vulnerable children with fine-arts, music, photography, and

film projects mediated by art professionals and students from the U.S. and Uganda. "Art is a tool for listening," Harishi says. "It is also effective in conjuring the moral imagination, building an experiential reference for people to begin understanding the lives of these children."

Although Harishi now is engaged at an international level, his passion for civic engagement started in the U.S. with CEP on **CivicWeek: Cincinnati** in the spring of 2003, and the following winter on an alumni trip to Des Moines, Iowa. "I finally started to understand that each and every one of these social problems are inter-related," he said. "One cannot plan to alleviate poverty and not understand homelessness, public health, development aid, social entrepreneurship and other factors and how they are inter-related...CEP planted a seed of curiosity in my mind to ask relevant questions before always looking for solutions/ answers." To find out more about Project FOCUS, you can visit [www.projectfocus.org](http://www.projectfocus.org).



*"One voice can make a difference."*

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**CivicWeek: Chicago** students stop to pose for a picture.

THE CIVIC EDUCATION PROJECT

# Catalyst

CEP's Alumni Newsletter • June 2007

## A Commitment to Civic Engagement

Continuing to volunteer during college enriches students' experiences, makes a significant impact on communities, and promotes a positive image of young people



**CivicWeek: New York** students take a break on a local elementary school playground.

Many students manage to find time to volunteer in high school. While juggling AP classes, sports practice, writing for the school newspaper, SAT prep classes, and a part-time job, socially aware high school students somehow squeeze in volunteering amongst the chaos. Although some high school students have one eye on college admissions when they take time out of their busy lives to volunteer, most possess or develop a passion for engaging in their communities and a genuine desire to help others.

In the past, however, as many students left high school for college, finding time to volunteer fell by the wayside. With pressures to adjust to college life and meet new friends, volunteering in the community was not prioritized.

A recent study by the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency, shows that this trend might be changing. The report found that the number of college students volunteering from 2002-2005 increased substantially, from around 2.7 million per year to around 3.3 million per year. This change is hopeful for those that benefit from the generosity and ambition of college student volunteers, as well as for

college students worried about finding the time or drive to volunteer.

The exact causes of this surge in college student volunteers are unknown, but some speculate that contributing factors could be students who had their passion to volunteer spiked by 9-11, or the thousands of college student volunteers that aided in rebuilding the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina.

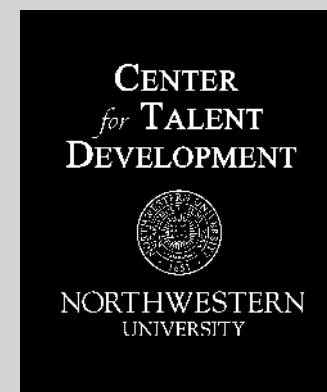
Whatever the causes, the effects are inspiring. More people that urgently need help are getting it, and students are enriching their college experiences through volunteer activities.

Many of you, having received your college acceptance letters this spring, will be embarking upon your own college experiences in the fall. Whether it is

**College students who work 1 to 10 hours per week part-time (46.4 percent) are more likely to volunteer than those who do not work at all (29.8 percent).**

through a volunteer organization at your college or university, or on a school break trip, the Civic Education Project hopes that you will continue your commitment to civic engagement and community service in college.

See the inside of this newsletter for tips on staying involved while in college, as well as common national volunteer organizations to look for on campus. CEP wishes you luck and happy volunteering.



# Spotlight on Service

## Organization Profiles

Although there will likely be many organizations at your college or university (or in the surrounding community) that can provide you with opportunities to volunteer and engage with your community, profiled below are several nationwide community service organizations that you can look for on campus, or even start up your own chapter.

### Habitat for Humanity

<http://www.habitat.org/youthprograms/campuschapters/>

Habitat for Humanity is an international non-profit agency, which seeks to eliminate poverty and homelessness by building affordable housing and selling it to impoverished families at no-profit. There are many area and campus chapters that focus on local building projects, advocacy projects, education, and fundraising efforts. To determine if your campus has an active chapter, or to start your own, check the web address listed above for more information and resources.

### UNICEF Campus Initiative

<http://www.unicefusa.org/campusinitiative>

A project of the U.S. branch of the United Nations Children's Fund, the UNICEF Campus Initiative encourages college students to become directly involved in the international effort to help the world's children survive and thrive. Campus initiatives often focus on educating students about UNICEF, advocating for UNICEF on campus, and fundraising efforts. Many colleges and universities already have branches active on campus. You can determine if your campus is active by checking the club membership link on the UNICEF website. If your campus is not listed, there is a straightforward application to start your own chapter found off of the Campus Initiative website (web address above).

### Campus Kitchens

<http://www.campuskitchens.org/>

Campus Kitchens is a small but growing program on college campuses nationwide. The concept is driven by its simplicity and sensibility. On participating campuses, students work to recycle unused food from their cafeterias, turn this food into nourishing meals through simple preparation and cooking, and deliver this food to those who need it most in their communities. The students also use the kitchen space to teach culinary skills to unemployed or poverty stricken men and women in their communities. The program not only benefits those who get a hot and nourishing meal from it, but also the students whose ingenuity and hard work result in life-changing skills and experiences. To see if your college or university has a chapter, or to start your own, visit the web address above. (For those still in high school, the program encourages students to start programs in high schools as well).

### Break Away Alternative School Breaks

<http://www.alternativebreaks.org/>

Increasingly popular among college students, Break Away, and many other similar organizations nationwide, promote alternative school break trips on which students participate in intensive community service. The trips usually have a thematic focus, and students return from the trips with enhanced knowledge and experience about an issue, along with a desire to continue community service. Virtually any issue or area that students are passionate about is likely to have a trip that focuses on that issue. By giving up school break time that could otherwise be spent on the beach tanning, or indoors playing video games, college students promote a positive image of youth. To find out about trips, or to see if your school has a chapter, visit the web address above.

# How to stay active volunteering in college

**Make volunteering a part of your weekly schedule:** It is easy to make excuses about not having the time to do volunteer work. Tests, papers, jobs, and having a social life can all seem overwhelming, and fitting one more activity in can often seem close to impossible. By making volunteering a part of your weekly schedule, it becomes a part of your routine, and thus harder to forget about or put off until later. If possible, try to volunteer with one organization at a certain time every week; you will build a relationship with the organization and the people who volunteer there, as well as make volunteering a part of your everyday life.

**Choose a volunteer opportunity that matches your interests:** There are literally more volunteer opportunities in more areas of interest than you can imagine. Whether you care about politics, the environment, animal rights, poverty, youth issues, education, or homelessness, there are likely to be several volunteer opportunities in your area that relate to your interests. Think about your

interests, what you are passionate about, or one problem that you would really like to see addressed in society, and find a volunteer opportunity to match it. Your college or university can be a great resource to help you find volunteer opportunities that match your interests. Checking with the university's career services or searching their website for "volunteer opportunities" can be good places to start. To find volunteer opportunities in your area and tailored to your interests, you may also want to search [www.ideal-ist.org](http://www.ideal-ist.org), [www.servenet.org](http://www.servenet.org), [www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org), or [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov).

**Volunteer with friends:** This simple step can be the key to keeping you involved throughout your college career. Volunteering with a group of friends makes the experience more fun and combines activism with social life. It can also be a great way to get to know new friends better and meet new people. Your friends can also serve as a support network, encouraging each other to keep volunteering and staying active.

"I constantly try to burst my own small, naive bubble so I can try to have more compassion, and sympathy towards others. It is very important that at this young age that we are constantly in the position of a learner, but at the same time not afraid to act if opportunity provides itself. I feel that "Hit and Run" way of helping has created more problems than solutions, and so commitment to one community is much more important than the mindset of "saving the world." We should not wait until we get our degrees to act, if it is hard to help now, then it will only get harder when we have a degree, a house, a car, a partner and such. My decision to act and volunteer has made my college experience more phenomenal than I ever could have imagined."—Harishi Patel, 2003 CivicWeek: Cincinnati (See CEP Alumni Profile on back)

Want to stay in touch with other CEP alumni and receive periodic updates from CEP? Join the **Facebook** group made especially for CEP alums, "The Civic Education Project - CEP," friend Ed Civic (CEP's Facebook profile), or visit CEP's myspace profile at [www.myspace.com/nucep](http://www.myspace.com/nucep).

The Civic Education Project (CEP) combines traditional education and community service to promote civic responsibility among young people, giving them the knowledge, experience and leadership skills they need to make a positive impact on society.

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