Reason and Respect

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Is assigning community service beneficial?

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Is Assigning Community Service Beneficial?
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What is community service? According U.S. Courts.gov., community service is "A special condition the court imposes that requires an individual to work–without pay–for a civic or nonprofit organization." Another source, the National Community Service Trust Act, states that community service "encompasses any human act serving the common good; in the interest of the community." These two separate definitions are different interpretations of the same act; neither of these definitions is wrong. The action of community service can occasionally be required. Thus the prefix "mandatory" is added to community service, creating what is commonly known as mandatory community service. Whether or not the service is voluntary or imposed, it is beneficial to many. If community service is obligatory, it is more beneficial when the service is assigned, rather than freely chosen.

There is speculation that the term "mandatory" community service is contradictory. These required acts of good will are meant to benefit those who need assistance with their living condition, help with physical labor, or any other task which requires the help of another person. In addition to helping those who need it, community service also benefits those who participate in the community service. Many educational institutions and religious organizations require a certain number of hours of labor to be completed to insure that their members value their surrounding communities. Court systems in the United States use mandatory community service as a means of punishment for a committed crime. In order to be admitted back into society, hours of community service are assigned to allow convicted felons to repay a debt to their community for their wrongdoing. Although these required hours of service fulfill a criterion for an organization, many may see some mandatory community service as redundant and unnecessary. However, I disagree with this opinion because I see this service as important to, and positive for, a person's environment whether the service is needed or not. Mandatory service is a matter of principle for these institutions and organizations. Mandatory community service as a whole benefits both the giver and the receiver.

When community service is mandated, i.e. a program bestows a certain task to be completed, instead of allowing free choice, the service is more beneficial to those serving and those being served. I personally have completed community service that was not required by an outside organization. I have also been required to complete five hours of community service in order to graduate from Roger Williams University. The Community Connections program assigned its students to various forms of community service around the Bristol, Rhode Island area. The students were organized into small groups to work together as they fulfilled their requirement. The group I was assigned to spent the day at an elderly Jewish retirement home. I had never been to a retirement home, much less spent an entire day communicating and helping out the elderly. If it were not for RWU's Community Connections service program I would never have experienced such a life altering event. I would not have chosen to spend my community hours in a retirement home. That day I spoke with the elderly residents, played games with them, shared stories and laughed, served and ate lunch with them, and most importantly met a very bright and beautiful woman named Betty. As a friend and I walked this elderly woman around her nursing home, she told us stories of her life that I will never forget. In return, she told us that our being there was one of the best times she had in a very long time. After our group had completed our five hours of service, we decided to stay three extra hours because the residents were enjoying our company so much.

Having the service assigned created experiences that some students would never in their lives have. This was a great way to be exposed to areas of the world that some had never seen or even thought about. In a poll of my 2010 class at Roger Williams University who attended the Community Connections program, I asked "Would you have benefited more if you were allowed to choose your service?" Five out of nine said no. This data shows that as the people doing the service act, they were glad to have been assigned the task, rather than deciding for themselves what service they would perform. I also asked those students, "Would someone else have benefited more if you were allowed to choose your service?" Three of the students said yes, and five said no; they felt that having Community Connections choose their service benefited those receiving the

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service more than if they would have been able to decide on their own. The data collected above may seem speculative due to the small number of students who participated; however, the participants were completely random and had no affiliation with each other.

If a person were to be allowed to choose the service he or she wishes to complete, that person is more likely going to choose the easiest form of service because the service is mandatory. People will choose an interest that they know all about. This does not encourage new experiences. I believe that it is important to attempt things that you never have or know very little about. Giving a predetermined task of mandatory community service is more beneficial for everyone than allowing the servers to choose their own duty.

Works Cited

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