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# Service-Learning in Out-of-School Programs

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## Recommended Citation

Lossli, Saren, "Service-Learning in Out-of-School Programs" (1999). *Guides*. Paper 5.  
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# Service-Learning In Out-Of-School Programs

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# Service-Learning in Out-of-School Programs

## I. Needs/Interests/Resources Assessment

- Who does service-learning or service projects in their program?
- What sort of projects have you done/do you do?
- What brought you to this workshop?

## II. Memory Exercise *(participants discuss in pairs or threes, then share with the larger group)*

- What kind of service did you do as a child? Service can mean informal service (like helping your mom or an elderly neighbor), formal service (like helping at a soup kitchen) and service leadership (like planning and directing service projects).
- What did the service you did in your youth mean to you? How do you think it affected who you are today?

## III. What kinds of “learning” opportunities can “service-learning” offer in out-of-school time programs?

Young people can find great satisfaction and wonderful learning opportunities in planning and participating in community service. Schools around the country have integrated the concept of service-learning into their regular curriculum, connecting it to academic subjects. But learning can be combined with service with or without an academic focus. Participating in service can offer young people opportunities to learn about:

- **awareness**
- **teamwork**
- **responsibility**
- **compassion**
- **citizenship**

As youth help plan and execute service projects, they are presented with excellent opportunities to develop:

- **leadership**
- **research skills**
- **public speaking abilities**
- **project management skills**

Out-of-school programs can be the perfect setting for service that is connected to both academic and non-academic learning opportunities.

## IV. What is service-learning? What is the difference between “service” and “service-learning”?

### Definition of Service-Learning:

In the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, service-learning is defined as an educational method:

- “under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community;
- “which is coordinated within an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program [including out-of-school programs], and with the community;
- “which helps foster civic responsibility;
- “which is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, **or** the educational components of the program in which the participant is enrolled; and
- “which provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience.”

*(some emphasis and clarifications added)*

According to this definition, some of the main components of service-learning are:

- **active participation**
- **meeting real needs**
- **fostering of civic responsibility**
- **integration of educational objectives**
- **structured reflection**

### Difference between “service” and “service-learning”

Community service becomes “service-learning” when those leading the service consciously draw out and build on the learning opportunities inherent in hands-on service activities. Regular service projects are transformed into service-learning when the academic and social skills involved in planning and performing projects are emphasized and youth are engaged in reflection on their actions.

<p><b>Service = ACTION</b></p>	<p><b>Service-Learning = ACTION PRECEDED BY CAREFUL PLANNING; ACTION COMBINED WITH REFLECTION; THOUGHTFUL ACTION: ACTIVE YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING AND ACTION</b></p>
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## V. Why is service-learning important?

### Children need more opportunities to give, to develop skills, to do meaningful activities, to develop strong relationships

According to extensive research done in support of the Presidents' Summit on America's Future, kids need five resources in order to be successful:

- An ongoing relationship with a caring adult -- parent, mentor, tutor or coach
- A safe place with structured activities during non-school hours
- A healthy start
- A marketable skill through effective education
- An opportunity to give back through community service

Just as much as they need help from adults to have meaningful relationships, safe places, health, and marketable skills, young people need help from adults to find ways to take responsibility and become contributing members of their community. Just like adults, children, especially as they grow older, desperately need to feel like they have a place in this world, that they matter, that they can make a difference.

According to a recent report by the Search Institute, "Young people say they have few opportunities to contribute. One of the scarcest assets among 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> graders is the opportunity to be resources to their communities. Only 25% of 100,000 youth surveyed during the 96-97 school year said they have many opportunities to contribute."

Children who are involved in meaningful service activities typically have high self-esteem, good teamwork skills, strong leadership skills and a sense of connection with their community.

## VI. Benefits of Service-Learning

### Some benefits for Children

- Gives young people more opportunities to do something REAL
- Helps them learn to be citizens of their community
- Builds research and planning skills
- Builds teamwork skills
- Builds social skills
- Builds responsibility and awareness
- Offers the opportunity to experience the joy of completing something tangible and feeling good about meaningful accomplishments
- It's FUN (provided that the service is well-planned and age-appropriate)

**Some benefits to your program:**

- Positive publicity for what you are doing with kids
- Opportunities to build good will with those you work with (such as the building custodian as kids help with a cleaning project, schoolteachers as kids do something special for their teachers, etc.)
- Stronger curriculum, increasing interesting activities and options for kids
- Staff excitement about doing something new and meaningful
- Parental and school involvement (Many programs get parents and others involved in their program for the first time when they ask for help with a service-learning project. After this first time, many want to stay involved.)

**Some benefits to your community:**

- Really help make your community better, meet real needs
- Build mutually beneficial and lasting relationships in your community

## **VII. Eight Keys to Effective Project Planning**

### **Choose Appropriate Projects**

- Younger children respond well to projects that have quick and tangible results and involve a lot of action (like picking up trash, doing a performance for elderly people, writing letters to soldiers over-seas).
- Older children often enjoy longer-term projects that allow them to get to know those they are serving. Involve older children in brainstorming and researching project ideas. Give them specific roles in planning and executing the project.

### **Keep It Simple**

Meaningful service-learning opportunities do not need to involve extensive planning, complicated transportation, or many materials. Projects can be simple, tangible and focused and can take place in walking distance from your site or right at your site.

### **Have Children and Youth Help Plan and Execute Projects**

In an age-appropriate manner, actively involve youth of all ages in planning and executing service-learning projects. Children can help with every step of the planning and execution of almost any project. Project planning offers youth excellent opportunities to develop research, strategic planning, and other important life skills.

- Discuss community needs and encourage youth to think about the resources and abilities they have that could meet needs they see.
- Younger children may need you to offer them concrete ideas and options about appropriate service projects. Older children can take more of a leadership role in brainstorming and researching ideas.
- Following are ideas of specific ways that youth can be involved:
  - ⇒ making phone calls (finding a project, coordinating logistics, asking questions about needs, times, dates, etc.)

## Service-Learning Module

- ⇒ thinking about what materials are needed to complete the project (using math skills to figure out quantities needed)
- ⇒ obtaining materials (getting donations, going with staff to purchase supplies, etc.)
- ⇒ dividing up work (deciding who should do what and when it needs to be done)

### **Develop Partnerships**

Set up a partnership with a local service agency such as:

- a local volunteer center
- community center
- food bank
- nursing home
- homeless shelter
- hospital

Invite a representative to come and talk with youth about the work of their organization and about the needs the organization tries to meet. Young people can "adopt" a group and develop meaningful relationships as they serve the same people again and again. Have youth suggest types of organizations they'd like to partner with and help them research potential partnerships. They can look at the yellow pages listings for social service organizations and ask parents and community members for ideas.

### **Be Persistent and Specific**

Many service agencies and volunteer centers are not used to the idea of children and youth as volunteers. They may not readily have ideas about what young people can do to help.

- Invite representatives to come meet the children and talk about needs.
- Be prepared to offer concrete suggestions of what your group can do.
- Be persistent.

Chances are, once service agencies meet the children and see the good young people can do, resistance will melt away.

### **Engage Young People in Reflection**

Reflection is a vital step in the process of transforming "service" into "service-learning." Through encouraging youth to think about and reflect on the needs of their community and the impact of the projects they do, staff can make the most of the learning possibilities inherent in most service projects. Effective reflection practices should include:

- a special time set aside for group discussion
- an ongoing process of capitalizing on the "learning moments" that arise throughout the process of planning, executing and following up on the project

## Service-Learning Module

*Ideas for reflection questions to be used in discussions:*

- ⇒ How do you think our project made a difference? What more could we have done?
- ⇒ How does it make you feel to help other people?
- ⇒ What did you learn that you could apply to other aspects of your life?
- ⇒ What can we do to follow up on our project? What more can we do about the issue we addressed?

### **Celebrate Efforts**

Like all of us, young people need to see that their efforts are worthwhile and appreciated. Sometimes projects don't go as planned and the results are not gratifying. Children's efforts can always be congratulated and the work they have done and learning they have achieved can be celebrated regardless of the overall success of the project.

- Regularly congratulate young people for their work.
- Make sure that organizations and individuals benefiting from your group's work express their thanks directly to the children and youth involved.
- Help young people see that the good feelings they get from helping others is part of their reward.
- On a daily basis, recognize young people who help each other, show courtesy and do things without being asked. Help kids see that their everyday actions are connected to building and sustaining a community that is nice for everyone.

### **Involve Families**

Parents and family members can offer great support for service-learning and often welcome the opportunity to be involved in the program in meaningful ways.

- Tap into the knowledge, ideas and resources of families. Have children go home and find out what ideas their parents have about the needs of their community.
- Ask for help from families in planning and executing service projects



## VIII. Sample Project Ideas

SERVICE PROJECT	SOME LEARNING POSSIBILITIES
Rake up leaves or plant flowers for people who are elderly or disabled. Help with yard work at your site	Learn about plants, gardening and landscaping. Learn about the specific challenges of others in your community.
Perform a play, read to people, or sing a song at a nursing home or hospital and take time to get to know people there. Write letters or draw pictures to send if transportation is an issue	Practice singing, performing, conversation and/or writing skills. Learn about nursing homes or hospitals.
Develop "reading buddies." Within your program or in partnership with another program, assign older children to younger children and have them read to each other regularly.	Solidify the reading skills of both younger and older children. Older children learn responsibility, patience and teaching skills. Offer older children simple training about being a good tutor.
Hold a toy/food/clothing drive for a homeless shelter or soup kitchen.	Learn about hunger and homelessness while developing planning, organizing, counting and sorting skills.
Put together "personal hygiene kits" (toothpaste, soap, etc.) for a homeless shelter. Ask the children to bring in sample soaps, shampoos, etc	Learn about homelessness. Use math to figure out numbers of kits to be made given the number of items available.
Pick up trash in a local park or neighborhood. If there seems to be a shortage of trash receptacles, find out who is in charge and write letters.	Learn about the impact of litter. Learn to do research and practice writing skills. Learn to notice needs and do something about what you notice. Learn about responsibility and accountability.
Make cookies or pictures to give to local police officers, custodians, teachers or cafeteria workers.	Learn about the work that these people do. Learn to appreciate those who are often under-appreciated.
Help the building custodian do some cleaning that will really make the building look nicer and that he/she wouldn't have been able to get to without extra help.	Learn about all it takes to keep a building clean. Use math skills to figure out amounts of supplies needed to complete a project.
Sort food at a nearby food pantry or help prepare and serve food at a soup kitchen	Learn about hunger issues in your community. Use counting and sorting skills and/or measuring and cooking skills.

## **IX. Brainstorming Activity** *(use with staff or children)*

- Divide into groups of 3-5 people
- First step: Each group brainstorms at least five simple, effective service projects that would be appropriate for a specific age range of children. If you like, ask them to come up with projects that fill certain categories such as one-time projects, ongoing projects, hunger projects, holiday projects, homelessness projects, environment/clean-up projects.
- Second step: Each group creates a chart with four columns: "Project Name," "Benefits to the Community," "Learning Objectives," "Follow-Up Ideas." Have groups fill in their top project ideas in the project name column and fill the other columns with notes on the specific learning that the project would promote and ideas for follow-up activities.
- Third step: Groups share their ideas with the larger group.

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## **RESOURCES**

*This list is a sampling of resources available on the subject of service-learning. Listing materials here does not constitute official endorsement by The National Institute on Out-of-School Time.*

### **PUBLICATIONS:**

Service as a Strategy In Out-of-School Time: A How-To Manual produced by the Corporation for National Service and the National Institute on Out-of-School Time. Available on-line at [etr-associates.org](http://etr-associates.org) or by calling ETR Associates, Publications Department at 800-860-2684 x142.

Kids' Guide to Service Projects: Over 500 Service Ideas for Young People Who Want to Make a Difference by Barbara Lewis. Service project ideas for children and youth that range from simple one-time projects to large-scale commitments. Available through Free Spirit Publishing by calling 1-800-735-7323. Also available through School-Age Notes by calling 1-800-410-8780.

Kids' Guide to Social Action: How to Solve the Social Problems You Choose by Barbara Lewis. How-to manual offering kids the tools they need to effect change and inspirational stories of youth who have made a difference.

Children as Volunteers by Susan J. Ellis, Anne Weisbord and Katherine H. Noyes. Ideas for designing appropriate and effective volunteer opportunities for children under age 14.

Making a Difference (student magazine) featuring activities, writing by young people, ideas on service. Available through Quest International by calling 800-446-2700.

The Real Heroes (Video) featuring personal testimonies from young people involved in a variety of service projects. Available through Quest International by calling 800-446-2700.

Today's Heroes (Videos and guides) featuring typical teenagers who share stories of service experiences. Available from the Points of Light Foundation by calling 1-800-272-8306/

### **ORGANIZATIONS/WEB SITES:**

The Service-Learning Exchange: 877-LSA-EXCHange  
web site: <http://www.lsaexchange.org>  
Opportunities to connect with peer mentors, information on events and initiatives, help locating local resources

National Service-Learning Clearinghouse: 800-808-7378  
website: <http://www.nisl.coled.umn.edu>  
Publications lists, info on joining a listserv, links to other sites, general information on service-learning

ServNet  
website: <http://www.servenet.org>  
Connects youth to volunteer opportunities in their local community

The Points of Light Foundation: 202-729-8000  
website: <http://www.pointsoflight.org>  
Information on volunteer centers as well as youth service training opportunities and publications

Learn and Serve America: 202-606-5000  
website: <http://www.nationalservice.org/learn/index.html>  
Information on grants and resources available for service-learning through the Corporation for National Service