had tested positive for HIV. The announcement stunned the nation, as AIDS and HIV were relatively unknown at the time, and Johnson was one of the nation’s most beloved superstars. Johnson made the announcement with uncommon courage, dignity, and maturity, choosing to emphasize the good he could do with his celebrity status rather than his own personal tragedy: “It’s God’s way. He is now directing me to become a teacher, to carry the message about AIDS to everyone. . . . I think I can spread the message about AIDS better than almost anyone. I’m a super-strong person, physically and emotionally (1991, p. 25).”

More than 13 years after making his announcement, Magic Johnson continues to be an advocate for AIDS awareness and prevention. His story has inspired millions, but has it served to recruit people to volunteer to help people with AIDS? Research by Penner and Fritzshce (1993) provides some answers. Just weeks before Johnson made his disclosure, these investigators had conducted a study in which they asked college students how willing they were to help an HIV-positive person. Taking advantage of a natural event, the investigators then repeated their study at three more time intervals: one week after Johnson’s disclosure, two and a half months after his announcement, and four and a half months after his disclosure. Figure 12.11 presents some of the data from this study. Two effects are apparent. First, Johnson’s announcement had little effect on the volunteerism of female participants. Among males, however, there was a dramatic increase in volunteerism one week after Johnson’s announcement. Although the rates of volunteerism declined in the months ahead, they remained far above the level found during the initial assessment period. These findings show that a positive role model can increase volunteerism rates.

Former president Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, provide further evidence that role models can increase volunteerism. Every year since 1984, the Carters have helped to build homes in poverty-stricken areas as members of an organization called Habitat for Humanity (www.habitat.org). The public’s response to this well-publicized effort has been dramatic: Many people who had never volunteered before have followed the Carters’ lead.