

# DAILY NEWS

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## Charity needs pros

By **JOSIAH BROWN**

**L**AST FALL, my friend Peter decided to embark on a two-year Presbyterian mission to what was then Zaire.

He had been running an after-school program for Latino children in Brooklyn and was seeking further experience more directly connected to his religious calling. Undeterred by the recent civil war in Congo, he is now studying French in West Africa and looks forward to his mission.

A striking number of my contemporaries share Peter's ability, idealism and deep commitment to serving others. Indeed, the recent murders of Jonathan Levin and Ennis Cosby have highlighted how many of these idealists — some from privileged backgrounds — are drawn, for instance, to teaching.

In the wake of hoopla over Colin Powell's admirable effort to expand volunteerism, we should recognize the extensive opportunities — and need — for full-time public service.

President Clinton's pet AmeriCorps reflects this need, as does the persistence of alarming socioeconomic inequality and other problems. Many gifted twentysomethings are responding to the challenge, belying the glib assumption that "Generation X" is characterized by materialistic self-absorption.

My friends include Lisa, who has toiled five years for a grass-roots Kentucky environmental and community development group; Katy, who founded a homeless shelter for women; Earl, who launched a foundation to provide mentoring and tutoring to African-American children, and Jerine, a clinical psychologist who has worked with incarcerated

teenagers and the mentally ill.

Clearly, as in the 1960s and other eras, a substantial core of young adults are devoting their lives to their communities. Yet as these examples show, volunteers, while necessary, are insufficient.

Nearly every effective charitable enterprise depends on a professional infrastructure, even if just one or two people. Someone must be able to lead, and take responsibility for, an organization. Someone must plot strategy, manage a budget, supervise volunteers. Our society's needs are too profound for voluntary activities alone to satisfy.

Even as government is cutting back, a combination of public and private resources is still required to meet those needs. Full-time practitioners of service have to live, willing as they are to forgo the lucrative salaries their education could yield in the private sector. As taxpayers and as private donors, we should accept the reality of those costs.

For now, Peter can subsist on his Presbyterian Church stipend. But over the longer term, if he is to teach and counsel kids; if Lisa is to continue her advocacy on behalf of Appalachian families; if Earl is to grow his foundation into a major vehicle for equal opportunity, sources of support will be crucial.

To enable enough dedicated people to pursue careers in service, it will take a partnership — government, foundations, businesses and private charities — together underwriting missions that can build a better world.