

Workshop Presentation

Topic: Innovations and Good Practices in Volunteering

Learning to CARE: Education, Volunteering, and Community Service

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to provide clear strategies and guidelines for schools to engage students in “Learning to CARE” through incorporating volunteering and community service within the school program in ways that enhance learning, develop academic and interpersonal skills, promote citizenship, nurture positive character traits, improve school-community relations, contribute real service to society, and encourage life-long volunteering and civic engagement.

In *Learning to CARE*, the word *CARE* is capitalized because it is integral to these strategies, as an expression of both feeling and action, and as a mnemonic device to help students remember that a good volunteer is: **C**apable, **A**vailable, **R**eliable, and **E**ngaged.

After explaining the word CARE, this paper discusses five options for schools to incorporate service into their programs with the help of community partners:

- School-Sponsored Service Projects
- Extracurricular Clubs and Teams
- Service Incentive Programs
- Mandatory Service Programs
- Service-Learning

The paper will then provide general guidelines relevant to all of the options and all of the different stakeholders involved.

LEARNING TO CARE: EDUCATION, VOLUNTEERING*, AND COMMUNITY SERVICE**

I. CARE: CAPABLE, AVAILABLE, RELIABLE, ENGAGED

To begin with, let us consider the term CARE, both as a word and as a mnemonic device.

The word *care* contains within it an expression of both feeling and action. A person who truly cares about someone or something is compelled to act on that concern. The person then takes care of (or cares for) what s/he cares about by watching over, protecting, and take responsibility for it – whether it is a person, a cause, or society as a whole. Thus, if one learns to care, one learns to develop the genuine feelings of concern for those in need and the problems in society that need to be addressed; one learns not to be indifferent and irresponsible; and one learns how to actually make a difference through commitment and effective action.

As a mnemonic device, CARE helps students remember that a good volunteer is: Capable, Available, Reliable, and Engaged.

Capable

Available

Reliable, and

Engaged

CAPABLE: *A volunteer needs to be capable of doing the job that s/he is assigned.*

AVAILABLE: *A volunteer needs to be available to fulfill the given volunteer opportunity. Being available is concerned with both having the time and being able to get to the place to volunteer.*

RELIABLE: *A volunteer needs to be reliable – to honor his/her commitments.*

ENGAGED: *A good volunteer is actively involved in the volunteer experience,*

* *Volunteering* is presented here as satisfying three criteria :

- 1) The work is done for *good* – for the benefit of society.
- 2) The person *freely* chooses to do it.
- 3) The person does it for *free* – without financial compensation.

** *Community service* refers to work done for the benefit of society which does not fulfill Criteria 2, generally because the work is required.

interested in the work, and focused on doing the best job possible.

II. SIX SCHOOL SERVICE OPTIONS

Schools can encourage and train students to be Capable, Available, Reliable, and Engaged (to truly CARE) through the different service options presented here.

OPTION 1: SCHOOL-SPONSORED SERVICE PROJECTS

One way for schools to encourage service is for the school itself to sponsor service projects. Such projects are outside of the regular academic program but, unlike clubs, they do not have an organized structure and membership that continues over time. In many cases, the catalyst for such school-sponsored service projects is a national or international service day or a program done in collaboration with an outside organization or institution.

School sponsorship of a project may take many different forms. The school may simply authorize faculty and students to get involved or encourage participation through statements by its principal. School support may include providing a bus to transport the students to the project or providing its indoor facilities or playground for the activity. In some schools, an activities director organizes such activities, while in others, it may be organized by the teachers or parent volunteers. The school may financially support the project or require participating students to pay a fee, or the project itself may include a fundraiser to cover any costs. An important aspect of school sponsorship is for the administration to give recognition to its student and adult participants after the project is completed.

OPTION 2: EXTRA-CURRICULAR CLUBS AND TEAMS

Schools have an amazing variety of extra-curricular clubs and teams. What they all have in common is that they are outside of the regular academic program, have an organized structure, and bring together students with some common interest. Both clubs and teams are generally voluntary in the two senses of the term “free” – students freely choose to be members and then do the “work” of the organization for free (without any financial compensation), in many cases actually paying to participate. For the purposes of this book we will divide them into service clubs and non-service clubs - those that have service as a main objective and those that do not.

SERVICE CLUBS

Service clubs are clubs that have service as a main objective. Service clubs can be further subdivided into “Service Samplers” and “Focused Service Clubs.”

SAMPLER SERVICE CLUBS

Sampler service clubs provide the opportunity for their members to sample a lot of different types of service. They may do a service project for the disabled one week, a few weeks later do a project for the environment, and some time later do a project for the elderly. It is best not to do a different project each week, since projects should be spaced out with time for preparation and reflection as well as implementation. Even so, in the course of a year members of such sampler service clubs will do service projects for a broad range of social causes.

Sampler service clubs are particularly good for introducing students to volunteering and community service. They allow students who have no experience or particular interest in a specific cause to sample different types of service opportunities. Students learn about a variety of social problems and causes. Furthermore, they usually do their service projects as a group, which most students find easier than volunteering alone. It is very important with such clubs to select a small enough number of projects to be done throughout the year to be able to undertake the proper preparation and follow-up. This is true for all service programs, but it is a particular concern for sampler service clubs, since students participate in a diversity of service projects and need to be provided with the necessary background information and sensitivity training relevant to each project.

Sampler service clubs, by their nature, give students experience with a lot of different types of service, but they do not allow the students to understand them in any depth. On the other hand, if their service activity was especially difficult or unpleasant for them, they do not have to be afraid that they will need to repeat it. In fact, club organizers should generally be careful to balance difficult, uncomfortable projects that help students understand the more serious problems in society, with ones that are lighter and more fun, so students don’t “burn out” and become negative about volunteering.

FOCUSED SERVICE CLUBS

Unlike sampler service clubs, focused service clubs have one area of service that they are focused on. Examples of focused service clubs include Roots and Shoots (environment), Amnesty International (human rights), and Red Cross (health and disaster relief). Focused Service Clubs are particularly good for students after they have had a Service Sampler Club experience. Once students have had direct experience with different types of service and gained some direct awareness of the different types of social problems existing in their society through such sampler service clubs, they should be encouraged to choose a particular cause or interest to support through volunteering. This is preferable for a number of reasons.

First, they can gain greater depth of knowledge about a particular cause – and in becoming more knowledgeable about one cause they will gain an appreciation that all such causes are more complex than can be understood in one brief visit. A second reason for encouraging students to participate in focused service clubs is that they can provide more substantive service because of their increased knowledge and skills, and their sustained commitment.

NON-SERVICE CLUBS AND TEAMS

Service is not generally included as a primary objective in a large number of school clubs and all school sports teams. The Folk Dance Club, the Photography Club, the Art Club, the Chess Club, the Basketball Team and the Soccer/Football Team, to name a few, usually do not consider service to be one of their objectives. These non-service clubs and teams can be given the incentive (or requirement?) to do at least one service project each year or, even better, each semester – or perhaps do an ongoing project that continues throughout the year. The project does not have to be directly related to the focus or theme of the group, but service projects that do will capitalize on student interest and commitment to that focus and seem more relevant to them. Such projects can also demonstrate to students that service can be connected to any topic or theme. Thus, for example, the Folk Dance Club could dance for an orphanage or home for the elderly, the Photography Club could take photographs at an event as a fundraiser for some good cause, the Art Club could teach art classes to smaller children after school at the school or a local park, the Basketball Team could organize a sports day for underprivileged children, and the Soccer/Football Team could coach a soccer team at an orphanage.

OPTION 3: SERVICE INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

A third option for schools is for them to establish a Service Incentive Program.

Incentive programs encourage students to engage in service to others. Students who participate in such programs thus fulfill the criteria of volunteering that the volunteer freely chooses to do the service. There are two main types of incentive programs: inclusive and competitive.

INCLUSIVE INCENTIVES

Inclusive incentives are those which “include” everyone. They are rewards everyone can earn if they are willing to fulfill the requirements. For example, if a school gives a certificate to every student who completes at least 25 hours of service in a year, then the certificate serves as an incentive to do the 25 hours of service, and it is “inclusive” because any student who is willing to do at least 25 hours of service can earn the certificate. For an incentive program to be effective, the reward needs to be desirable, attainable, and difficult enough that it is indeed special for someone to achieve it. A clear set of guidelines should be presented to all eligible students:

- 1) What grade level(s) are allowed to participate
- 2) What types of service are eligible
 - a. Service within the school and/or beyond
 - b. If outside the school, through which community partners
- 3) What must the student do (number of hours of service, service project, etc.)
- 4) What proof needs to be provided to whom
- 5) What is the deadline for submitting this proof
- 6) What is the reward

Support should be provided to students to help them find appropriate volunteer opportunities –and students should be prepared with the needed sensitivity training as well as a clear understanding of the expectations of both the school and the community partner that the student volunteers for. It should also be made clear whether other service programs of the school can count, such as service through school clubs, school-sponsored projects, and service-learning.

COMPETITIVE INCENTIVES

A competitive service incentive program selects the “best” in service to be recognized for their efforts. It might be a service award for the one student who is a model of service, or the club or class or teacher that does the best service project. It may be an award for the student who has done the most service hours. A school could have a winner for each class or grade level, and possibly an overall best in the school. The

winners of these awards might be given a certificate, their name on a publicly displayed plaque, a special trip, or recognition at an awards dinner. Winners might be featured in the school newspaper, on a school bulletin board, or in the school's annual yearbook with a picture of the person doing the service or an article about what the student did to earn the award. The more recognition that is given to winners, the more students will want to compete for the award the next time.

As with inclusive incentive programs, the guidelines for eligibility should be very clear, and support should be given to help students do the service. Some people are more motivated by competition than others. It is probably best to provide both inclusive and competitive incentives so everyone feels they can be recognized for their service efforts.

OPTION 4: MANDATORY SERVICE PROGRAMS

The mandatory service program is the one program that ensures that all students in a school eventually engage in community service, but it is the most difficult program to implement effectively. It is important to note that this is *not* volunteering, since it does not fulfill one of the basic requirements of volunteering - that the volunteer freely chooses to do the service. A name sometimes used for the person who does community service is *voluntold* because the work is generally the same as that of a *volunteer*, but the person is *told* (required) to do it.

There are two main ways that schools require service. Some schools require a certain number of hours to graduate (30, 50 or even 100), or a certain number of hours of service each year during their last three or four years of school (usually 10-25). Other schools require students to plan, organize and implement a service project in order to graduate. It may be done alone, or be a leadership project where they student directs the efforts of other students.

In either case, mandatory service programs expose students to the problems of their society. Unlike taking a field trip in which students only observe, service programs add the element of participation, as students become directly involved with what they are observing. The participant-observation that students engage in as they do service has the benefit of allowing students to observe without simply staring at those they are learning about – and can allow students to observe over time and varied circumstances. At the same time, students also learn how to serve others. In addition,

students can develop their character in terms of being more compassionate, responsible, and resourceful. All these aspects of learning are the primary justification for mandatory service programs. Just as schools require all students to do homework and take exams as part of the learning process, they can also require all students to do service by demonstrating its educational value.

As with incentive programs, those who are required to do community service need to be provided with a clear set of guidelines:

- 1) What grade level(s) are required to participate
- 2) What types of service are eligible
 - a. Service within the school and/or beyond
 - b. If outside the school, through which community partners
- 3) What must the student do (number of hours of service, service project, etc.)
- 4) What proof needs to be provided to whom
- 5) What is the deadline for submitting this proof
- 6) What are the consequences of not fulfilling the requirement

There are a number of significant problems specific to mandatory service programs that schools need to address if they are going to have a successful program. One is the simple fact that all people tend to resent what they are forced to do. To diminish this resentment, it is very important for students to understand why this is an important part of their education, just like the homework and exams they also don't like. The coercive nature of such requirements can also be diminished by giving students as much choice in the program as possible – choice of when to do it, what kind of service to engage in, even whether they can do it as individuals or through school-organized projects or programs.

A second major problem of mandatory service programs is the sheer volume of service hours that need to be fulfilled if all students in a school are included or even all secondary students. Most schools that have such requirements have difficulty finding enough volunteer opportunities, so that it is helpful if they establish a working relationship with community partners that need a lot of relatively unskilled help.

Another problem is that the service experience itself is more likely to be negative for students in a mandatory service program. They may find it hard to work with strangers and in circumstances that are strange to them, especially if they have to do it alone, instead of with at least one friend, or a school group. Students who find such

new situations difficult will most likely not participate in voluntary programs, and so this problem may not need to be addressed in other service programs presented here.

The experience may also be negative for the community partner who may experience irresponsible and resentful students, students who are serious discipline problems, students with serious learning disabilities, and students who do less than their best. Some of these problems can be avoided if both students and community partners fully understand and comply with their rights and responsibilities (a list of these is included in Section III of this paper).

OPTION 5: SERVICE-LEARNING

Unlike the first four options, service-learning is an educational method which integrates service into the academic curriculum of a school in a way which enhances learning while providing genuine service to the community. Service-learning complements other methods of teaching, like lectures, readings, demonstrations, and audio-visual materials. And just like these other teaching methods, it can be used at any grade level and for essentially any subject taught in school. In service-learning, the service may be an ongoing part of the course integrated throughout the term, or it may be focused on one aspect of the course, providing a new dimension to the field of study, and demonstrating its relevance to solving real problems. The essential elements of quality service-learning are listed below, and some of them are discussed in more detail in Section III: General Guidelines about Service.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY SERVICE-LEARNING

- 1) **Learning:** There are clear educational goals concerned with learning knowledge, skills, or values in the specific academic discipline (art, history, math, language, or any other subject).
- 2) **Service:** Students engage in genuine service that meets real needs in the school or community.
- 3) **Student Voice:** Students participate as much as possible in decision-making related to the selection, planning, implementation, reflection, evaluation, and celebration of the service project as part of the learning experience.
- 4) **Collaboration:** A broad diversity of stakeholders are encouraged to collaborate in the project including students, teachers, administrators, parents, staff of service organizations, recipients of the service, and various project

supporters. All of the different partners in the project contribute to its planning and benefit in some way.

- 5) **Preparation:** Students are prepared for all aspects of their service experience. This includes, as appropriate, orientation to the service organization where the project is done, awareness of safety precautions, sensitivity training, and learning the special skills needed to complete the project tasks.
- 6) **Reflection:** Students engage in reflection before, during and after service. Through reflection, students actively think about the experience, and put into conscious awareness, possibly into words, what is done, felt, observed, and learned, to enhance learning from the experience.
- 7) **Evaluation:** Assessment is primarily used to help improve the project and improve student behavior and outcomes, not simply to give a grade.
- 8) **Recognition:** Students recognize and appreciate the efforts of others in helping them with the service project and they, in turn, are recognized for their efforts in a way that is appropriate to the service provided.

III. GENERAL GUIDELINES ABOUT SERVICE

There are a number of guidelines that are important, regardless of which of the options a school chooses. These are presented below.

PREPARATION

One key to the success of any service program is to properly prepare the students. Thus, if one of the projects is for the elderly, students need to be given information about the elderly, information about the place where they will visit, how the elderly may act with the students, and what the students will be doing during their visit. They should also be informed about what they should NOT do. In addition, the students should be given instructions about what they should do if they face any problems that they cannot handle personally.

STUDENT VOICE

For all the different options presented here, the school should ideally give students as much voice in decision-making and as much opportunity for leadership as possible, under the guidance and supervision of responsible adults. This increases the benefits of the experience for the students in terms of developing their character and

leadership skills. Student participation in decision-making and leadership might include letting students choose the area of service the students work on, having the organizing committee for each project contact the community partner organization, help decide the actual project to be done, learn from the organization, the internet, and other sources what they need to know about the elderly, and share it with the other participating students. Students can lead in doing the actual project, facilitate the reflection activity afterwards, and make sure appropriate people are thanked. Students at all age levels can participate in all of these steps, though older or more experienced students will need less supervision and help.

GENUINE SERVICE

One real problem for school service programs is how to organize a project that is a genuine service and not just some token effort. Since students generally have minimal skills, knowledge and experience, and do either one time service or only a small number of hours (usually 2-20), organizations are generally not willing to invest the time or have the trust to give them meaningful service projects. This is especially true for large groups that need a lot of supervision and equipment. It is a relatively simple matter to give 30 students 3 trees to plant – you only need three shovels (or less), and if they don't do it well, it is easy for the gardener to pull up the trees and plant them again after the students leave.

It is a more genuine service and a better learning experience to have those same 30 students gather around the gardener (or a volunteer from an environmental organization) who demonstrates exactly how to properly plant a tree; have the places for the trees to be planted carefully marked with a colored stick; have students take turns being the person who digs, the person who holds the tree, the person who refills the hole with dirt, and the one who gives it the initial watering (or however the project is divided). Those 30 students can then plant 300 trees under the supervision of the gardener. The project needs more trees, more shovels, more water buckets, etc. – but a real service is done and students know it. Finally, the necessary follow-up for the project needs to be planned, whether or not it is to be done by the same students. Who is going to water those trees until they take root? In projects such as tree planting, students should be able to come back to the project months or even years later and see how much the trees have grown, so that they can feel proud that their efforts had meaningful results.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF VOLUNTEERS***

Whether you are a volunteer or an agency making use of volunteers, understanding the rights and responsibilities of the volunteer is the key to successful volunteering. It is at the heart of what makes a good volunteer and a good volunteer experience. From the viewpoint of an organization, volunteers who do not understand and fulfill their responsibilities can be more of a liability than an asset. From the viewpoint of volunteers, organizations that do not respect their rights are not worth volunteering for. The "rights" of the volunteer are essentially the "responsibilities" of the organization, while the "responsibilities" of the volunteer are essentially the "rights" of the organization. The list below is a short version of the most important rights and responsibilities of volunteers. They may seem like common sense, but they are often violated by those who do not consciously recognize their importance. Students and community partners should review (and possibly sign) something along the lines of the Rights and Responsibilities listed below. Variations of this list can be found on different websites.

As a volunteer, you have the right to:

- Feel that your efforts have real purpose and contribute to the organization's objectives
- Receive the necessary orientation, training, and supervision
- Learn how to improve your skills in the work you are doing
- Be treated with respect
- Expect that your time will not be wasted by poor planning
- Ask questions and give suggestions about the work you are doing
- Be trusted with confidential information necessary to do your work
- Be appreciated for the work you have done
- Be given written proof or evaluation of your work, if you request it

As a volunteer, you have the responsibility to:

- Meet your time commitments or provide adequate notice so other arrangements can be made
- Only accept responsibilities that you can reasonably handle
- Perform the work assigned to the best of your ability
- Follow organizational policies and procedures

*** Excerpted and adapted from *The Guide to Youth Volunteer Opportunities 1998-99*, Volunteer Center of San Francisco, page 5.

- Respect the confidences given to you
- Be open-minded and respectful of others
- Accept reasonable tasks without complaining

REFLECTION, EVALUATION, AND RECOGNITION

Students need to have an opportunity to reflect on the project - to share their thoughts about the experience, evaluate how it went, and suggest ways that such an activity could be improved in the future. They need to recognize and appreciate the efforts of others in helping them with the service experience. And they themselves need to have an opportunity to be recognized for their efforts.

CONCLUSION

This paper is all about making a difference. It provides guidance to help school administrators and teachers make a difference in their school through establishing or improving student programs of volunteering and community service. It presents ways to empower students to make a difference in their society as active agents of change. And it encourages schools to expand the number and types of stakeholders actively involved in making a difference in all aspects of the school itself.

The following recommendations can help a school to maximize the effectiveness of its service program:

- 1) Begin by implementing at least two of the five service options.
- 2) Provide students with a diversity of service opportunities that reflect the diversity of interests and needs of its students.
- 3) Draw on local, national, and international resources.
- 4) Network with a broad diversity of community partners.

This paper is itself an abstract of the book *Learning to CARE: Education, Volunteering, and Community Service* which is forthcoming in the final months of 2005. For more information about the book and the Learning to CARE Program, visit our website: www.avs.org.lb/learningtocare.

Whatever you do, it is hoped that this paper will encourage and support your efforts to inspire, teach, and empower young people to CARE!

Capable

Available Reliable Engaged

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INTERNET RESOURCES

The following Internet sites provide resources of interest to those who want to increase school involvement in volunteering and community service.

http://learningindeed.org/	A site for becoming informed about and involved in service-learning.
www.abcdbooks.org	A place for literature and service-learning connections.
www.energizeinc.com	Site especially for leaders of volunteers.
www.gysd.net	Global Youth Service Days
www.projectappleseed.org	The National Campaign for Public School Improvement
www.servicelearning.org	National Service-Learning Clearinghouse
www.ysa.org/planit	Project Plan-It! is an easy interactive series of questions and templates that allow students to plan their own service project or program online.