



## **Shelton Teens Have Resources to Develop Talents**

The lawn and garden section of your favorite hardware store offers a variety of seed packets, each brightly depicting the type of flower contained inside. If you fertilize, water, and weed the planted seeds regularly, in time you'll have a flower bed full of beautiful Daisies, Marigolds, or Geraniums. The same is true of teenagers. If they receive love, support, a good education and guidance from caring adults in their lives, they will grow up to be strong and vibrant individuals. But without nurturing, there is no guarantee they will bloom successfully on their own.

A recent study by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a national anti-crime nonprofit organization, says that between the hours of 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. are when many teen crimes are committed. "Quality youth development programs can cut crime immediately and transform this prime time for juvenile crime into hours of academic enrichment, wholesome fun and community service," the report states.

Children involved in quality after school programs interact with positive role models in a safe environment where they can develop their interests and abilities. In Shelton, one organization reflects this type of community support system: SOCK (Save Our County's Kids). Founded in 1997 in response to rising gang activity which led to the tragic death of an area teen, SOCK provides "positive living and learning alternatives for local youth at risk."

SOCK's new Youth Philanthropy program and their ongoing YES! (Youth Empowerment Strategies) programs are examples of people taking action to safeguard their children and prevent further corrosion of their community.

The Youth Philanthropy program offers teens the opportunity to experience the transformative effects of giving; to become givers rather than takers not only by looking for opportunities to help others but also by participating in making micro-grants to other teens from a youth-advised fund. According to SOCK founder and Executive Director, Sue Sheldon, this program will provide the means for these kids to manifest their visions.

The YES! recording studio allows kids to explore the world of audio engineering and video production. Students have worked on bicycle safety videos, documentaries and an upcoming CD of local musicians, which program director Michael Diamond says captures the richness and diversity of the community.

Last summer the Bicycle Alliance of Washington started providing broken bikes and parts to the Bike Shop where volunteers teach the youth how to build functional bikes which are then donated to people who need, but cannot afford them.

The greenhouse project, taught at the Fir Lane Health & Rehabilitation Center in Shelton, gives kids an opportunity to develop a green thumb. Once their plants begin to grow, the kids deliver them to Fir Lane residents, giving them the opportunity to develop relationships with the elders.

These programs provide the youth of Shelton and surrounding Mason County with a vital source of education, positive reinforcement and with safe and structured opportunities to nourish their minds, build their character, and develop their talents – something every young seedling needs in order to grow up strong.

If you are looking for organizations like this to volunteer your time with, or if your volunteer organization is looking for training or support, please contact the Volunteer Center of Lewis, Mason, and Thurston Counties at 360-741-2622 or visit us at [www.volunteer.ws](http://www.volunteer.ws).