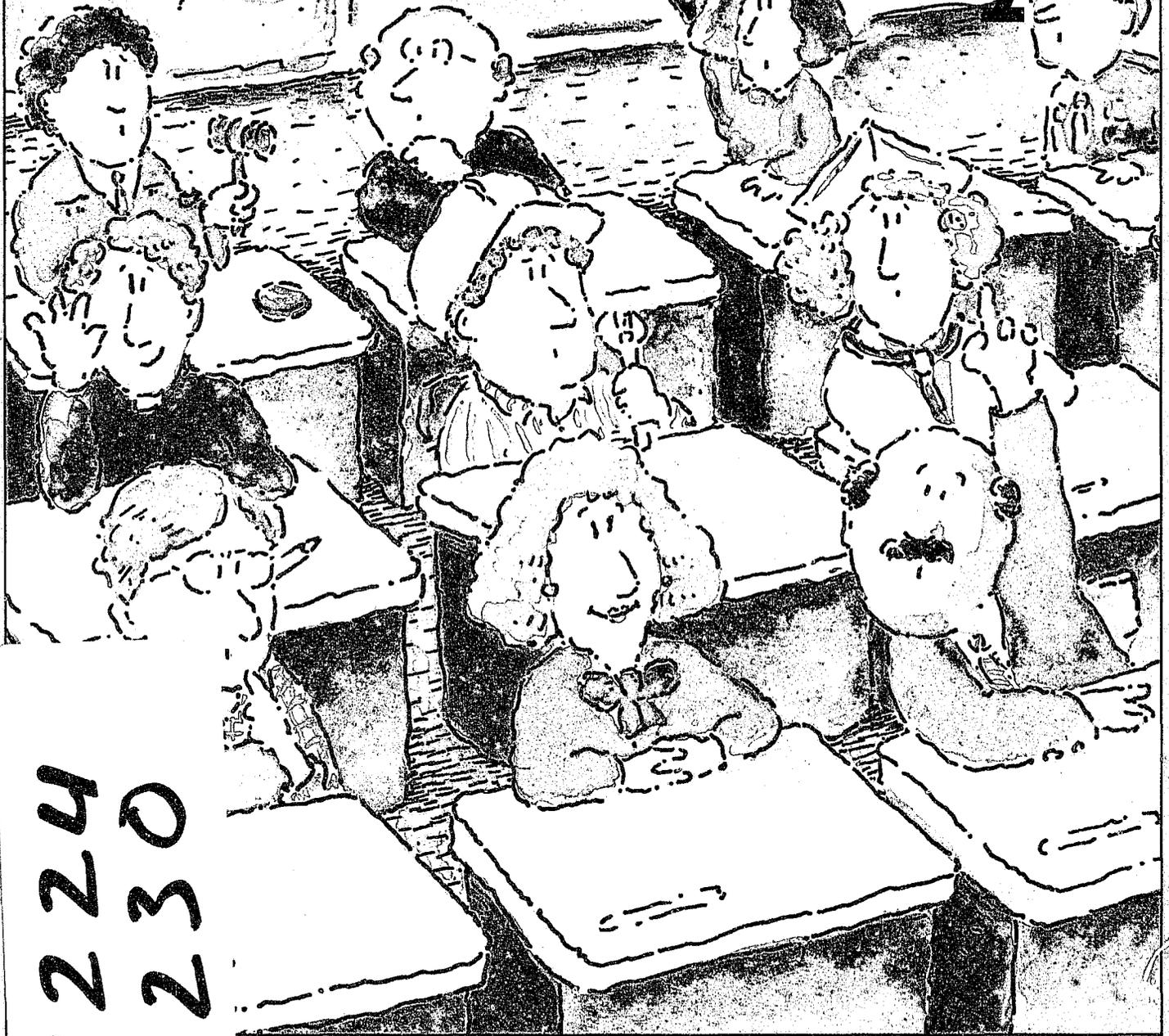


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*Better to give and receive: Students and neighbors
learn to share resources to benefit their communities.*

School Safety



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Crime, Close
and personal

Building
respect.

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

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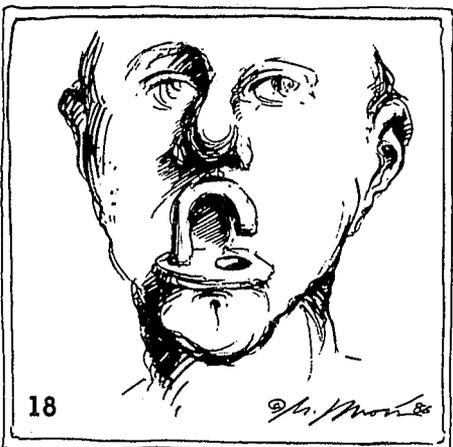
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About the cover:

Schools are benefiting from a resurgence of community involvement — from private citizens, commercial businesses and public agencies — stimulated both by positive school-public relations and, unfortunately, by a series of crime-related crises. Illustration by Deborah Zemke, Copyright © 1988, NSSC.



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BY CATHRYN BERGER KAYE

School-based youth community service programs are helping students develop individual and social responsibility, and build intergenerational bonds.

Community service — with a smile

"Community service opened my mind, made me think!"

"All I cared about was me; now I care about others. The purpose of my life has changed."

"The word philanthropy went straight from my brain to my heart and I have been living it every day since."

In the 19th century, while traveling throughout the United States, Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville observed a peculiar phenomenon that Americans had adopted on a broad scale — service. He called it the "habits of the heart." These habits no longer can be left to chance. The student comments above demonstrate the powerful effect community service has on young lives. We must encourage our young people to actively seek out service opportunities and to develop a higher level of critical thinking and reflective processes through such participation.

Currently, a growing national youth service movement exists. More than

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200 college and university presidents have formed a coalition called the Campus Compact to increase the amount of community service performed by their student populations. State and city conservation corps recruit youth between the ages of 17 and 24 for a one-year commitment to service. President Bush's National Service Office has initiated a national program called YES — Youth Entering Service to America.

Public schools, often the most significant institution in young people's lives before they enter the work force or college, must take an active role in this growing movement. Millions of youth need meaningful experiences that inspire them to act for the common good and plan for a life with purpose.

Proposed national legislation would provide the necessary financial support for school-based community service programs and incentives for local policymakers and school administrators to participate. The Chief State School Officers Association; with the Constitutional Rights Foundation, conducted a series of nationwide conferences in spring 1988 to provide a rationale for school-based community service and to highlight successful program models. The time for action is now!

Service in schools

"School-based youth community service" offers guidance and encourage-

ment to student volunteers within the school environment so that they can acquire the ideals of citizenship by planning and implementing service projects.

Program designs vary according to the needs of each school district. Several large districts, such as Atlanta, Springfield (Massachusetts), Detroit and Los Angeles, have begun mandatory or voluntary programs on a districtwide basis. Individual schools may institute classes, co-curricular programs, independent study or other programs to encourage volunteerism. An array of options gives all young people the opportunity to volunteer.

An increasing number of schools integrate service across the academic spectrum of their K-12 classes. If service is not integrated into the curriculum and fabric of schools, it may fail to reach its unique potential for stimulating academic learning and intellectual growth and invigorating the school experience.

Six essential elements are necessary for students and the community to reap maximum benefits.¹ The service must:

- Be valuable and worthwhile for the community and the students;
- Provide opportunities for young people to be depended upon;
- Include tasks that challenge and strengthen students' critical thinking, both cognitively and ethically;
- Provide students with decision-making opportunities;

- Involve adults and students working together; and
- Provide systematic reflection on the experience.

Youth community service goals

School-based youth community service helps achieve the following goals:

Builds positive bonds between youth and our society's institutions. As educators, we have an obligation to provide youth with the tools to improve society and their community. By investigating needs and initiating projects, youth learn to see a graffiti-covered wall as a place they can clean up, or find they can tutor younger children to improve their reading scores. In the process, they discover the steps necessary to make a difference. By gaining access to the power structures, our youth can become part of delinquency prevention rather than the cause of delinquency.

As the demographics of our communities change, the service experience encourages individuals to learn about their surroundings, take pride in their communities and value their contributions. One Los Angeles youth, a recent immigrant from Southeast Asia, planned a holiday party for a local convalescent hospital. "I proved I can put an idea on paper and make it work — plan the food, provide decorations, and bring students to visit and make music," she said. "I learned I'm not alone; I can ask for help from my teacher, community and friends. This memorable day was an excellent mirror to see myself and measure my improvement."

Brings together students from diverse ethnic, racial and socioeconomic groups. Students tend to socialize and attend classes in homogenous groups. As one student described his three years of community service in high school, "Students who otherwise would remain in segregated groups join together as a single entity. Stereotypes are broken down as we learn to appreciate the differences in our cultures and find out that we are basically the same and

share similar goals."

Offers all students a chance to give something back to their schools and communities. While most school districts have some community service activity, the question remains: Are community service opportunities available for every student, regardless of their educational standing and current involvement in their school? All too frequently, community service involves only the student elite — the Key Club, Honor Society, Leadership Class or student government. By drawing every student into the service experience, schools respond to their critical role of encouraging participation and building citizenship. A recent publication by the William T. Grant Foundation states:

"When young people have a chance to act on their humanitarian ideals, they build self-respect and strong attachments to family and community. There is virtually no limit to what young people — with appropriate education, training and encouragement — can do, no social need they cannot help meet."²

Creates positive partnerships between students and adults. Researchers consistently acknowledge that community service provides youth with the information and experience to make an effective transition to adulthood and embrace the responsibilities of citizenship. Through the community service experience, young people interact with individuals of different ages, and they see adults as partners and role models.

Strengthens student self-esteem and academic performance. When institutionalized within the educational environment, community service lets teachers and students work in a concentrated fashion investigating social needs, current issues and the historical context from which these emerge. Students develop teamwork and communication skills, examine community needs and remedies, and plan and implement projects. Reflection is systematized through journal writing and frequent discussions. Newspapers, supplemented by readings from classic and contemporary



Student volunteers spend time with disabled children. Photograph by Gail Rolf.

literature, history or psychology, can serve as a classroom text.

Participation creates a bonding to school that can impact the students' schoolwork, "derived largely from increased feelings of efficacy and self-direction and perhaps from a stronger connection to the school community inspired by youth community service."³ If education is truly to "educate," or bring forth from within, community service can be used: as a vehicle for learning and understanding; exercising problem-solving, critical thinking and reasoning abilities; applying information gathered from a multitude of disciplines; increasing leadership abilities; solidifying values and a sense of self-worth; and preparing to live productive lives.

Encourages a lifelong commitment to the service ethic. Our youth spend years sitting in chairs absorbing ideas, information and philosophical approaches to life from their teachers. They are on the verge of entering the "real world," yet uncertain about what the real world is, who the players are, and how to be viable and effective participants in society. By empowering all young people to make responsible decisions and effect change, the service ethic can be internalized and take its place among other personal values.



Students talk with a convalescent home resident. Photograph by Cathryn Berger Kaye.

As one student said: "Many things bring joy, but there is no feeling like the one I get when an elderly person smiles and says thank you for caring, or when a child beams when he beats you at musical chairs. I'll continue my community work long after high school."

Youth community service programs
Student-initiated projects range from en-

vironmental conservation work to child care assistance in after-school latchkey programs. Each project provides real service, filling needs that otherwise may not be met or that would be delayed due to lack of funds. Youth volunteers do not replace paid providers; they supplement what services are available while learning and augmenting personal abilities. The following are examples of nationally recognized programs:

Charleston, North Carolina — Youth Service Charleston: High school students provide Wood for Warmth, free

firewood for low-income families; help staff the Special Olympics program; and paint murals depicting student service on a construction wall.

Tucson, Arizona — Student Service Learning, Tucson Unified School District: An elementary school invites senior citizens to a weekly lunch program called "The Pleasure of Your Company." During lunch, older citizens interact with their young hosts and become familiar with the neighborhood school. Elementary classes also participate in pen pal, adopt-a-senior and

Grandparents Day programs.

Los Angeles, California — Youth Community Service, Constitutional Rights Foundation and the Los Angeles Unified School District: Eight hundred high school students meet in a community service class or as a co-curricular after-school group to organize an annual picnic for battered and abused children. Students assist in literacy programs, volunteer with the Red Cross, tutor in after-school latchkey programs, paint over graffiti, lead aerobics classes for senior citizens, and plant smog-reducing trees to reverse the greenhouse effect.

Springfield, Massachusetts — Community Service Learning, Springfield Public Schools: Each school in the district develops a plan to help students consider the connection between what they learn and how they live. Each school annually chooses a theme or project that involves all students in classroom and community participation.

Minnetonka, Minnesota — Community Involvement Class, Hopkins High School: Student service is encouraged through all-school projects, including food drives; club activities; credit for community service internships; a peer tutoring program with native-born and immigrant students; and class laboratory experiences such as students repairing items for senior citizens in shop class, performing community service in lieu of a library-based report in sociology class, and participating in a community service class.

Organizing a project

Essentially, the two ways to get started in community service are: joining existing efforts or beginning projects in response to unmet community needs. Some ideas for projects include:

- *Identify community agencies* that need assistance by developing a community needs assessment that surveys the facilities, agencies and schools within a one-mile radius of your school; asking for student/adult input; reading newspapers; or contacting volunteer centers, youth or adult service clubs,

religious organizations, and human social service networks such as day care or senior citizen centers. Many cities print directories of community agencies that are available at volunteer centers, the local chamber of commerce or city hall.

- *Start with the student* by identifying the skills and interests of various volunteers and building project ideas around them. Develop a "contribution catalog" and give a copy to local agencies.
- *Brainstorm project ideas* with students, teachers and community members. Ask a council member, the city manager, a social worker or other community leader to attend a student meeting or class.

The following factors are important in ensuring a project's success:

Project design: Review all ideas to make sure the project addresses community needs, provides service to the community, and is within the participants' capabilities. A project proposal should include a description of the project in addition to identifying needs, tasks, student and adult involvement, a budget and plans for evaluating the project.

The guiding questions in the project proposal help develop a rationale and implementation strategy. While plans may change as the project progresses, the proposal serves as a way to get started and as a useful point of reference along the way. It also explains the project to others and helps gather support from school administrators and agency officials.

Student volunteers: To involve additional students, set a reasonable goal for the number of volunteers needed, then inform prospective volunteers of project orientation plans, the time commitment required, and ways to get more information. Recruit students by notifying clubs, school faculty and the general school population of the need for volunteers.

Project approval: Determine who needs to be notified for project approval

and give copies of the project proposal forms to appropriate individuals, including student participants, parents, the sponsoring teacher, school administrators, student government leaders and community advisers.

Group history: Keep copies of proposal forms and meeting minutes to maintain the project history. Adding photographs of planning sessions and actual service work creates a useful historical record of what volunteers have accomplished.

Evaluation and reflection: Evaluation and reflection aid academic learning, personal development and program improvement. Reflection, the thoughtful preparation and discussion before, during and after the project, might include: keeping a journal; doing observation exercises and assignments; preparing background sessions, i.e., lectures, films and readings; creating "Tip Sheets" for future volunteers; writing essays or research papers that demonstrate the expertise gained; giving formal presentations to school or community groups; and conducting a closing event to celebrate and affirm what has been accomplished. Also allow time after the project has ended for students to complete a written evaluation with group discussion. □

To receive Network, a national publication on school-based youth community service programs, other materials or additional information regarding youth community service, contact: Youth Community Service, Constitutional Rights Foundation, 601 South Kingsley Drive, Los Angeles, California 90005, 213/487-5590.

Endnotes

1. Hedin, Diane, and Dan Conrad, *Executive Summary of the Final Report of the Experiential Education Evaluation Project*, Center for Youth Development and Research, University of Minnesota.
2. *The Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America's Youth and Young Families*, The William T. Grant Foundation, Washington, D.C., 1988, p. 79.
3. Herman, Joan, and James Burry, *Evaluation Report of the Constitutional Rights Foundation's Youth Community Service Program*, Center for the Study of Evaluation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1988. Complete copies of the report are available through the Constitutional Rights Foundation.