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The Demands of Demographics

New Opportunities for Community Education

By Gene Wilhoit, Executive Director
National Association of State Boards of Education

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Service: Meeting Youth's Need To Be Needed

By James C. Kielsmeier and Rich Willits

IN APRIL 1861, hours after the smoke cleared at Fort Sumpter, the first volunteer military units from the North were organized in preparation for the battle to preserve the Union. They were from Minnesota.

The North Star State is again mobilizing, capturing some of the fresh air of the service movement sweeping the nation, and adding its own populist brand of citizen involvement. Youth service is blooming in America's heartland, and community educators are leading the way.

National service has long been viewed as a male rite of passage from childhood to adult responsibility. William James (1910), in an essay entitled "The Moral Equivalent of War," framed the concept in military terms, declaring the adversary to be the "forces of nature" rather than a human enemy. War, according to James, was an experience that built character, but with a cost far too great. Coal fields, fishing fleets in December—hard outdoor work demanding commitment and sacrifice—were the nonmilitary contexts that could make men out of boys.

A POPULIST VISION

The emergent Minnesota concept of youth service offers a broader vision based on the principle that service—unselfish giving to others—is learned behavior rooted in life experience that should be taught incrementally starting at the earliest years. The goal

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is to present opportunities for service throughout the growing-up experience of Minnesota youth.

In 1984, the National Youth Leadership Council based at the Center for Youth Development and Research in St. Paul took on the mission of developing a Comprehensive Youth Service Model in the state of Minnesota. The model would offer community service opportunities to every young person from kindergarten through college; non-college young adults could participate in a full-time service corps. The Council sought to create an ethos of service in which the giving of one's time and talents to meet the needs of the community

would be a commonplace opportunity available at every level of school and throughout the community in much the same way that athletics are available today.

With the involvement of young people, teachers, administrators, community educators, youth workers, and many others—including the Minnesota attorney general, the mayors of Minneapolis and St. Paul, several state legislators, two U.S. Congressmen, the Governor, and the Lt. Governor—the Council is well on the way toward achieving its mission.

Four major "spheres of service" have been identified.

Leadership for service was the theme of the National Youth Leadership Project, held in Amery, Wisconsin, last summer. Two Minneapolis students were among the young leaders who fanned out across Amery to help senior citizens.





In training to lead others in community service, a participant in the National Youth Leadership Project helped an older resident with yard chores.

SCHOOL-BASED YOUTH SERVICE

Curricular and co-curricular opportunities to engage in service have been explored and encouraged. In 1987, legislation introduced by State Representative Ken Nelson authorized school districts to levy an added \$.50 per capita for community education to be used to design and implement youth development plans. A Minnesota Department of Education survey showed that most of the 186 school districts (out of a possible 435) that levied included proposals to develop youth service (Willits 1988).

A phone survey of 31 area school districts by the Minneapolis Area United Way in June 1988 found that 15 include youth service in their current Youth Development Plans, and that four others will include it in the future. The youth development legislation has been heartily supported by the Minnesota Community Education Association, which backed the legislative effort, developed in-service training for youth service

teachers, and highlighted youth service in its publications.

The 1987 Minnesota Youth Development legislation is the first state- and community-funded school-based service effort in the nation. Of the estimated \$2 million levied for youth development in 1988-89, \$1 million can be considered earmarked for youth service projects and programs.

There is solid grassroots support for youth service statewide: from educators, parents, youth workers, interested citizens, and, most important, youth, all of whom have participated in the youth development planning process in their communities. These groups, facilitated by community educators, are envisioning what their communities might, at best, be like for youth, and youth service is playing a major role in their dreams, their plans, and their labor.

Legislation passed in 1988 strengthened the language of the 1987 bill and spelled out how youth service should be conducted as part of formal education. The statute reads in part:

Programs must include:

1. Preliminary training for pupil volunteers conducted, when possible, by organizations experienced in such training.
2. Supervision of the pupil volunteers to ensure appropriate placement and adequate learning opportunity.
3. Sufficient opportunity for pupil volunteers to give genuine service to their community.
4. Integration of academic learning with the service experience.

Examples of appropriate pupil service placements include: child care, Head Start, early childhood education and extended day programs; tutoring programs involving older pupils tutoring younger pupils; environmental beautification projects; and regular visits for shut-in senior citizens.

Youth service also received support from the State Board of Education. On August 8, 1988, a recommendation for a rule change was passed unanimously by the Board mandating all school districts to offer youth service at both the elementary and secondary levels. A year of review is required before the rule becomes permanent, but every indication is that it will face little if any public opposition.

In spite of all this interest, existing

programs are few and under-recognized. Less than 15 percent of the school districts responding to a 1988 survey by the Minnesota Department of Education and the National Youth Leadership Council reported curricular or co-curricular programs. In another survey conducted by the department, more than 175 districts reported a high or moderate need for assistance in youth service program development. These surveys and high attendance levels at recent workshops indicate that there is likely to be significant growth in school service programs in the next few years if effective materials and training can be made available.

AGENCY-BASED SERVICE

Scouts, YMCAs, YWCAs, Red Cross, 4-H, Campfire, and other nonprofit youth service organizations have historically offered community service opportunities as part of their youth development curricula. In Minnesota, an already high level of interest has heightened. Nonprofit professionals have not only pressed their own organizations to offer more service opportunities, but have joined in support of youth service efforts in other spheres. Currently, a task group is exploring how the formal and non-formal educational systems can link to provide enhanced service experience for school-age children. The recommendations include inviting organizations such as 4-H to jointly sponsor service projects such as Pedal Power, a bike safety training program that matches high school students with younger peers; encouraging school credit or recognition for achievements in community service outside of school; and using school facilities for agency-based after-school programs that engage youth in public service.

CAMPUS SERVICE

With the technical assistance of two national organizations, Campus Compact and COOL (Campus Outreach Opportunity League), and with initial funding from local foundations and from ACTION, the federal agency, the National Youth Leadership Council has sponsored a statewide campus service effort. Minnesota COOL (M-COOL) has in the past year helped nurture campus volunteer efforts in every four-year col-

lege in the state. Led by a recent graduate, M-COOL has conducted student training, provided on-site consultations, and pursued policy-level work that resulted in state legislation in 1988. The work continues; the involvement of two-year colleges is expected in 1988-89, and a new legislative initiative will, if successful, put a campus service coordinator on every state college and university campus. The 1988 legislation calls for a review of curricular service opportunities in state higher education; a series of reports is due to the legislature in February 1989.

FULL-TIME SERVICE

Organizing that began in 1984 focused support for a full-time service program on enhancing the relatively small Minnesota Conservation Corps. A Governor's task force (1986) recommended that a comprehensive full-time service corps be established "for the purpose of giving youth unique opportunities to provide full-time necessary service to Minnesota, while enhancing their personal development, education, and future employability skills." Efforts to press forward with this model, which resulted from hearings conducted throughout the state and a year of study, are now targeted on the 1989 legislative session.

PULLING IT TOGETHER

Supporters of youth service in each of the spheres have worked together for mutual support. Key to the view that youth service can be advanced in several sectors has been the involvement of Governor Rudy Perpich, the incoming chair of the Education Commission of the States (ECS), the education organization of the nation's governors. Perpich supports youth service in Minnesota and has promised to make it a priority in his tenure with ECS.

The formation of the Minnesota Youth Service Association has also strengthened connections among the spheres of service. More than 100 organizations representing diverse approaches and populations have joined to support a Comprehensive Youth Service Plan. Planned conferences, workshops, and a comprehensive curricular package will strengthen both the program and the



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association's legislative initiatives. A strong partnership between the Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Office of Volunteer Services, and the National Youth Leadership Council has done much to ensure a solid future for youth service in Minnesota.

A VISION FOR THE NATION

The Minnesota youth service initiative has received solid community support. The idea of service is deeply rooted in the American experience. In Minnesota, it has yielded a rich bounty of program initiatives that will address the need of youth to be needed, and the society to be served. With similar nurturing in other states and at the local level, a vision of a comprehensive national service model begins to take shape (U.S. House of Representatives 1987). □

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Young people from Minneapolis and St. Paul helped lay the foundation of a Habitat for Humanity house as part of Minnesota Youth Service Day, November 21, 1987. Habitat for Humanity has built or renovated more than 3,000 low-cost homes for poor families by using volunteer labor and making nonprofit, interest-free loans from a revolving fund.

