



TAG in Action: The Power of One College Student

As part of its national call to action, **Adolescent Health: Think, Act, Grow**[®] (TAG), the Office of Adolescent Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has identified a number of successful strategies for improving adolescent health. This includes our “Power of One” series about individual efforts to support young people.

The Inspiration

On his way home from school one day, Rodney Smith, a student at Alabama A&M University, saw an elderly man struggling to mow his lawn and decided to help. Smith set a goal to mow 40 lawns for those without the ability or means to do it themselves. Exceeding expectations, he reached his goal within a month and ultimately completed 100 lawns. Smith saw the positive impact volunteering had on his life, and he realized that something as simple as yard maintenance could help his community raise boys that would become positive adults.

Taking Action

After completing the 100 lawns, Rodney started the *Raising Men Lawn Care Service*. Young men and young women volunteer to provide lawn care services to the elderly, disabled, veterans and single mothers. They mow, rake leaves or shovel snow. The first few lawns often seem like work to the youth, but Smith noticed that once a volunteer mows their fifth lawn they are energized and often request more work. He developed an incentive for youth similar to the karate belt system. The volunteers receive different colored t-shirts as they reach milestones of providing lawn services to 10, 20, 30, 40 or 50 people. The highest level, 50, is a black shirt.

To date, about 60 youth and young adults have volunteered for *Raising Men Lawn Care Service* in the Huntsville, Alabama area. Raising Men has also started chapters across seven states and in Smith’s home country of Bermuda. A few months ago, Smith decided to expand his reach even further and issued a “50-lawn challenge” to kids worldwide via Facebook. Kids can sign up by sending a picture mowing their first lawn. As they reach a particular milestone, Smith sends them the corresponding t-shirt. Once they hit 50 lawns, he will personally fly to deliver their black shirt. Already, two young people have surpassed 50 yards and gone on reach 100. More than 120 youth have signed up nationwide.

Making A Difference

Smith says that *Raising Men* is able to keep youth on a positive path by helping them gain a sense of accomplishment, self-esteem, moral value and purpose. “After having such a great experience myself, I wanted to show kids that helping people is cool. I wanted to mentor and demonstrate the importance of giving back to community. I’m able to help, and if you are able, then you should do something to make a difference for someone else. And you can even do it through a lawn mower!”

Contact

For more information:
https://www.facebook.com/pg/raisingmenlawncarehsv/about/?ref=page_internal

