

## Implementing Service-Learning

### Service-Learning Defined

In the Lions Quest programs, service-learning is coupled with social and emotional learning to incorporate the recognition and application of talents and interests, organizational skills, goal setting, appreciation of diversity, empathy, respect, communication and cooperation, problem solving, reflection, and other essential life skills to create a fully integrated learning experience. In school-and community-based situations, young people investigate issues, prepare and plan a service-learning project to address those issues, implement their projects, and then reflect on and share what they have learned about real-world needs with others outside the classroom who can help carry the work forward. Service becomes service-learning as students reflect on what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what they are learning about themselves, others, the need they are addressing, and the collaborative process of working together to achieve a common goal. In this process, students apply knowledge, skills, and behaviors they need to learn while designing and performing service projects that give them a sense of empowerment, confidence, and accomplishment of having done something worthwhile. In addition to preparing and planning to address needs, they also develop stronger academic, social, emotional, ethical, and civic skills. Young people long for opportunities to make a difference in their school and community and desire to have their voices, talents, passions, skills, and knowledge acknowledged and put to use in making their classrooms, school, community, and world a better place for everyone. As a result, research shows that they are more likely to come to school, get better grades, bond to facilitators and classmates, demonstrate prosocial skills, and develop an ethic of service that contributes to a life-long disposition toward civic action.<sup>38</sup>

### Five Steps of Service-Learning

Unit 5, Leadership and Service, provides eight lessons that follow a structure for implementing a high quality service-learning project. The structure is comprised of Five Steps of Service-Learning.<sup>39</sup> Students are empowered with guidance from the facilitator to implement these steps as follows in Lions Quest programs:

**Investigation** With guidance and support from the facilitator, students:

- Discover and make visible to the class the students' talents, skills, and interests that will be helpful in carrying out a service-learning project by using their social and emotional skills of listening and interviewing each other and posting them in a visible place.
- Identify range of needs in the school and community that align with their talents, skills, and interests.
- Research reasons why the needs exist through interviews, surveys, and various media.
- Collaborate with school and community partners who are interested in addressing the needs.
- Narrow the list of needs to no more than five around which to develop service-learning project ideas.
- Begin documenting the service-learning process by writing in journals, taking pictures and videos, and keeping a record of the experience to share as part of the demonstration and celebration step.
- Begin to reflect on individual learning and the effectiveness of the group process.

### Service-Learning: Why Are We Doing This?

Students typically ask, "Why are we doing this?" when presented with new content in the curriculum. Service-learning is an educational methodology that answers that question by:

- Enhancing and extending learning beyond the classroom
- Providing opportunities for students to learn and apply academic, social, emotional, and ethical skills to address real-life issues in the school and community
- Fostering a sense of empathy and caring for others
- Meeting actual school and community needs
- Creating school and community linkages
- Integrating service-learning projects into the academic program
- Providing time for reflection about what was learned during this service<sup>37</sup>

**Preparation and Planning** With guidance and support from the facilitator, students:

- Brainstorm potential service-learning project ideas that could potentially meet those needs.
- Decide on a class service-learning project.
- Learn more about the need and potential for the service-learning project through additional interviews, surveys, and research.
- Develop a detailed service-learning project plan with committees, roles, and responsibilities.
- Continue the documentation process and ongoing reflection on individual learning and group process.

**Action** With guidance and support from the facilitator, students:

- Implement the class service-learning project as a collaborative group effort with committees, roles, and responsibilities.
- Offer direct, indirect, advocacy-based, or research-based service in the school or community based on the type of service-learning project they choose to implement.
- Use academic, social, and emotional competencies to prepare, plan, implement, and document the service-learning experience.
- Participate in a real-world learning experiences with real consequences.
- Continue the documentation process and ongoing reflection on individual learning and group process.

**Reflection** With guidance and support from the facilitator, students reflect on at the end of the service-learning project through the following process:

- Report on what happened at the outset, during, and as a result of the service-learning project.
- Describe their thoughts and feelings about their individual experience of participating in the service-learning project.
- Describe their thoughts and feelings about the group process of preparing, planning, and carrying out a service-learning project with the entire class and within committees.
- Assess the effectiveness of the group process—What worked well? What didn't work well? What improvement to the group process could be implemented in the future?
- Gather feedback from participants and recipients about their experience of the project.

**Demonstration and Celebration** With guidance and support from the facilitator, students demonstrate what they have learned as well as the talents, skills, and knowledge used to complete the service-learning project successfully through the following process:

- Gather all documentation of the service-learning project from the beginning to the completion.
- Determine audiences outside the classroom who would benefit from learning about the project results.
- Create and present a class presentation to demonstrate the individual and collective learning from the project through reports, digital presentation photography, videos, publications, performances, and/or artistic displays to audiences outside the classroom.
- Celebrate the results of the service project with those who participated and the recipients.

## Facilitator Considerations before Starting a Service-Learning Project

There are several considerations that the facilitator needs to address before starting Unit 5: Leadership and Service.

**Short-term or long-term project** *Do you want to facilitate a short-term or long-term project?* If new to service-learning, it is advisable to start small. Short-term service-learning projects that are completed by the whole class can take 1–2 weeks to complete, be relatively easy to implement, and provide high quality experiences for students. Long-term projects that are more complex may take weeks to complete or require an ongoing commitment and are better facilitated by experienced service-learning practitioners. It is critical to decide whether to facilitate a short-term or long-term project before beginning Unit 5 in order to keep students' expectations within the boundaries of what the facilitator is able and willing to implement.

**Level of effort** *What level of service-learning project are you able to manage given your course load and family commitments?* It is important for the facilitator to be realistic about the time, levels of interest and support, and resources available to organize the details and logistics of a service-learning project. If course load or family commitments do not permit extra time and preparation, keep the service-learning project focused on the school and plan to complete it during class time. If more time and resources are available, invite students to consider needs and service-learning projects in the community or beyond. Again, the facilitator's decision will determine how the opportunity for service-learning experiences is introduced to the class.

**Flexibility with out-of-class time** *How receptive are the administrators to schoolwide service-learning projects that may take students' time outside of regular class time?* Check with school administrators to find out what the parameters are for students to complete a service-learning project outside of class time.

**School policies** *What are the school's policies about students leaving the school to participate in community-based service-learning?* Check on school policies related to leaving the school site to participate in community-based service-learning, such as handling transportation and the legal issues related to who provides the transportation, getting permissions from families to release students from school, making sure all students are covered by insurance and have presented medical forms, making sure first aid kits are available.

**Student maturity** *Have your students demonstrated sufficient maturity for community-based or large-scale service-learning projects?* The complexity of the project should be in direct relation to the maturity of the students. If they are designing an organized class service-learning project for the first time, it is advisable to keep the project in the classroom and school and supervise the students closely. If the students are seasoned service-learning implementers, then they can be given more responsibility to work independently in a broader sphere of influence.

**Resources** *What human and financial resources do you have access to?* It is critical for the facilitator to think about the people needed to help implement service-learning projects and the financial resources that might be sought to complete the projects. The scope of the service-learning project should be in direct relationship to the availability of these

## How to Decide on a Class Service-Learning Project

Base your decision on:

- Talents, skills, and interests of students in relation to the need and project ideas
- Feedback from school and community members about their perception of the needs and project ideas
- Defining realistic parameters for implementation and considering feasibility criteria for each project idea
- Reaching class consensus on the service-learning project they most want to implement

critical resources. Lions Club members can be invaluable resources for transportation, service sites, help and support, and financial assistance. While students may include fund raising as part of their service-learning project, the focus for students is on direct service.

**Community participation and guest speakers** *What process does your school have for contacting, preparing, and engaging community resources, such as guest speakers, in your service-learning project?* Service-learning projects are enhanced greatly by community relations and partnerships, as well as family participation. Check with your administration to find out the school's protocol for selecting, contacting, inviting, and engaging guest speakers and classroom resources. Develop a process for the students to identify potential speakers, make the invitation, collect resumes, develop topics and questions for the speakers to address, provide specific information about the event and how the exchange between the speaker and students will unfold, debrief the guest speaker's presentation or interview, and express gratitude for the speaker's contribution.<sup>40</sup> In terms of engaging with recipients of a community-based service-learning project, find out if the recipients of the service may come to the school and what procedures are necessary for that to occur within school guidelines for community participation in school events.

**Group process** *What process will you use to help students reach a genuine consensus on their service-learning project?* Throughout the steps of the service-learning process, students will be discussing opportunities and discussing which ones to pursue. Teach the consensus-building process in Unit 5 and lead discussions that invite every student to voice their ideas, opinions, and preferences until students can reach an authentic consensus that represents the priorities and preferences of all group members. Continue discussions until consensus is reached.