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## Youth Community Service

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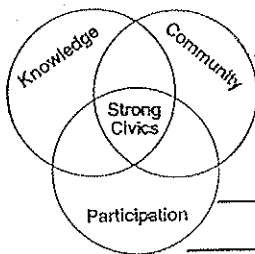
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# Youth Community Service

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Todd Clark

**A** growing number of American educators recommend that all students in our public schools engage in voluntary school and community service opportunities as a part of their preparation for citizenship. The idea is one that public education has entertained for years without actually doing much to implement such programs except in elitist "service" organizations or in a few schools that depend on the enthusiasm of local leaders.

It is a valuable experience to have young people identify the unmet needs of their schools and communities and to design and implement activities intended to meet them. Campus needs for tutoring and beautification, community projects to help the elderly, after-school programs for latchkey children, or community environmental projects are just a few of the efforts in which students may participate.

Not all service has equal effect on student volunteers. Research conducted by Hedin and Conrad (1981) concludes that six elements enhance the value of service programs:

1. Service performed *must be* valuable and worthwhile for the community *and* for the students.
2. Service must provide opportunities for young people to be depended upon; one must count on the student.
3. Service must include tasks that challenge and strengthen students' critical thinking.
4. Service must provide students with the opportunity to make decisions.
5. The most effective community service projects involve adults and students working together.
6. Good community service *must* provide systematic reflection on the experience.

School-based service programs organized to include these six essential elements should be available to all students at least as voluntary activities in every school in America. These opportunities should be provided in three ways:

1. *Infusion.* The social studies curriculum (K-12) should have a participation strand focus at least once each year on the importance of voluntarism to the health of a free society. Continuing and short-term school and community projects should be a part of the effort.
2. *Elective.* A special service course that

carries academic credit should be offered as an elective open to all students beginning in middle school. The course should be built around a solid knowledge and skill development base. Students should be able to repeat the course at least once for credit. Continuing school and community projects as well as those designed and implemented by students should be the focus.

3. *Cocurricular.* After-school programs coordinated by a teacher sponsor that serve as the link between class work, the school, and community should be provided. Continuing school and community projects such as tutoring, campus beautification, and work with the elderly can be coordinated by experienced students. Community needs can be assessed continually and projects involving large numbers of occasional volunteers can be planned and implemented.

What effect will programs meeting the stated criteria have on students? Effective programs have power to improve both academic learning and personal and social development. Effective programs strongly influence student problem-solving ability and significantly affect attitudes toward school, adults, and the community in general. They also help build skills and habits needed in the workplace. These findings, according to Hedin and Conrad, are especially important for at-risk students who could profit greatly from the knowledge, skill development, and social bonding that result from service programs.

Three school-based programs are summarized below. I invite sponsors of other programs to send basic information to the Constitutional Rights Foundation, 601 S. Kingsley Drive, Los Angeles, California 90005.

## Community Involvement Program

Hopkins High School, Minnetonka  
The core of the program is a 12th grade social studies course that is held five days per week for two hours. Students spend four days in community service placements and one day in seminar. In addition, students in any social studies course may perform community service as an out-of-class project. Materials available: Two videos, "Sense of Community" and "6 Minutes on Youth Service." Write to Dan Conrad, 2400 Lindbergh Drive, Minnetonka,

Minnesota 55343.

## Early Adolescent Helper Program

New York City

Inner-city student volunteers are given training in human development, communication, problem solving, worker attitudes and behaviors, and how-to information concerning the areas where they will serve (e.g., early childhood programs, latchkey programs, senior centers). Volunteers discuss with adult leaders their roles, experiences, successes, problems, and feelings. Volunteers serve up to four hours a week after school or as a credit elective during the school day. Materials available: Program guides, "You and Your Helper" leaflet for child care staff, and a newsletter. Write to Joan Schine, CASE/Helper Program, 25 West 43d Street, New York, New York 10036.

## Youth Community Service (YCS)

Los Angeles

YCS helps youth develop leadership skills and apply them in student-directed community service projects benefiting their schools and neighborhoods. Students in grades 9-12 attend an overnight leadership training retreat and meet twice weekly to plan and implement service projects. Community volunteers assist students and serve as role models. Sample projects include visits to convalescent homes, clothing drives for the homeless, entertaining children with special needs, and voter registration campaigns. Teacher sponsors attend a two-day training session plus monthly meetings. Materials available: Student handbook and teacher's guide; workbooks; infusion material for government classes; and *Making a Difference: A Workbook for Student-Directed Community Service Projects*. Write to Cathryn Berger Kaye, 601 South Kingsley Drive, Los Angeles, California 90005.

## Reference

Hedin, Diane, and Dan Conrad. "Executive Summary of the Final Report of the Experimental Education Evaluation Project." Center for Youth Development and Research, University of Minnesota, 1981.

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