

# Volunteer Community Service: What are the Benefits to the Volunteer?

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The concept of community service as a requirement for graduation is appearing in more and more institutions for higher education. "Learning through service" is a different way of study. By integrating theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom with practical work in the community, the student has the opportunity to test and apply his/her knowledge, while, at the same time, helping others.

The National and Community Act, passed on Nov. 16, 1990 (Public Law 101-610) emphasizes the need for U.S. citizens "regardless of age or income, to engage in full time or part time service to the Nation." Some of the purposes of the act are to . . . renew the ethic of civic responsibility in the United States . . . call young people to serve in programs that will . . . improve the life chances of the young through the acquisition of literacy and job skills . . . to expand full time and part time opportunities for all citizens, particularly youth and older Americans . . . generate additional service hours each year to help meet human, educational, environmental, and public safety needs, particularly those needs relating to poverty. (Public Law 101-610, Nov. 16 1990: 42 USC 12401)

## DEFINITIONS

The term "service-learning" is a method:

- (A) under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs and are coordinated by collaboration with the community;
- (B) that is integrated into the students' academic curriculum or provides

structured time for a student to think, talk, and/or write about what the student did and saw during the actual service activity;

- (C) that provides students with opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities; and
- (D) that enhances what is taught in school by extending academic learning beyond the classroom and into the community and helps to foster the development of a sense of caring for others.

The term "service opportunity" indicates a program or project that enables students or out-of-school youth to perform meaningful and constructive service in agencies, institutions, and situations where the application of human talent and dedication may help to meet human, educational, linguistic, and environmental community needs, especially those relating to poverty. (Public Law 101-610, Nov. 16, 1990:42 USC 121411-101)

## COMMUNITY SERVICE AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Innovative projects in higher education for community service (Section 118) is part of Public Law 101-160 whose purpose is to "encourage students to participate in Community Service activities while such students are attending institutions of higher education."

The law identifies the following factors as important in service-learning .

- (1) Community service and service to others is an integral part of American tradition;

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- (2) Existing volunteers and volunteer programs should be praised for their efforts in helping and serving others;
- (3) The definition of a successful life includes service to others;
- (4) Individuals should be encouraged to volunteer their time and energies in community service efforts;
- (5) If asked to volunteer or participate in community service, most Americans will do so; . . . (Public Law 101-610, Nov. 16, 1990:42 USC 12561:302)

Dancing suggests that service-learning might give young people the sense of having paid their dues to their country, a sense of citizenship earned rather than citizenship received, a sense of valuing themselves, their education and their country more highly. (Public Law 101-610, Nov. 16, 1990:37)

Pertinent literature shows a growing trend among academic institutions to develop learning-through-service, work-for-credit programs. However, a required community service program for colleges/universities is seldom described. Theus reported that colleges such as Alverno in Milwaukee, Mt. St. Mary in Los Angeles and Berea in Kentucky required public service for graduation. (Theus, 1988:32)

The University of West Florida, University of Maryland-Baltimore (Rapp & Primo, 1974), and the University of Michigan have programs where students in psychology and other social service disciplines are expected to volunteer in community based agencies. This included such things as work in mental health hospitals, drug abuse centers, or hospitals for adolescents with mental illness. Redfering and Biasco (1982) report that students volunteering reported feeling good about themselves and others as a result of the time they spent volunteering. Changes occurred in self-concept and development of positive mental health attitudes.

Project Rondon, started in 1967 by a group of students and teachers at the University of Guanabera in Rio de Janeiro, addressed health problems in isolated populations. The purpose was to broaden the students' education and assist in poverty-stricken areas. There was no

credit or pay for the experience. At the end of the service period, students reported enjoyment of their contribution and learning and valued their knowledge, initiative and common sense. (Reichlin, 1982)

Numerous surveys of volunteers report that most volunteers become involved to do something useful for others, or altruistic reasons. However, Green reports that non-altruistic motives are stronger than altruistic ones. Requiring voluntary service as part of a school curriculum can be an accepted learning strategy rather than a subjective commitment. (Green; et al, 1984) It has the potential to generate powerful motivational elements and increase the results for the student learner.

#### COMMUNITY SERVICE AT THE ZINMAN COLLEGE

The Zinman College of Physical Education at the Wingate Institute (Israel) has a four-year academic program for physical education teachers. The concept of learning through service has been incorporated in the philosophy of student training since 1983. (Harel, 1989)

For graduation, the College requires each student to serve in a community service project. Through the combination of practical work, and the theoretical subjects acquired in class, the student has the opportunity to apply his/her knowledge, while working in different projects that, at times, present situations foreign to him/her. Learning through service thus provides an additional component of the student's future career.

#### THE PROGRAM AND ITS GOALS

Since the program's goal is to reach low socio-economic culturally deprived populations of all ages, but mostly children, the projects offered are as follows:

- a) Individual work with a child (Big Brother/Big Sister).
- b) Group projects: mainly enrichment through physical education programs.
- c) Work with the handicapped—individually or in groups: children with motor deficiencies, paraplegics in wheel chairs, Cerebral Palsy victims, mentally handicapped.

- d) Elderly projects in hospitals, senior citizens clubs, elderly homes.
- e) New immigrants: "adoption" of students, enrichment programs in absorption centers, help to families.
- f) A "Girl in Distress" program: (age 14-17) rehabilitation through physical education of girls who are neither studying nor working.
- g) An "Alienated Youth" program: boys (age 14-17) on the verge of delinquency, rehabilitation through physical education.
- h) "Children of inmates": individual work with grade school children whose fathers are imprisoned for long terms.
- i) Battered women shelter: work with children and their mothers, individually and in groups.
- j) Neighborhood centers: physical education (sports and dance) programs for children and youth.
- k) Children's homes (orphanages): sports, games, coaching.
- l) Help to staff in different medical institutions.

The community service project is generally required of students in their second year of study. Upon request, and if found eligible, first year students may also enroll. Although the service is required, each student selects their placement.

The goals of the community service work suggests that the student will develop skills and/or tools to work in their assignment. Things such as creative problem-solving, use of the imagination, development of citizenship values, and personal growth are expected outcomes. Each student is counseled individually and continuously, verbally and through periodic written reports. The student writes a self evaluation of his/her work and progress toward established goals. The continuous feedback and support helps the student to perform in the most efficient way, and at the same time, optimize learning from the experience.

#### THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to analyze and verify student evaluation of learning through service. Two questions were addressed. a) Did community ser-

vice help you as a person and as a future teacher? b) Did your contribution help, in your opinion, the child you worked with (or other)? How?

The study was based on 318 questionnaires completed by students at the end of their project during the years 1985-1987, and chosen at random. This study had the following hypotheses:

- a) Community service becomes an additional educational tool toward teacher training;
- b) Community service strengthens self-confidence by applying theory to practice;
- c) Community service helps gain a better understanding of the needs of the specific population;
- d) Community service enhances citizenship values.

#### SUBJECTS

- a) Students participating in the study data:
 

|        |         |       |
|--------|---------|-------|
| Female | N = 217 | 68.5% |
| Male   | N = 100 | 31.5% |
- b) Class level when performing:
  1. Preacademic class N = 2 0.3%
  2. First year N = 86 27.3%
  3. Second year N = 184 57.9%
  4. Third year N = 46 14.5%

Although the choice of service was broad, children in groups, children on individual basis, elderly in nursing homes and day clubs, handicapped, children of prison inmates, new immigrants, and others, most of the students (51.3%) chose to work individually with one child. The 1:2 male/female ratio represents the student gender ratio at the college at the time.

#### STUDY RESULTS

A. Question: Did the community service help you in any way as a person or a future teacher?

- a) Findings show that:
  1. First year students report: a better understanding in identifying child's problem, enhancement of work experience, close ties with the child and his family, and personal satisfaction.

2. Second year students report: personal satisfaction, discovery of self-potential, and acquisition of self-confidence as a future teacher.
  3. Third year students report: improved motivation and self-confidence as future teacher, positive attitude toward the teaching profession (physical education), and improved skills to identify and understand child's problems.
- b) Findings regarding project results in working with an individual or a group show that group work contributed to enrichment of self-confidence and personal satisfaction. Working on an individual basis helped develop closeness to child and his/her family.
- B. Question: In your opinion, did your contribution help the child (or others) you worked with? How?
- a) All students (first, second and third year) report: all children enjoyed the personal relationship developed with the student. They exhibited improved self-confidence (57.0%), enjoyment from the project (54.7%), improved personal achievements—study, sports (55.1%), development of close and personal relationship with student (59.5%), and acceptance among peers (50.3%).
  - b) On a group level, the children benefited mainly by improving their physical fitness, acceptance among peers, improved scholastic motivation and pleasure from the experience.

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings of this study show that community service performed as a requirement for graduation is "learning through service," and enhances the performance of the child (or other) receiving the service.

The choice between individual or group service should be the student's (who "volunteers") according to his/her interests and qualifications, since both choices help him/her to develop.

Requirement of community service in the students' second year of study seemed to be the most effective. Community service as part of the school curriculum is recommended. While doing the project, the student may not be aware or convinced that required "volunteerism" adds to his education and experience, but as time goes by the student enjoys his/her new learning, adding new tools to his/her education as a teacher. Self-confidence is strengthened, and the student comes (while being closely guided) to understand community problems. Sensitivity to his/her environment helps the student develop values of caring for others and good citizenship.

Community Service performed by the Zinman College student is nonaltruistic, since it is required. However, it does help the student develop both on a personal and professional level, while providing a valuable service to the community.

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