

Guidelines for Community Service Groups

So, you have a group of kids interested in doing community projects? Try a community service learning group - an alternative way to have kids involved in their communities and in 4-H! Here are some simple steps to get the group off to a good start.

Why a community service learning group?

1. Kids see community needs differently and they prioritize them differently than adults.
2. Kids have ideas for solving problems. Break the stereotypes! Think of kids as assets, not problems!
3. They have the energy and motivation to tackle problems and find solutions.
4. They need to know/learn that they can do things--as a group or individually--that will make a difference.
5. They learn while they serve. Community service learning gives kids the chance to see that what they are learning, in school or in 4-H, does relate to the real world.
6. Our communities can use their help in meeting real needs.
7. Kids and adults can have fun working together!

Who can be involved?

Youth and adults who want to make a difference. This can be a group of 4-5 kids, or 15-20. The important thing is that they want to work in their communities. An adult or older youth who will guide them, while allowing the kids to make decisions, plan the projects, and do the work, is necessary to help them see the larger aspects of working with the community. Different volunteers can work with the group on different projects.

What is community service learning?

Community service learning is the combination of two long-established parts of 4-H: community service and learning-by-doing, or experiential learning. Community service learning teaches citizenship, leadership, decision making and can be directly related to 4-H projects and school lessons.

Time frame:

In our busy world, one often-heard complaint is the lack of time. Volunteers are hard to come by. A community service learning group is a way to get involved for a short time, accomplish a goal, then move on to something else.

A group may work on a project for as little as a week, or tackle a long-term project for several months. After a project is finished, the volunteers and the youth are free to move on. Some may decide to continue with a new project, and a new volunteer, interested in that project, may start working with the group.

There are no records to fill out, no reports necessary, no exhibits to prepare!

There are five steps to community service learning:

1. Preparation:

Youth and adults identify a problem, partner with community members to find solutions, select and plan the project. In choosing a project, consider the interests of the group's members, and the skills and resources they have. What other resources will be needed to accomplish the goal? Who needs to be contacted about the project? What is the time line? How and when will the group work on the project?

2. Action:

Youth provide service to the community that connects to what they learn through 4-H, school and other sources.

3. Reflection:

Time for youth to think about the experience before, during and after. Reflection can be done by reading, writing, art, discussion and projects. What was learned? How did each individual feel about the project? Did the group accomplish what they planned? Did attitudes or perceptions change?

4. Celebration:

Recognize youth and adults for their contributions to the project and bring closure to the service project. Celebrate accomplishments! Have fun!

5. Future plans:

Does the group want to continue to work together? Do some want to start a new project? Are there other youth that may be interested in joining the group to work on a new project? Is a different volunteer needed to help with a new project?

Things to think about:

A group formed for community service learning projects should be fluid--members and volunteers may come and go as their interests and the time they have available change. Once committed to a project, however, the group should stay together until that project is finished.

Publicity. Let others know what's happening! Invite the media to come and see what is being done!

The group should be open to any youth and adult interested in making a difference in their community. Reach out to youth and adults not interested in the traditional 4-H program as well as those that are already involved in 4-H.