New Hampshire 4-H
Serving to Learn, Learning to Serve

Service Learning

Through its pledge of "hands to larger service," 4-H has historically given back to the community by encouraging young people and adults to volunteer. In 4-H, service is commonly defined as the voluntary action of an individual or a group of individuals without pay. Service to the community helps young people learn caring, leadership and citizenship. Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach responsibility, and strengthen communities. This publication will walk you through the definitions of service learning, community service and citizenship as well as provide the steps for planning quality service learning experiences.

Definitions:
Service-Learning:
1. Service learning is connecting the community service project with the values and skills it instills.
2. The National Commission on Service-Learning describes Service-Learning as: "...a teaching and learning approach that integrates community service with academic (or project based) study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities."

Community Service:
1. Services volunteered by individuals or an organization to benefit a community or its institutions.
2. Similar work performed by law offenders to serve a sentence in lieu of or in addition to jail time.
3. A service that is performed for the benefit of the public or its institutions.

Citizenship:
1. The status of a citizen with its attendant duties, rights, and privileges.
2. Citizenship also often implies working toward the betterment of one's community through participation, volunteer work, and efforts to improve life for all citizens.

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What We Know:
According to Service-Learning researchers Conrad and Hedin, students benefit from Service-Learning in many ways:

*Personal Growth and Development*
- Self-esteem
- Personal efficacy and sense of responsibility
- Moral development and reinforced values and beliefs
- Exploration of new roles, identities, and interests
- Willingness to take risks and accept new challenges

*Intellectual Development and Academic Learning*
- Higher level thinking skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking
- Skills and issues specific to service experience
- Motivation to learn
- Insight, judgment, and understanding

*Social Growth and Development*
- Social responsibility and concern for others
- Political effectiveness
- Civic participation
- Knowledge and exploration of service-related careers
- Understanding and appreciation of, and ability to relate to, people from a wide range of backgrounds and life situations

*By giving back to their communities, young people:*
- Learn the value of helping others
- Develop leadership, communication and organizational skills and a sense of empowerment
- Learn how important the connection is between subject matter and life in the community
- Learn how to cooperate with one another and work as a team with diverse groups of people including adults, peers and others with different backgrounds and experiences
- Succeed in an area different from academics, athletics or popularity
- Develop problem-solving skills by applying their knowledge to real-world situations

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Carrying out service activities can strengthen a club or group because it:
- Boosts member commitment and involvement by giving members meaningful activities
- Can involve families and youth in a joint activity
- Fulfills the "hands to larger service" part of the 4-H Pledge
- Builds unity among members, allowing them to function better as a team
- Allows members to get to know one another better as they work together on a common goal
- Helps youth become invested in their club and community
- Shows the community how youth can be resources and how they can get things done.

Planning projects:
The Five-Part Community Service Learning Cycle (Michigan 4-H)

In the cycle, young people actively assess community needs, plan and prepare for their service project, experience meaningful community service, reflect on and assess what happened throughout the process, and apply what they’ve learned to future situations. The community service-learning cycle as been proven to help develop leadership, caring, personal competence and citizenship in young people.

There are several decisions 4-H groups must make in planning service activities. The group must decide what’s needed, determine what should be done to meet the need(s), decide what they can do to bring this about, and decide exactly what they will do, and who will do what. Once these decisions have been made, the group can begin planning the details.

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Service Learning Planning Worksheet

Step 1: Decide what’s needed: Involve 4-H’ers in brainstorming or using other decision-making techniques to figure out what the alternatives are.

Step 2: Decide what should be done: Look at the list of all the things that are needed, and decide the highest priorities for the community.

Step 3: Decide what the 4-H group or individual 4-H’er can do: Decide what portion of the solution is realistic for the group to do.

Step 4: Decide what will be done and who will do it: Assignments should be tailored to the interests, abilities, ages, and potential of each member.

Step 5: Evaluation: Review what members have done and learned through this activity or have them write a journal of their service activities and what those activities meant to them.

Resources:
New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service and County 4-H Programs
Sites to Visit:
www.learnandservce.gov - Corporation for National and Community Service
www.servicelearning.org - National Service Learning Clearinghouse
http://nationalserviceresources.org - The Resource Center: Tools and Training for Volunteers and Service Programs.

References:
The Ohio State University Service Learning Ideas
Michigan 4-H – Get Involved in Service Learning
Louisiana 4-H Service Learning

Tennessee 4-H Service Learning Standards and Best Practice Guide
The Free Dictionary by Farlex