



AGE APPROPRIATENESS IN YOUTH SERVICE ACTIVITIES GRADES K-5

The service of young people is an important resource in solving community problems. But like any volunteer, they need to be matched with volunteer opportunities that are appropriate. Developing age appropriate service activities will ensure that they and the agency they are serving receive the most out of their experience. Depending on the age of youth, concrete developmental features must be present to retain a youth's interest and energy in service.

This Resource Packet includes a brief overview of the developmental characteristics of young people in grades K-5, sample projects appropriate for this age group, and a list of other resources on this issue.

“The Benefits of Children Doing Volunteer Work” was written by Mary Jeanne Menna for Family Times and outlines the benefits of volunteering for younger children.

Contact: Family Times
Peddlers Village, 10 Main Street
Suite 3C
Christiana, DE 19702
Tel: 302-224-3020

The two pages on developmental themes are adapted from the following materials:

A Practical Guide for Developing Agency/School Partnerships for Service-Learning

Contact: The Points of Light Foundation, Youth & Family Outreach
1400 Eye Street, NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005
202-729-8135
www.pointsoflight.org

The Power and Potential of Youth in Services to Communities, “Service Experiences Through the Eyes of Youth”

Contact: Minnesota Office on Volunteer Services
117 University Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55155
1-800-234-6687

Learning By Giving

Contact:

National Youth Leadership Council
1910 West County Road B
St. Paul, MN 55113
651-631-3672
www.nylc.org

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF CHILDREN DOING VOLUNTEER WORK?

Every parent knows that teaching their kids to help others is the right thing to do, but did you know that getting children actively involved in volunteering can better prepare them for life? Here is how:

PROMOTES PERSONAL GROWTH

It feels good to do good—volunteering gives kids a personal sense of purpose and boosts self-confidence. An ordinarily shy child may learn a new talent and in turn, teach others, raising their self-esteem.

REDUCES “AT-RISK” BEHAVIOR

Studies show that students who volunteer are more likely to stay in school, stay off drugs and stay out of trouble. It gives kids “connections” to other people and promotes maturity.

TEACHES SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Kids develop empathy for others and they learn that one person really can make a difference.

STRENGTHENS FAMILIES

Children who interact with people from other cultures and circumstances different from our own, better understand the world around them and gain a deeper appreciation of their own families. In addition, parents who participate in their child’s volunteering experiences encourage open communications, leading to meaningful discussions at the dinner table.

FURTHERS CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Volunteering in an area of interest is a good preparation for their future careers. It gives students a more realistic view of workplace and enhances their leadership skills.

There are many benefits to volunteering. Most important, volunteering teaches children that, although there are problems in the world, they can be part of the solution—a solution that benefits everyone.

*An excerpt from an article in Family Ties entitled “The Benefits of Children Doing Volunteer Work” written by Mary Jeanne Menna

DEVELOPMENTAL THEMES

YOUTH GRADES K-5

Each young person develops at a slightly different rate and in a slightly different way. However, general patterns can be seen within different age groups of youth. Here are some major developmental themes to take into account when designing appropriate ways to include youth in grades K-5 in service.

PRIMARY (5-7 YEARS)

PHYSICAL:

- Developing small muscle skills
- Developing hand-eye coordination
- Physically able to play games
- Increasingly skillful with tools
- High energy levels
- Need to be active
- Gain control over body/self regulation

SOCIAL:

- Beginnings of empathy
- Two or three best friends
- Play groups are small
- Beginning of conformity with peers
- Beginning to interactive conversation; communicative
- Need to express newly acquired power and control, try out new roles
- Have trouble taking another's point of view

COGNITIVE:

- Beginning to differentiate between fantasy and reality
- Attention span lengthening
- Adept at ordering objects by size and quantity
- Developing logical operations and ability to solve problems
- Memory good for concrete sequences (numbers)
- Developing better judgements and decisions
- Can remember sequences and names of objects
- Perceptions still dominate reasoning ability

SELF:

- Achieving independence in care of physical self care
- Exploration is more goal directed
- Learning to forgo immediate reward for delayed gratification

ELEMENTARY (8-10 YEARS)

PHYSICAL:

- Physical skills are gaining importance
- Females ahead of males in physical development
- Skillful in small muscle coordination
- High energy level
- Active and energetic
- Experiencing growth spurts
- Able to care for self

SOCIAL:

- Intensification of peer group influence
- Males and females interested in hobbies
- Competition more common
- Overly concerned with peer imposed rules
- Energetic physical game playing
- Have same-sex friends
- Seek "best" friend

COGNITIVE:

- Capable of prolonged interest
- Beginning to see similarities
- Beginning to apply logical thought to practical situations
- Beginning to understand relationships of cause and effect
- Understands concept of money and time
- Beginning to understand symbolism and abstract concepts
- Able to organize information
- Able to substitute words and ideas for concrete objects.

SELF:

- Achieving personal independence
- Aware of importance of belonging
- Becoming increasingly self-sufficient
- Begins to compare themselves with others

VALUES:

- Sense of duty and accomplishment
- Developing moral values
- Developing consciousness is evident
- Developing awareness of consequences for behaviors and action
- Beginning to accept rules, but does not understand principles behind them
- Sees things as either bad or good

VALUES:

- Testing and questioning attitudes, values and belief systems
- Learning to forego immediate reward for delayed gratification
- Moving away from egocentrism
- Beginning autonomous thought and mutual respect
- Identify closely with parents and other family members
- Adult role models are strong influences about behavior
- Understand the reason for rules and behaves accordingly
- Beginning to set standards for self and accepting responsibility for own behavior
- Developing concern for others

*Adapted from A Practical Guide for Developing Agency/School Partnerships for Service-Learning, Points of Light Foundation, The Power and Potential of Youth in Services to Communities, Minnesota Office on Volunteer Services, and Learning By Giving, National Youth Leadership Council.

MATCHING SERVICE EXPERIENCE TO THE DEVELOPMENTAL LEVEL OF THE PARTICIPANT

Diane Hedin's research suggests that "for optimal moral growth, students should be engaged at their own level of reasoning in experiences which will challenge them to exercise their skills in more sophisticated ways. They must not be overwhelmed with demands beyond their current level."

As young people grow from childhood through adolescence to adulthood, there are appropriate service opportunities for them at every age. Just as young people have opportunities to participate in age-appropriate athletics from Little League to varsity sports, so they can have increasingly complex and involved in service experiences as they grow up.

Kindergarten and First Grade Students:

- Make holiday greetings cards and artwork for senior citizens who live in a nearby nursing home.
- Students participate in Arbor Day events, develop a basic understanding of the need for such a day and what community is all about.
- Students participate in the up-keep of a road or park.
- Collect stuffed animals to donate to children in a homeless shelter.
- Make bird houses for a nursing home or shelter.

Second Graders:

- Visit the nursing home as a group, making presentations that could include singing, story telling by seniors or by students, games, and like activities.
- Begin a "Stay in School" campaign, start by making posters explaining why is school good for you.
- Adopt a zoo animal.
- Hold a food drive for the homeless.
- Organize a liter patrol during lunch and recess.

Third and Fourth Graders:

- Students adopt an elder: write letters, share projects, visit, assist with utility bills through fundraisers.
- Sponsor aluminum can drive to raise money to plant trees in a park.
- Adopt a ____ project; a portion of a river, stream, highway, beach, or park trail.
- Fund raise for zoo and raise awareness of endangered animals.
- Collect clothes, toys, and shoes for needy countries.
- Start a community garden.

Fifth Graders:

- Assist the Kindergartners and first graders in making their cards for seniors, explaining who the cards are going to and helping personalize them.
- Plant gardens with low-income families.
- Read-a-thon projects, where students read to younger children or get sponsored to read books. And use the money raised to buy books for a library or underprivileged kids.
- Hold a health fair to raise awareness about diet, disease, and exercise.
- Research the problem of air pollution, and start a "Carpool" campaign.
- Lead workshops on bike safety.

WHAT IS AND IS NOT AGE APPROPRIATE SERVICE FOR K-5 STUDENTS?

Sometimes it is just as important to know not what to do as what to do. Below we have highlighted some projects for comparison.

IS AGE APPROPRIATE...

- Participating in an environmentally conscious project; like a beach clean up.
- Making placemats for a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.
- Read-a-thon projects, where students read to younger kids.
- Initiating a liter patrol at school during lunch or recess.
- Collecting used books for a shelter for homeless children.
- Performing plays and skits depicting community problems and their solutions.
- Visiting senior citizen who live in a near by home.

IS NOT AGE APPROPRIATE...

- Test water samples from a local lake or river and document the findings for the community.
- Volunteering in a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.
- Organizing a phonics fair to help improve reading skills.
- Starting a recycling program for the entire school.
- Writing letters to corporations asking for donations for a shelter for homeless children.
- Holding a youth summit to dialogue about problems in the community and possible solutions.
- Collecting and writing a personal or community oral histories by interviewing senior citizens.

OTHER RESOURCES FOR AGE APPROPRIATENESS IN SERVICE

The Big Help sponsored by Nickelodeon is an ongoing campaign to encourage and support kids (ages 6-14) volunteering. Toolkits are available that explain how to get help with organizing, promoting and running a Big Help service project.

Contact: The Big Help
PO Box 929
New York, NY 10108
212-258-7080
www.nick.com/inits/bh_dev/index.html

National Youth Service Day sponsored by Youth Service America, encourages communities to celebrate and recognize the power of young people's involvement in community problem solving. A toolkit is available that explains how to plan and organize a community service project including volunteer recruitment, fundraising, and publicity.

Contact: Youth Service America
1101 15th Street NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005-5002
202-296-2992
www.servenet.org

Make a Difference Day “the national day of doing good” sponsored by USA Weekend in partnership with the Points of Light Foundation, is a way for all citizens to get involved in solving serious social and environmental problems. Specific planning guides are available for young people, teachers, employers, and families are great organizational tools that can help anyone plan a great Make A Difference Day project.

Contact: Points of Light Foundation
1400 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005
202-729-8122
www.pointsoflight.org
www.usaweekend.com/diffday

The Giraffe Project has developed the **Standing Tall Teaching Guide** for students grades K-12. The teaching guides contain lessons and activities to inspire students to stand tall for the common good. It also lists sample service projects and a bibliography of books that contain concepts of caring, courage, service, and action.

Contact: The Giraffe Project
197 Second Street
PO Box 759
Langley, WA 98260
206-221-7989
www.giraffe.org

Camp Fire Boys and Girls created **A Gift of Giving** which is a service-learning program for youth in grades K-6. For each grade, there is curriculum guide that goes over the five-step process that leads students to providing a community service of their choice.

Contact: Camp Fire Boys and Girls
4601 Madison Avenue
Kansas City, MO 64112-1278
816-756-1950
www.campfire.org

The Maryland Student Service Alliance has developed service-learning curriculum guides for elementary, middle, and high school. These instructional guides were developed to help teachers to engage students in service-learning.

Contact: Maryland Student Service Alliance
200 W. Baltimore Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
(410) 333-2427

A publication has been developed by Ann Tracey, Andrea Roufs and Rob Shumer which lists the guides of the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, which are most pertinent to service-learning. This list also includes information on how to obtain guides.

Contact: Learn and Serve America
(800) 808-7378
serve@tc.umn.edu

The Pennsylvania Institute for Environmental and Community Service Learning has created a guide called **Discovering the World of Community Service Learning** designed to get students to investigate problems of their communities and develop strategies for solving them. This series includes a manual and teacher's guide, as well as a book of practical applications for elementary instructions.

Contact: Institute for Service Learning
64 Lempa Rd.
Holland, PA 18966
(215) 357-5861