

# CATCH THE SPIRIT!



A Student's Guide to  
Community Service



Prudential

Presented in cooperation with The U. S. Department of Education

# CATCH THE SPIRIT!

Ideas and information on how young people can help make their communities better places to live.

In this fast-paced world of in-line skating and online computers, it's surprising there's time for you to attend classes, do homework, hold down a part-time job, take part in extracurricular activities and set aside time for fun and relaxation with family and friends.

Yet despite busy schedules, many young people like you are concerned about what's going on in their neighborhoods and communities, and are looking for ways to get involved. Here are some facts:

- In a recent survey of nearly 1,000 young people commissioned by Prudential, 95 percent of those interviewed support volunteering.
- Almost two-thirds of those respondents said that individual responsibility is the best way to solve community problems.
- Sixty-seven percent indicated that they devote some of their time to volunteer activities.



Why are so many students interested in serving their communities? Because they want to:

- make a difference
- develop new skills
- explore career paths
- have fun working with friends
- feel good about themselves

Although the efforts of one person may seem small, young people throughout America continue to discover that millions of individual volunteers can create a revolution of sorts. And as public, private and corporate funding declines, volunteering may help save vital community programs and services.

Whatever your reason for volunteering, once involved, it's easy to get hooked—to “catch the spirit” of community involvement. Volunteering can expand your horizons and become a satisfying, lifelong commitment.

## What's right for me?

You may make an instant decision to volunteer in your community. But don't be hasty in selecting a project or organization. First and foremost, take time to learn about groups, ideas and causes that interest you.

Before choosing an activity, consider the following:

- What community or neighborhood problems concern you?
- Does volunteering for one of these groups fit your own interests?

There are many reasons to volunteer. But one should be universal—volunteer for something you can enjoy. As you search for the “right” volunteer activity, ask yourself:

- How much time do I have to commit?
- What talents or skills do I offer?
- What do I want to get out of my involvement?
- Will I enjoy this type of service?

Don't limit your thinking. You may prefer the more structured approach of a larger group or the “family” feeling of a smaller organization. Perhaps you want to create your own volunteer activity by engaging your friends or family, or maybe just work alone on a project. When you've selected or narrowed your volunteer interests, you may want to talk to your parents, friends, a teacher or club sponsor, a counselor or someone at your church or synagogue. They might have suggestions on how to go about making it happen. Call organizations and local government offices that offer services to the public. Read your local newspaper. Watch and listen to the television and radio news for ideas.

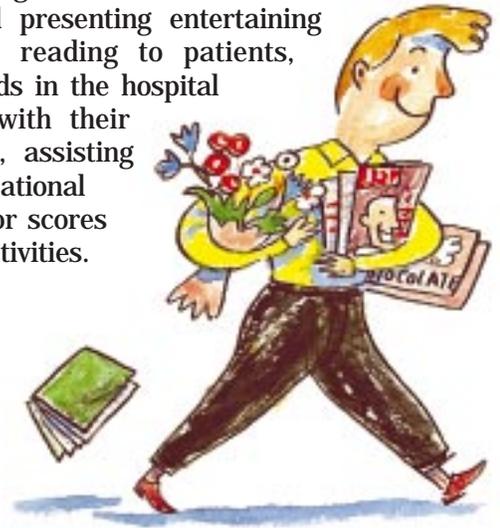
After you've made a choice, commit yourself to it. Give it your energy—and adequate time—to determine if it's a good fit.

### **What can a volunteer do?**

This information can help serve as a compass to point you to some of the many possibilities for volunteering. Combine these suggestions with your own ideas and creativity—and go for it.

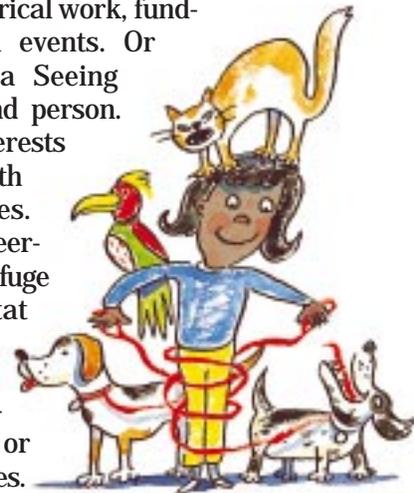
### **A PRESCRIPTION FOR SATISFACTION**

So the medical or health-care field intrigues you. Take heart, opportunities abound. Consider volunteering at a local blood bank, a medical clinic for the poor, a nursing home, an emergency medical squad, a children's or veterans' hospital, a cancer or AIDS hospice. Volunteering may mean working in the office, delivering flowers, magazines and snacks, developing and presenting entertaining programs, reading to patients, helping kids in the hospital keep up with their homework, assisting with recreational activities or scores of other activities.



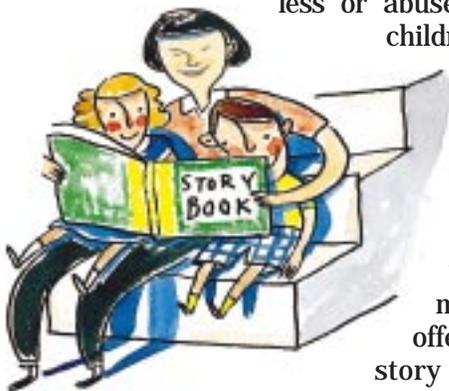
### **ANIMAL MAGNETISM**

If animals are your passion, here's a flock of ideas. Check with your local zoo, animal shelter or humane society. Volunteer chores can include cleaning cages, feeding and exercising the “residents,” clerical work, fund-raising or special events. Or consider raising a Seeing Eye dog for a blind person. Perhaps your interests are more in tune with endangered species. Think about volunteering at a wildlife refuge or nature habitat where you can steer your commitment to awareness campaigns or fund-raising activities.



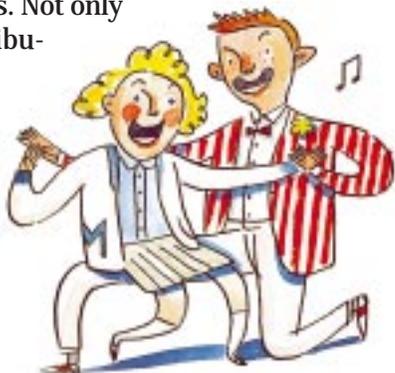
## YOU'RE READING OUR MIND

If you enjoy reading, you've got a skill that's easy to share. Community shelters (for the homeless or abused) often house children who are as hungry for fun and stories as for a square meal. Libraries, children's hospitals or wards may jump at the offer of organized story hours. On a more personal level, you can read to an elderly neighbor or someone who is blind. Or check into a local organization that needs readers for a "talking books" program. Volunteers are often needed for literacy programs, such as the *America Reads Challenge* and *Read\*Write\*Now!*, tutoring younger students or helping immigrants learn English.



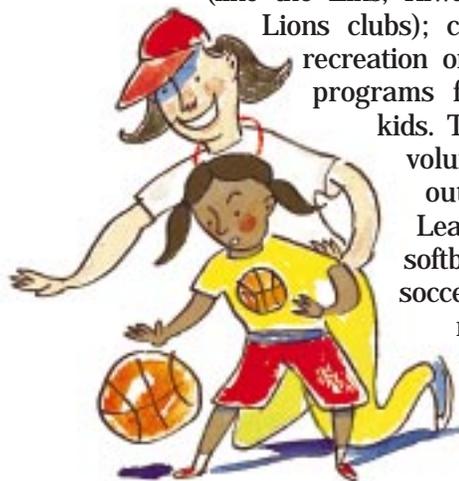
## CURTAIN UP, LIGHT THE LIGHTS

Young volunteers with an interest in the arts can share those talents, as individuals or in a group. Check with senior centers, shelters or day-care programs, local parks or recreation programs. Offer to serve as an usher at a community theater or help find stage props and costumes. Or offer assistance at an arts center or a local art gallery. Develop skits, musical revues, magic shows, prepare readings or other entertainment you can present at senior citizen homes, hospitals or other places. Not only does your contribution help keep cash-strapped arts alive in your community, but it also helps build a lifelong appreciation for the arts and brings enjoyment to many.



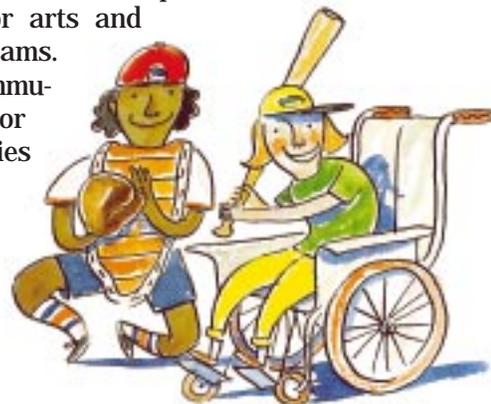
## SOME SPORTING GOOD IDEAS

Share your athletic talent and interest as a coach or coaching assistant in sports or recreational activities. "Help wanted" signs are often posted at volunteer organizations serving people with mental or physical challenges; YMCA, YWCA or Red Cross chapters; local civic organizations (like the Elks, Kiwanis, Rotary or Lions clubs); city parks; and recreation or neighborhood programs for low-income kids. They often seek volunteers to help out with Little League, swimming, softball, basketball, soccer, tennis, gymnastics or other recreational activities.



## APPLY YOUR ABILITIES TO DISABILITIES

Be a special friend to people with mental or physical disabilities. Not only will your skills contribute to the programs, but you may help change public perception about people who have special challenges. Volunteer for local, regional or state Special Olympics competitions held in many communities. Local groups and residential facilities often need volunteer help with field trips to museums and amusement parks, recreation and sports activities, or arts and crafts programs. Contact community centers or other facilities for disabled persons, or ask your mayor's office for options.

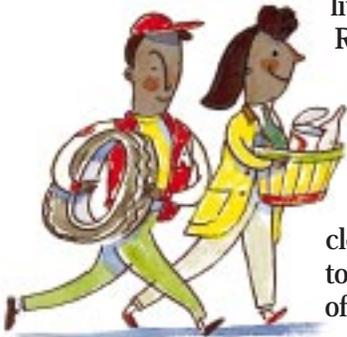


## PROTECT THE PLANET—RECYCLE

---

Concern about our environment is serious stuff. And your commitment can start right at home. If you're not doing it now, start recycling your own newspapers, glass and aluminum at home. And then get your neighbors involved. If your school doesn't have a recycling program, talk with your teachers or principal about getting one started. Companies supplying your school cafeteria might lend a hand in this effort. Or consider adopting your block, a local park or common area. Recruit some friends and pick up litter on a regular basis. Recycle what you can.

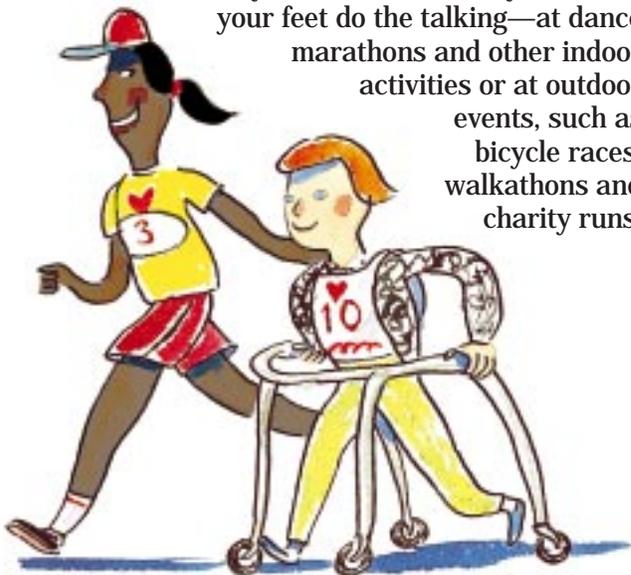
Any money from recycling can be pumped back into your effort or given to a favorite charity. Having a cleaner neighborhood or town is an important part of protecting our planet.



## HEART AND SOLE

---

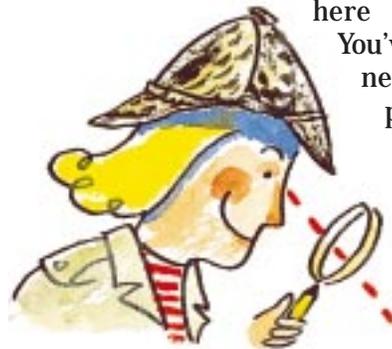
Perhaps you don't want to take on the responsibility of organizing and planning. There are other ways to help your favorite causes. There are many activities in which you can let your feet do the talking—at dance marathons and other indoor activities or at outdoor events, such as bicycle races, walkathons and charity runs.



## BE A CRIME FIGHTER

---

If you have an interest in police work as a career or are concerned about crime in your community, here are some ideas.



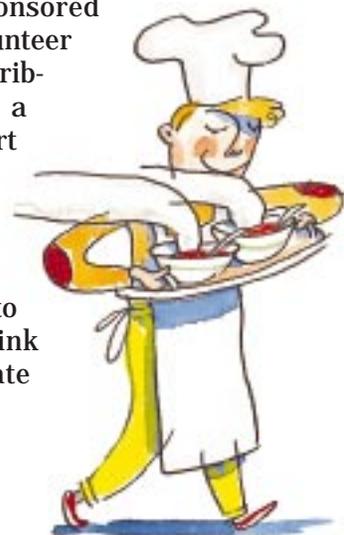
You've probably heard of neighborhood watch programs in residential areas. How about developing a school watch program? Talk with your principal or school counselor about establish-

ing a student patrol that keeps an eye out for, and reports, theft, graffiti and other crimes in your school. Contact your local police department to see if you can help develop or get involved in a student-watch program, or participate in a program to eliminate graffiti in your community or on public transportation.

## MANY IN NEED, INDEED

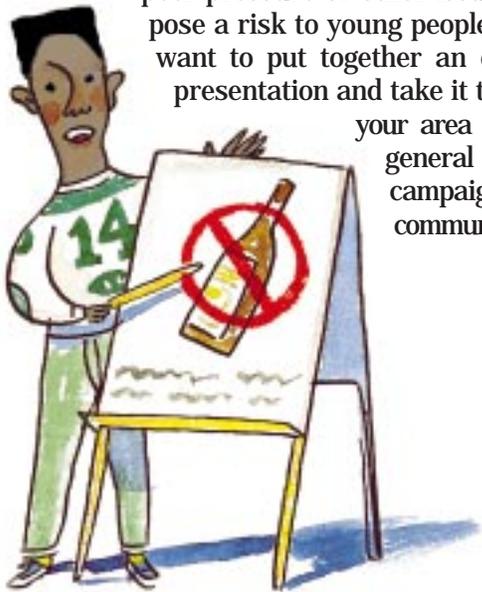
---

Perhaps you've been concerned about homeless or needy people. Their needs are many—from shelter to food and clothing. Community projects and church-affiliated organizations such as Habitat for Humanity need volunteers to construct housing for the poor. Contact community or church-sponsored soup kitchens and volunteer to help prepare or distribute food. Suggest that a school play or concert charge admission of canned foods that can be donated to a food pantry or soup kitchen. Initiate a campaign to recycle food and drink containers and donate the money to a local food bank.



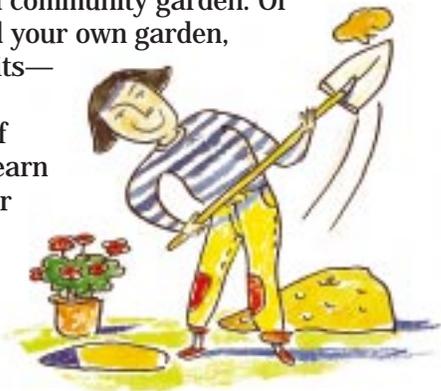
## SPREAD THE WORD

Perhaps you'd like to warn fellow students about drug or alcohol abuse, AIDS, negative peer pressure or other issues that can pose a risk to young people. You might want to put together an educational presentation and take it to schools in your area or launch a general awareness campaign in your community.



## BEAUTIFY YOUR TOWN

Here are some earthy ideas to sink your hands into. Your local parks department may welcome an offer to plant trees and flowers in public parks, along walkways or in downtown areas. Talk to your principal about beautifying your school grounds. Local environmental groups, landscaping companies or the National Arbor Day Foundation (located in Nebraska City, Nebraska) often give away tree seedlings. Planting flowers for an elderly neighbor can bring a lot of happiness to them—and you! A local low-income housing project may need some help in a community garden. Or plant and tend your own garden, selling the fruits—more likely vegetables—of your labor to earn money for your favorite charity or a food bank.



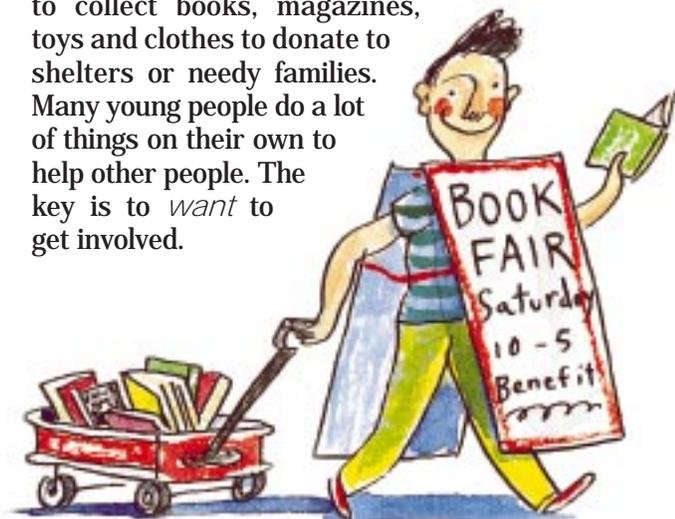
## KIDS ARE YOUR THING

If you like helping other kids, or are considering a teaching career, volunteering can work for you. Local camps, especially those for low-income youngsters or kids who are ill, need counselors and tutors. Children's hospitals, low-income day-care centers and shelters, programs for "latchkey" kids, homework tutoring phone lines, or Big Brother or Sister programs are only a few ideas. If you like working with your hands, help clear and build a neighborhood playground for other kids. Some local city or county courtrooms are interested in activities for children who must come to court with a parent; ask about setting up a room with books and toys, and volunteer to help care for these children.



## YOUR OWN SPECIAL BRAND OF HELP

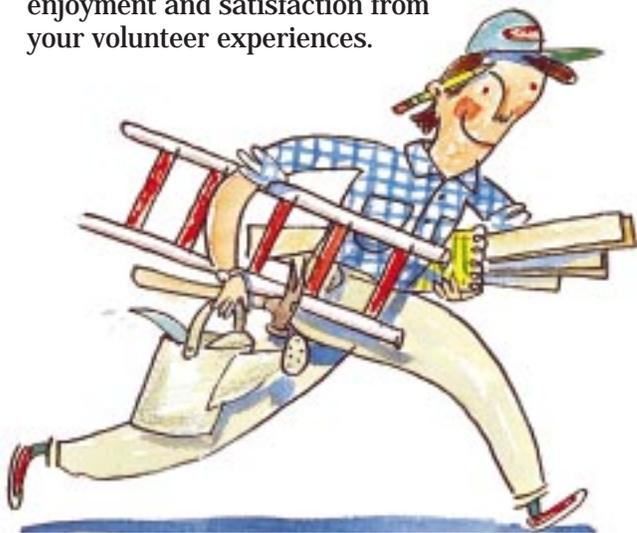
If you want to do something in your own special way, put on your creative thinking cap. On your own, or with a few friends, you can raise money for your favorite cause through bake sales, car washes and garage sales. Or organize a drive to collect books, magazines, toys and clothes to donate to shelters or needy families. Many young people do a lot of things on their own to help other people. The key is to *want* to get involved.



## Do's & Don'ts of Successful Volunteering

---

- Do be flexible. It is rare to find the “perfect” fit right away. Keep an open mind—you might discover something new that interests you.
- Do be persistent. Volunteer coordinators are often busy, so don't assume they're not interested in you if they don't call you right away.
- Do attend orientation meetings. Keep in mind that informed volunteers are the best volunteers. These meetings will help you do the best job possible.
- Do take necessary training classes. Ask about them before you decide to get involved and be prepared to learn what will be needed.
- Do be responsible. Show up on time and follow through with your commitments. People will be depending on you.
- Don't expect to start at the top. You have to work hard and prove your worth before you are given more responsibility.
- Don't think that volunteering has to be a group effort. You can start your own volunteer program and do it on your own time.
- Do expect to get plenty of personal enjoyment and satisfaction from your volunteer experiences.



## Local Resources for Volunteer Ideas

---

- Principal, counselor, teacher
- Churches and synagogues
- Organizations such as United Way—and their many affiliates
- Mayor's office
- Civic groups, such as the Elks, Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions clubs
- Local arts centers, community theaters
- Food pantries, shelters for the homeless and battered women
- Zoos, animal shelters, conservation groups
- Hospitals, hospices, nursing homes
- Residential facilities for disabled persons or abused children
- Newspapers, television and radio
- Schools and libraries
- Local community and volunteer centers

*We hope this booklet has given you some ideas for volunteer service and information on where to find the organizations in need of young volunteers. There is little doubt that your help is needed, whether in your school, your neighborhood or city, or through your church or synagogue. Match your interests with the many volunteer opportunities available.*

*If you are still stumped, on the next page is a list of some national service organizations that offer information on youth volunteering. Write or call them for additional ideas.*

*Ready, set, go—Catch the Spirit of volunteerism!*

*Arthur F. Ryan*

Arthur F. Ryan  
Chairman and  
Chief Executive Officer  
The Prudential Insurance  
Company of America

*Richard W. Riley*

Richard W. Riley  
U.S. Secretary of Education

# National Organizations with Information for Young Volunteers

---

## **America's Charities**

12701 Fair Lakes Circle, Suite 370, Fairfax, VA 22033  
800-458-9505  
<http://www.charities.org>

## **American National Red Cross**

National Office of Volunteers  
8111 Gatehouse Road, Falls Church, VA 22042  
(703) 206-7410  
<http://www.redcross.org>

## **Boys & Girls Clubs of America**

1230 West Peachtree Street, N.W., Atlanta, GA 30309  
800-854-CLUB  
<http://www.bgca.org>

## **Child Welfare League of America**

440 First Street, N.W., Third Floor, Washington, DC 20001-2085  
(202) 638-2952  
<http://www.cwla.org>

## **Corporation for National Service**

1201 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20525  
(202) 606-5000  
<http://www.nationalservice.org>

## **Earth Force**

1908 Mt. Vernon Avenue, Second Floor, Alexandria, VA 22301  
(703) 299-9400  
<http://www.earthforce.org>

## **Habitat for Humanity International**

121 Habitat Street, Americus, GA 31709  
(912) 924-6935  
<http://www.habitat.org>

## **National Crime Prevention Council**

Teen Crime in the Community, Youth as Resources  
1700 K Street, N.W., Second Floor, Washington, DC 20006-3817  
(202) 466-6272  
<http://www.ncpc.org>

## **National 4-H Council**

7100 Connecticut Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD 20815  
(301) 961-2973  
<http://www.fourhcouncil.edu>

## **Points of Light Foundation**

1737 H Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20006  
(202) 223-9186  
<http://www.pointsoflight.org>

## **Quest International**

Lions/Quest Skills for Action  
1984 Coffman Road, Newark, OH 43058  
800-446-2700  
<http://www.quest.edu>

## **YMCA of the USA**

101 North Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60606  
(312) 977-0031  
<http://www.ymca.net>

## **Youth Volunteer Corps of America**

6310 Lamar Avenue, Suite 125, Overland Park, KS 66202-4247  
(913) 432-YVCA



This booklet was produced by The Prudential Insurance Company of America in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Education. It is part of The Prudential Spirit of Community Initiative, which seeks to promote community involvement by young people throughout the United States. The initiative also includes:

### **The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards,**

a national recognition program that honors young people in middle and high school grades for outstanding, self-initiated community service. Applications are accepted each fall through participating schools, and awards are presented at the local, state and national levels. The top two youth volunteers in each state receive \$1,000, a handsome silver medallion and a trip to Washington, D.C., and the top ten national winners receive an additional \$5,000 and a crystal trophy for their schools. The program is conducted in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

**The Prudential Youth Leadership Institute,** a unique leadership and service training program for high school students. The Institute features an innovative curriculum developed by the Center for Creative Leadership and is offered in communities throughout the United States by affiliates of Youth Service America and the Points of Light Foundation.

For more information, write to:

**The Prudential Spirit of Community Initiative**  
751 Broad Street, 16th Floor  
Newark, NJ 07102-3777

Or visit our Internet site at:

**<http://www.prudential.com/community>**

For additional copies of this booklet, write to:  
The Consumer Information Center  
Dept. 506E  
Pueblo, CO 81009

Copyright 1998 The Prudential Insurance Company of America. This booklet may be photocopied provided appropriate credit is given to Prudential.

U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, invites you to join thousands of member organizations in the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education through initiatives such as the *America Reads Challenge* and *America Goes Back to School*. These efforts encourage all of us to get involved in mentoring and volunteer activities to support children's learning. For information, call 1-800-USA-LEARN or visit [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) on the Web.

15N121W



Printed on recycled paper.

Presented in cooperation with  
The U. S. Department of Education



**Prudential**