

serve the needs learn for keeps

A Youth Development Tool Newsletter brought to you by the National Youth Council

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editor's note

Civic consciousness and social action begins with a change of heart, with the ability to empathise. Enabling youths to experience such a fundamental necessity in life however, is almost like baking a cake. We can only set up the conditions for it and hope that it happens the way we want it to.

One of the ways to create a conducive environment is through Service-Learning. Using service to the community as a platform, youths are exposed to the different facades of life, the good, bad and ugly. Bringing them out of the conditions they are used to essentially brings them into the lives, and hearts, of other people.

In this issue, we go back to the basics of what Service-Learning really is. In **Thinking Out Loud: Community Service Project vs Service-Learning Project** (page 3), we break down the differences between the two so that it is easier to recognise one from the other in a typical service project.

Our cover story **Strategies For Developing A Service-Learning Momentum** (page 1 & 2) gives several strategies on how to generate a Service-Learning momentum in your school or organisation.

To Serve Or Not To Serve (insert page A) is a useful supplement for your youths that takes a wacky look at why service is good and meaningful for them. They can also read about how service helped turn around the life of a teenager in **The Lessons Of Giving - Learning To Love Again** (insert page B).

We hope you'll enjoy reading this issue!

Service-Learning & Resource team @ NYC



Does it sometimes feel as if you are the lone ranger in your organisation trying to organise Service-Learning (S-L) projects and generating interest in them? You need resources and tie-ups, funds, volunteers – but seem to be fighting a losing battle in obtaining all these.

Paradoxically, the solution is in creating a culture of S-L. It may seem like a Catch-22 situation, and quite a foolhardy solution. However, the crux of the answer lies in the momentum generated and synergy enabled when the culture of S-L exists.

When key adult facilitators, teachers and youth in your organisation believe in service and practice it, half the battle is won. Instead of worrying about pumping up enthusiasm and interest in service, you can concentrate on developing more exciting, innovative and meaningful S-L projects. At the same time, you can look to collaborating with the adults and youth who are already engaging in service and have varying degrees of available resources and contacts. That kind of partnership is key in building a foundation of support for one another through the challenges of practising S-L.

So you have bought into the idea. Now what? Honestly, creating an S-L momentum is extremely challenging, with a steep learning curve. But biting the bullet in the initial stages will eventually result in an environment that is conducive for immense learning for your youth.

Here are some strategies on how to go about creating an S-L momentum:

Identify Opportunities & Ride on Them

No need to reinvent the wheel at times. Instead, look out for existing platforms where you can integrate S-L to enhance the impact of what is already out there. For example,

- CIP (Community Involvement Programme) is an excellent community service platform where you can use S-L as an approach to enhance its effectiveness.
- If your school uses Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as a form of teaching, S-L can be integrated with PBL by getting students to identify a genuine community need, develop a solution and go one step further by implementing their solution to serve the community need.

It is definitely easier to get started on S-L by hitching onto existing programmes.

S-L in a Nutshell

Key elements of S-L for a smoother ride when mapping out plans for S-L projects. In essence, an S-L project should:

- Allow youths to identify and learn about a recognised community need – and choose what project to do
- Enable youths to experience significant age-appropriate challenges and demonstrate responsibility and decision-making skills
- Establish partnerships and shared responsibility with stakeholder groups as opportunities to interact with people of diverse backgrounds and experience
- Help youths benefit through mutual teaching and learning, action and influence between all participants in the project
- Give youths a chance to recognise, through serving their community, their ability to make a difference – which may lead to a lifelong ethic of service and civic engagement
- Ensure cross-curricular integration so youths learn more holistically

Build expertise in the process of S-L. Initiate the four steps of the S-L cycle: preparation, action, reflection and demonstration.

Preparation – Guide youths to:

- Identify a genuine community need
- Draw upon previously acquired skills and knowledge, and acquire new information through a variety of means and methods
- Analyse the underlying problem
- Collaborate with community partners
- Develop a plan that encourages responsibility
- Recognise the integration of service and learning
- Orientate with the service beneficiary and needs of the project so that they are ready to provide meaningful service
- Define realistic parameters for implementation

Action – Through the project, youths take action that:

- Has value, purpose and meaning for themselves and the service beneficiary
- Uses previously learnt and newly acquired academic skills and knowledge
- Has real consequences

Reflection – Guide youths, via various methods such as role play and discussion, to:

- Describe what happened
- Examine the differences it made
- Discuss thoughts and feelings
- Place experience in a larger context
- Consider project improvements
- Generate ideas
- Identify questions
- Receive feedback

Demonstration – Youths demonstrate skills, insights and outcomes to an outside group through:

- Reporting to peers, teachers/ adult youth workers, parents and/ or community members
- Writing articles or letters to local newspapers regarding issues of public concern
- Creating a publication or website that helps others to learn from their experience
- Making presentations and performances
- Creating visual art forms, such as murals

While the three stages are ongoing, you can concurrently begin planning projects that provide exposure for the different stakeholder groups. And as you and your organisation go through each cycle of the three stages, you will find that gradually, the culture of S-L will infuse the stakeholders, who will in turn support the culture further – enabling the cycle to go on in an upward spiral motion.

All the best, and may the force be with you.

Synergise S-L & Curriculum

Students and teachers alike already have a full workload and the last thing they want is another new programme. Therefore if you are able to kill two birds with one stone by devising ways in which an S-L project can be integrated into lesson plans, your chances of success are higher. For example, students may serve their community by producing a *Save on Utility Bills Booklet* for low-income families. This can be incorporated into mathematics lessons as students learn to calculate the cost of power usage by various household appliances and draw bar charts and graphs as illustrations. Students serve a community need and simultaneously learn about the application of mathematics in daily life.

Communicate through Training

You may have a vision of how S-L can be an effective tool in your youth development efforts, but your colleagues and the youths might not have had the opportunity to really understand S-L. People tend to be resistant towards something which they do not understand.

Therefore one effective form of communication is through training. Organise a training session for fellow colleagues or students to orientate them to the idea of S-L. The students can follow up by planning and implementing an S-L project with an awareness of their learning through the service experience. Teachers who are in the know of S-L can also better facilitate their students' learning through reflection.

You may attend an S-L training workshop and in turn transfer that knowledge to others in your organisation. Alternatively, bringing in an external "expert" trainer can be more convincing, depending on your target audience.

Funding as a Carrot

"It's a wonderful idea but we have no budget for that"... Very familiar, but oh what a bummer! Sometimes a wonderful S-L project idea requires funds for implementation and the carrot that will help you get buy-in from your bosses and colleagues could be the fact that you can get *funding if S-L is an integral element integrated in the project.

**The National Youth Council Youth Development Fund recognises genuine efforts to integrate S-L into project applications by supporting such projects.*

Build Relationships with Key Stakeholders

Identify the possible groups of stakeholders whose involvement in the process is crucial to successful S-L projects on any scale, eg. influencers such as CIP coordinators, department heads, administrators and the principal, or with community organisations such as neighbourhood resident committees and VWOs, and of course, youths!

Amass sources of materials that you can use to explain the principles and practices of S-L to the above stakeholders. Engage them in talking about and discussing S-L projects. The more viewpoints of each stakeholder group are represented in the planning discussions, the greater the likelihood for success.

Showcase Success Stories

When you have a success story of how S-L empowered your youths to make a difference to others by serving and to themselves through personal learning - blow the trumpet and tell as many people as you can about it. This can be done through conventional methods such as assembly talks, exhibitions, ceremonies, and sharing sessions. Alternatively, you can get your S-L success story featured in the school newsletter, the NYC S-L Newsletter, the media, or even apply for recognition schemes such as the *Youth Service-Learning Award 2006.

When people know that S-L works, even on a small scale, it builds their confidence to support this approach to youth development. Slowly but surely, an S-L momentum can be established.

** The Youth Service-Learning Award 2006 is an annual recognition of the best in Service-Learning projects. Log on to www.nyc.gov.sg/sl for more information. Application closes on 15 May 2006.*



Community Service Project VS Service-Learning Project

Is there any difference between a “Community Service Project” and a “Service-Learning Project”?

You bet there is!

A Community Service Project can mean any form of service rendered by a group of youths to a community - with the focus on the service performed by the youths. Any learning by the young people, derived from the service experience, is totally incidental.

A Service-Learning (S-L) Project, on the other hand, goes above and beyond getting a group of youths to serve their community - it also involves ensuring that the youths learn from the service experience by intentionally planning the learning objectives and facilitating reflection with the youths as a means to draw out learning points.

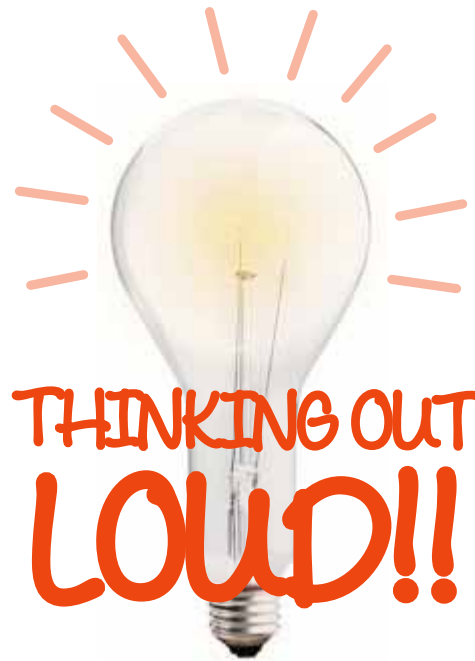
In its purest form, S-L projects are community service projects that tie learning back to curriculum, as commonly practiced in the United States, where S-L has existed for over 20 years.

For example, to aid the Tsunami disaster victims in Sri Lanka, many students were rallied to raise funds for the victims, but at the same time, the service can be linked to learning about physical geography (how a Tsunami occurs) and human geography (what it takes to rebuild the communities affected by the disaster). This requires the teacher or facilitator to plan and link the service opportunities with the learning opportunities.

There can be varying degrees of using S-L, as it is a methodology or an approach to how young people can be engaged in their community. As long as young people serving the community needs are empowered to learn, whether it is in terms of academic knowledge application or learning about community issues or gaining personal development, it is S-L.

The key in S-L lies in REFLECTION which is the link between the serving and the learning. If I can find a way to develop opportunities for the youths to reflect as they render service to the community, and to facilitate that reflection to draw out the learning that I want them to acquire, then I have an S-L Project, or I have a community service project done the S-L way.

***Service-learning, Service-learning
What makes it glow?
Needs are served and learning occurs
with reflection to thread them both***



Checklist:

Am I facilitating my youths' community service involvement the S-L way?

- I encourage the youths to own the community service project by empowering them to decide what and how they want to serve.
- I help the youths explore and assess the REAL community needs that can be met.
- I explore different aspects of learning (academic, issue-based, personal) that the youths can acquire.
- I plan what the youths will learn from the serving experience.
- I think of how I can help the youths to reflect on their experience to draw out the learning points.
- I think of reflection cues and different reflection methods to make reflection interesting for the youths.
- I allocate time for youths to reflect and to facilitate that reflection.

More detailed explanations of the elements of S-L projects can be found in “Is This Service-Learning? A Guide to Assessing Your Programme Design”, which can be obtained from the Service-Learning & Resource Section., National Youth Council

Youth Leaders and Mentors Programme (YLMP)

"I never thought about how much I could touch someone's life. Until I became a mentor."

Join the Youth Leaders and Mentors Programme (YLMP) and do just that!

The YLMP is a programme that powerfully impacts the lives of youths and those around them – so that they become Engaged, Empowered and Enriched.



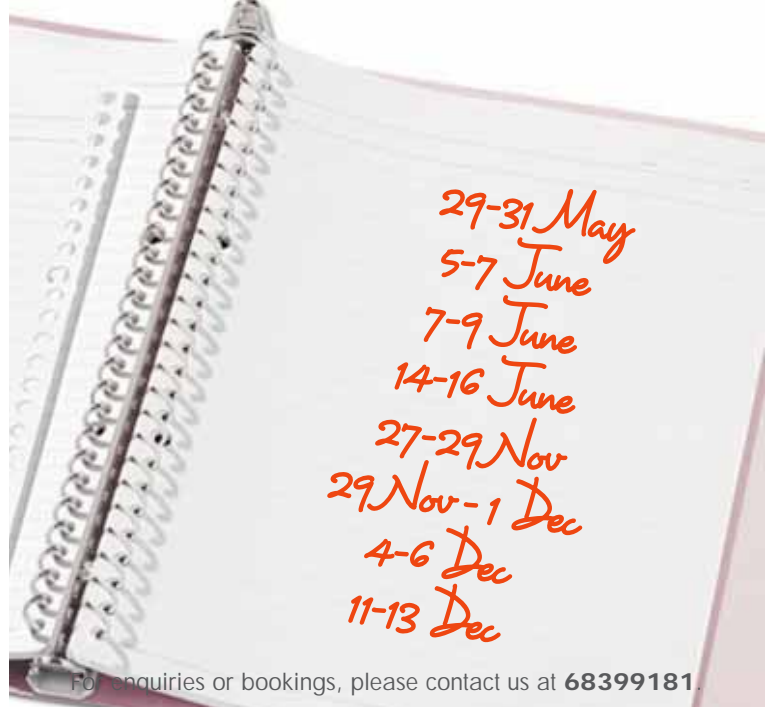
Youth from post-secondary school institutions or young working adults can **JOIN AS MENTORS** in the **Youth Mentors Development** programme under the YLMP, and enjoy:

- Fully-subsidised mentor training programme
- Guidance by adult facilitators
- The opportunity to influence the lives of youth for the better

Secondary school can enrol their pupils in the **Youth Leaders Development** programme under the YLMP, which develops students in leadership skills, project management skills and service-learning knowledge through camps and workshops. Secondary schools will enjoy the following benefits:

- Up to 50% training grant for the training cost per student
- Seed funding for community projects
- Guidance by post-secondary school mentor

Available NACLI camp dates for secondary school students are now open for booking on a first-come-first-serve basis.

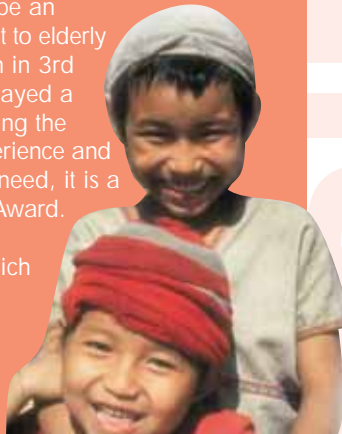


Youth Service-Learning Award 2006

Have you done something recently to change someone's life, or make an impact within the community? If so, we want to recognise your efforts!

The Youth Service-Learning Award is an annual recognition of the best in Service-Learning projects. It can be an environmental project, or one to reach out to elderly people, or even to help illiterate children in 3rd World countries. As long as you have played a significant role in planning and organizing the project, meaningfully learnt from the experience and it has truly addressed a real community need, it is a project that can be in the running for the Award.

Pssst... this includes your CIP projects which you thought were really cool!



PRIZES!!

Winning teams in each of the 3 categories will receive certificates, trophies and the following prizes:

- Gold** - \$2000 cash
- Silver** - \$1000 cash
- Bronze** - \$500 cash
- Merit** - \$200 book voucher

Cash prizes are to be used for making your future Service-Learning projects even more impactful!

For more information on how you can submit your applications, log on to www.nyc.gov.sg/sl. Closing date for applications is **15 May 2006**.

Organised by :



About UV Network

Founded by an undergraduate team passionate in youth volunteerism, UV Network is a non-profit youth group that aims to create awareness and interest in volunteerism among youths via the development of articles, resources and a comprehensive online portal. As part of the NYC's continuing efforts to engage youth organisations, youth workers and teachers in youth development, the S-LR Section is collaborating with UV Network in a series of articles for youths, by the youths. These will take the form of a series of pull-out supplements in the S-L Newsletter that can be used as resources for youth work.

TO SERVE OR NOT TO SERVE?

TOP FIVE WACKY EXCUSES ON WHY NOT TO SERVE

No time, boring, meaningless...these are some of the reasons youths don't like to engage in service projects. Here, we list the top 5 excuses – and why we think otherwise!

#1 **I just don't feel like it...laziness is my middle name. So what if I serve? It does not make a difference to anyone!**

You do make a difference – so long as you are willing.

It's easy to understand why you thought you never made a difference previously. While carrying out the community activity, you probably did not understand your purpose of being there and had spent the entire time unhappy and reluctant to render your assistance.

However, we assure you that you can make a positive and meaningful difference with your community project. The key to success in volunteering is the attitude – a willingness to try, learn and experience. It really does not matter if you do not know how to go about your community project, or if you feel awkward befriending a beneficiary for the first time. All these can be learnt with time and experience. What matters is the heart – beneficiaries and fellow volunteers can tell whether you are sincere about serving. And they appreciate all true, heartfelt effort, even if it is rough at the edges initially.

#2 **Serving is redundant. It does not help in my future or studies, so why should I spend time doing something that does not benefit me? It's not a profitable deal: I give and give and give...without any return!**

Who says service renders no returns? The truth is, you gain far more than you serve. Sure, you don't get a salary. You even have to pay for your own transport and lunch while volunteering. But there are tangible benefits when you serve, such as interpersonal and organisational skills learnt or the social network formed. By the way, while we do not advocate serving as a means to a wonderful track record, your community activities will prove an impressive testimony to your extra-curricular performance.

You also start becoming a leader as you engage in community projects. This is because you gain many skills as you volunteer – such as organisational and management abilities. In the course of serving, you will also develop a great personality, as you learn to empathise from the interaction with different types of people (from among beneficiaries and fellow volunteers).

#3 **I don't have the time! Life as a student in Singapore is stressful enough!**

The fact is that everyone has the same amount of time - 24 hours a day, 8760 hours a year, no more and no less. The key is to look for synergy between service and other things you are doing in school, e.g. serving and getting CIP points, or serving as part of your NYAA.

#4 **Even if I have the time, I want to spend it doing more meaningful stuff!**

The most amazing thing about serving is in fact the unique, amazing and meaningful experience that you would have had in the course of your volunteer experience. You gain satisfaction knowing that you've brought a smile to someone. You also gain from the tender warmth of the beneficiaries as they interact with you. You finally become aware that many others are caught in much worse-off lives and situations than those of yours – and you are filled with gratitude for what you have.

Alternatively, you can look at service as an escape from the routine daily student life by engaging in something out of the box, unusual and satisfying. Knowing that you've brought a smile to someone, that others appreciate your efforts to help and that you've so much in life to be thankful for... are definitely much more satisfying than that easily forgotten movie.

#5 **Service is so "uncool", no one ever wants to do it with me. My friends all say that volunteering is for frumpy people with no lives. I don't want to embarrass myself.**

Service can be as challenging as skateboarding, cyber-gaming, or rock climbing and "cool" is defined by how passionate you are about something. Service is definitely not for wimps!

So if service is something you have an interest in, then surely your true friends will at least support your decision to explore volunteerism as a hobby. In the course of your community endeavours, you might even meet likeminded people who will become your closest buddies as you support each other in serving others.



The Lessons of Giving Learning to *Love* Again

Different people engage in volunteerism and S-L for different reasons. In Sheng Nan's reflection below, she gives a poignant account of how volunteerism transformed her life.*

Many people have asked me why I like to volunteer so much. My answer is simple: I serve because I gain as much as, if not more than, I give. More importantly, volunteering is perhaps the only way of expressing my gratitude towards angels that I have met in my life.

In 1999, I experienced the break up of my close-knit family. The tumultuous events began with the sudden death of my maternal grandmother. I had never experienced death in the family prior to this, and I grieved. I was also wrecked with guilt, because I had been putting off an apology for a reckless action, with the careless attitude that I could always do so another day. I had lost that chance forever. Somehow, I grew terrified of losing my other loved ones too, particularly my paternal grandmother whom I was brought up by.

I was dealt another blow too soon. That same month, my family was ordered to pack our bags and move out of our ancestral home that I had lived in since I was born, due to an unexpected betrayal by a trusted aunt. Consequently, we moved three times before settling in an old flat marked out for poor families. I became very bitter. I would stare into the mirror every morning, swearing to make tons of money in future. I would be a famous lawyer so that I could do justice for my grandmother and win ownership of the house.

Gradually, I also became disgruntled with my closest family, due to the frequent and severe clashes between my mother and paternal grandmother. Both women were defensive, upset and unrelenting—my mother's behavior, due to her mother's death, and my grandmother's, due to her daughter's treachery. I also began to hold a grudge against my father for his non-intervention. I hated them. I grew distant from my family, avoiding them as much as possible. If I stopped loving, I stopped hurting.

However, an accidental experience at the Dover Park Hospice (DPH) – where I interned under my school's Work Experience Programme – changed my entire outlook of life.

I had a very difficult start at DPH. On my first day, I felt awfully uneasy, shocked by how seriously ravaged the patients were by illness. I very much wanted to quit that day. To see the quality of human life reduced to such pain and loss was simply too much for me to take. I did not want to show compassion towards others, as I was determined to be hardened and ruthless to exact vengeance. The atmosphere of impending death also brought back hurtful memories of my maternal grandmother's passing. My fear of death was brought to the surface once again after months of suppression. To confront these feelings were painful.

Somehow, I held back because an inner voice told me to stay, whispering that the experience might be a life transforming one. Indeed, it was at the hospice that I learnt to use my heart again. There, I formed a most precious friendship that will be cherished for the rest of my life. At the DPH day-care center, I met Auntie Fengyi, an old lady who spent some days each week at the center. I spoke to her out of duty initially, determined not to involve any personal feelings. However, I was soon drawn to treat the frail old lady with sincerity and love. By the end of my internship, I was listening as a friend. Auntie Fengyi and I kept in close contact up till her demise three months later.

Looking back, the experience at DPH was a major turning point in my life: it brought me out of the rut, as I learnt to face my inner demons. I also learnt about service – the extent to which I could receive and be healed by loving and caring for another. By serving at DPH, I was forced to confront my fear of losing loved ones. By spending time with dying patients, I grew to accept the passing of my beloved. And by providing company and comfort to an old lady in her last days, I found a release in my remorse of not fulfilling my duty towards my maternal grandmother. Ultimately, I think I was healed emotionally because I did my best for Auntie Fengyi till the end. This time, I knew I had no regrets.

I also became aware that there were people suffering immensely. Yet they continued to live life with utmost dignity and love. While I was brought up to think that I was blessed, it seemed impossible, in my sea of troubles, to count these blessings – until I witnessed the plight of these patients. Their courage motivated me to deal with my setbacks bravely. If they could do it, so could I. It was then that I stopped my childish nonsense of self-pity.

By witnessing the frailty of human life, I knew that there was no time to waste. Just as how I enjoyed a budding friendship with Auntie Fengyi in her twilight years, I could similarly give joy and care to my family members. I had already lost a chance to be filial, and I did not want to give up the rest. Today, the motivation is a desire to do my family proud. I still yearn to move back to my first home—the terrace with two ponds where frogs mated on rainy nights. But I want to do so, no longer out of spite, but to bring happiness to my grandmother.

Today, I continue my work because volunteerism is perhaps my only way of saying - thank you.

**Author's name has been changed for confidentiality purposes*