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## Community Service Promotes

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# Community Service Promotes



Community service links the school with society and should be a part of the middle level curriculum.

**S**chool and society are interwoven, not separate entities. Therefore, the goals of schools should be integrated with those of the surrounding community and society as a whole. Middle school student service helps integrate those goals.

The school environment is, in some ways, separate from the "real world." Students follow mandated schedules and rules and interact with basically the same people each day. They choose who they will have lunch with, who will be their partners in square dancing, and who they will sit with on the bus.

But, once they leave the campus—at the end of the day or at the end of their formal schooling—they walk into a different environment with different rules and myriad kinds of people.

Schools can help prepare students to function effectively and make a significant contribution to this community away from the school campus through community service projects.

The following are descriptions of middle level community service programs.

## Adolescents and the Community

By Marlow Ediger

**O**ne public school student teacher who strongly believed in involving her sixth graders in the community established the following service projects.

### Nursing Home

Presenting a program at a nearby nursing home gave students the opportunity to interact with and entertain its residents and to incorporate some of the lessons they had learned into other areas of their lives. The students had just completed a unit on creative writing and based their program on that unit.

# Student Awareness

- A student read aloud a student-composed tall tale.
- A student read his quatrain poem about cold weather and shared his illustration of the poem.
- A student read a legend she had written about Kit Carson.
- Four students presented a skit about the Mayan religion, which they had studied in social studies.
- A student read a diamante poem written by the class as a whole on hibernation of frogs.
- A student read a haiku about nature.

After the program, pupils visited with the nursing home residents. When they returned to the classroom, they evaluated the program, offering each other general suggestions such as "speak loudly enough so all can hear" and "practice reading beforehand so the selection is fluid."

## Police Department

The sixth grade class wrote a letter to the city police department asking that a stop sign be placed directly south of the middle school, at an intersection that students found particularly hard to cross.

When a policeman came to the classroom to tell the students their request would be brought up at the next

city council meeting, the teacher asked him to come back the next day to talk to the students about bicycle safety.

The next day, he showed the class a filmstrip about bicycle safety and answered student questions. He also gave each student a pamphlet on safety procedures.

The students wrote a thank-you letter to the policeman, paying special attention to the format, spelling, handwriting, capitalization, and indentation.

Ten days later a stop sign was erected at the intersection.

## The Environment

The sixth grade students had often commented about the litter on the street directly north of the school, and, at the teacher's suggestion, decided to pick up the trash during four recess periods. They also kept track of the kinds of trash they picked up, such as paper bags, cans, etc.

At the end of the four days, the students discussed what types of garbage they had picked up. These included quite a few soft drink containers; aluminum cans; and napkins, paper plates, and plastic utensils from fast food carryouts.

The students discussed how business and industry could help remedy the garbage problem and how people in general must learn to dispose of waste products in an acceptable way.

The sixth graders became more concerned about the environment—a concern that seemed to permeate the building and the community.

## Conclusion

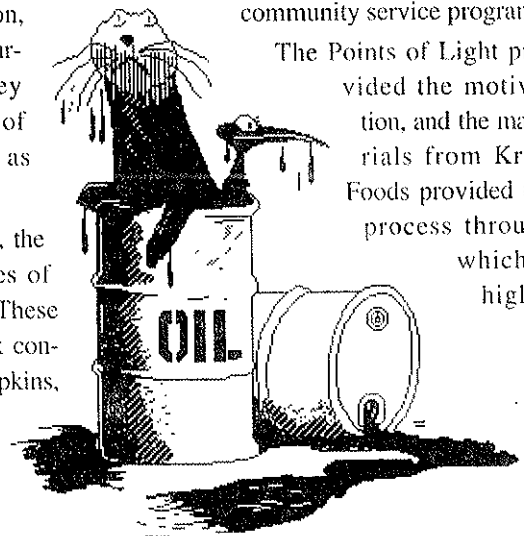
Community service links the school with society and should be a part of the middle level curriculum. By integrating community service into the academic program, schools can ensure that middle level students become active participants in improving themselves and their community.

## A Classroom in the Community

By Barbara S. Hamilton and Wateka Hanna

As a result of former President George Bush's emphasis on "The Points of Light" program and materials produced by Kraft Foods, a teacher at Florence Middle School and her students began a special community service program.

The Points of Light provided the motivation, and the materials from Kraft Foods provided the process through which a highly





successful volunteer program between school and community developed.

Under the direction and supervision of a certified teacher and the nursing home's activity director, middle level students visit the local nursing home and interact with its residents on a weekly basis.

Prior to the first trip to the nursing home, the activity director visited the classroom to explain to students some common diseases and problem behaviors among the elderly, and the policies and procedures of the facility. To meet volunteer requirements, students were given skin tests for tuberculosis.

The students are involved with the residents in a number of ways. They:

- Assist the nursing home activity department with fund raising
- Provide seasonal decorations, birthday celebrations, and hand-made gifts
- Write letters to residents and send birthday greetings
- Help residents relive history and validate their lives as students encourage them to talk about their pasts

- Talk with residents and write notes to communicate with the hearing impaired
- Play games with residents or take them for wheelchair walks
- Serve refreshments.

### Benefits for Students and the Elderly

This program benefits both the students and the nursing home residents.

Benefits for the students include improved:

- Social and educational development
- Self-esteem and self-confidence as they bridge the gap between the youth and the elderly and make a difference in the residents' quality of life
- Understanding of the elderly
- Ability to adjust to a variety of settings
- Understanding of mental illness
- Opportunities for acknowledgment and recognition, and a feeling of being needed.

The nursing home residents benefit because the program:

- Allows them to become involved with the youth of the community.

- Gives them something to look forward to on a regular basis.
- Improves their basic communication skills
- Fills a void in the daily routine and helps decrease feelings of isolation, boredom, or depression
- Improves residents' alertness and activity.

The positive interaction between students and nursing home residents has grown steadily since the first visit. Staff members report that residents' anticipation of the weekly visit motivates them to stay out of bed and be better groomed for the visit.

The educational value of the program is also significant. As students write summaries of each visit, they develop skills in written expression. They develop higher order thinking skills as they write about and discuss their experiences.

This program heightens adolescents' social awareness and their awareness of community needs. It also offers students a feeling of success and, as a result, helps keep them in school.

Marlow Ediger is professor of education at Northeast Missouri State University, Kirksville, Mo. Barbara S. Hamilton is a teacher at Florence (Ariz.) Middle School. Waiseka Hanna is activity director at Pinal County (Ariz.) Nursing Home.