

## Service-Learning Project Sharing

A high quality example of a curriculum-based local or global outreach effort made possible by Learn and Serve Ohio, Partnerships Make a Difference, and a caring community of K-12 teachers and students

Learning with Purpose . . . Serving with Passion . . .  
**Creating a Positive Legacy**

### Project Title: *Kids for Critters*

*“A service-learning project is when you do something for your community and you learn a lot!” – Erin, Barrington Elementary Third Grade Student*

**Big Idea:** Third grade students identified the problem of pet overpopulation and the need to have more animals spayed and neutered. They educated the public about this need and also developed a pet product business to raise money for local pet centers and organizations.

**Teachers:** Bonnie Emery and Katie Benton, Barrington Elementary, Upper Arlington City Schools, Upper Arlington, Ohio

**Students:** 50 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students

**Curriculum Area(s):** Social Studies, Economics and Sociology, Language Arts, Math, Science and Nutrition

**Community Partner(s):** Capital Area Humane Society, Pets Without Partners, Golden Endings, Cozy Cat Cottage, Kroger, Cat Welfare, Upper Arlington Animal Control, Ohio Nature Education (ONE), PetFinder.com

### Planning and Implementation Process

#### Investigation

*How/why did you choose to do this project? What significant need(s) or issue(s) did your students address? What made the idea for this project compelling/inspiring? How did you get them intellectually/emotionally engaged?*

Our investigation of this issue evolved from an activity we do each year. As a way of building classroom community and getting to know each other, children sign up to have their pets visit the class. The children love having an opportunity to talk about a special animal in their lives. Even children who have pet allergies like pets!

Inevitably, these visits spark discussions about pets and their homes, as well as the fact that there are many pets that do not have homes because of overpopulation and other factors. Also, in newspapers or magazines, there are often stories about lost or homeless pets. This is sometimes due to natural disasters, severe weather events, and most recently, economic challenges.

This service-learning project developed as a response to the needs of local pet organizations. Just looking at the articles/ads in newspapers demonstrated the need for homes for many animals. Discussions about an overabundance of animals brought the situation “home” for the children. The students conducted surveys to determine how many families have pets and how homes are found for babies born to family pets. At the same time, students realized that not all animal babies are born to responsible pet owners who find placement for the babies.

### **Preparation**

*How did you and the students get ready? What learning was involved? What partnerships did you develop?*

Our planning and preparation took many forms. We wanted to increase our own knowledge and awareness of pet overpopulation so we could begin to educate others.

First, we did an activity to determine the frequency and number of babies born in a litter of animals. We used doghouses and dog bones to represent all the babies born and how those babies have babies. This activity really showcased how significant and widespread the pet overpopulation problem is.

We also talked about the existence of “puppy mills” and how their goal is creating more puppies – not necessarily producing healthy puppies or finding good homes for them.

We looked closely in the Sunday newspaper for all the ads for dogs, cats, birds, turtles, and other animals that need homes. Many of these stated, “Free to a good home.”

We also checked out news articles that focused on the needs of animals which are abandoned, lost, or homeless due to weather events, such as Hurricane Katrina, or other factors, such as the downturn of the economy.

Speakers came to the classroom and brought animals that needed homes. Students had first-hand information about the importance of safe places for animals to live.

We visited the Capital Area Humane Society and learned about their policies for adopting animals and how they deal with an excess of pets being available. We also traveled to Cozy Cat Cottage and local pet stores to learn about responsible pet ownership.

By this time, we had decided to design and sell pet products to raise money for some of the pet centers. So while we were at the pet stores, we examined various products and learned about marketing strategies.

### **Action**

*Service-learning allows students the chance to change the world—sometimes in small ways, sometimes in much larger ways. Please explain the meaningful service activities in which you and your students were involved.*

Students were engaged in educational activities to inform and educate the public about the problem of pet overpopulation. They created brochures, fundraising literature, and display boards that included pictures, news articles, and statistics on the problem. They spoke to the media and wrote letters to the local papers regarding what must be done to help the situation. In addition, they conducted an all-school assembly and went to other classes to talk to students about the pet situation. They truly became teachers.

Students also volunteered at a pet center to help with the care of the animals, and they collected informative articles for the pet centers' clients on litter, food, pet-friendly cleaning supplies, and other topics. Many individuals did chores at home and in their neighborhoods to raise money for donations to various pet organizations.

These 3rd graders also became entrepreneurs by creating their own business. Most notably, they designed pet products to make and sell in order to raise money for the pet centers. They developed prototypes and explored the feasibility of making and selling the items. These young businesspeople had to consider factors such as supply and demand, needs and wants, goods and services, and quality control. Their items were marketed within the school and in the community through posters, news stories, and other strategies. Children and parents then sold the products at a local grocery store and at the school.

### **Reflection**

*Written, oral, artistic, visual, dramatic and other forms of expression . . . all these are important ways of reflecting. In what ways did your students reflect on their experiences and the learning that was a part of it? What were a few of their key observations and insights?*

At various times during the project, reflection took place via discussion, journal writing, and guided questions and answers (What did I do? What did I see? What did I feel?)

What did I learn? What difference did I make?). Some reflection activities were done on an individual basis, and others were done in small groups. Consistently, after speakers visited or after field trips, we would list the key points that we learned and discuss how each speaker or field trip motivated or informed us.

At the conclusion of the project, the children did personal reflections regarding how the service-learning project affected them – what they learned, what difference they made, and what they will continue to do as a result of this project. The format of the final reflection was a letter written to the upcoming 3rd graders about the project. Students were asked to describe the purpose of the project, its major parts, their favorite part, what they learned, and any suggestions/words of wisdom for the students in the next class. Comments from these letters included:

*“Kids for Critters is awesome! You will have a good time!” -- Eli*

*“I promise you will love Kids for Critters!” -- Georgie*

*“Service-learning means learning while helping others.” -- Alex*

*“The best part of Kids for Critters is helping animals, saving lives, and raising money for the Humane Society!” -- Elie*

Another form of reflection had to do with sharing the project – its purpose, process, and results – at an assembly. The children presented a skit that included critical information about the services we performed and the learning that took place.

### **Demonstration/Celebration**

*Along the way and at the end of the project, how did you celebrate the impact of your efforts? In what ways did students demonstrate their new learning?*

The major celebrations for this project were our Kids for Critters All-School Assembly and our Check Presentation Ceremony. That ceremony occurred when we gave checks to the pet organizations that the students had selected by voting. It was indeed a celebration when the children saw the happiness of the organizations’ leaders as they received their checks! The children delighted in being able to specify exactly how the funds would be spent by the various organizations.

### **Assessment/Evaluation**

*To validate service-learning and spotlight key results, we need to gather information about student learning and attitude changes, as well as the impact on local/global needs and issues. What are some ways in which you were able to document your students’ progress and the impact of their efforts?*

We evaluated the students’ learning and growth through a variety of authentic assessment strategies. For example, at the beginning of the project, the students were asked to write about what they knew about the pet overpopulation situation – what it was, how it was handled, and what happened to pets who needed homes. At the end of

the project, a similar set of questions was given, and the significant difference in responses was noted.

We also listed pertinent vocabulary words on a Word Wall throughout the project. These words were defined and discussed. At the end of the project, the children were asked to select five of the words and use them to write a paragraph about their experiences.

We also emphasized the concept of cause and effect throughout the project. Students demonstrated their understanding by educating others about the causes and effects of pet overpopulation. The students also learned about the yearly expenses connected to having a pet and why some families cannot afford pet ownership.

Economic concepts were put into action as we created our Pet Products Business. Continually throughout the project, we discussed the four factors of production, needs and wants, goods and services, quality control, opportunity cost, supply and demand, marketing, advertising, pricing, consumer and producer, scarcity, and profit and loss. The students demonstrated their mastery of these concepts by successfully carrying out their business plans and enterprises.

Students' biggest gain in academic awareness had to do with the startling statistics associated with how many homeless pets there are. These 3rd graders will never forget those compelling figures.

### **Curriculum Connections**

*High quality service-learning connects service with the curriculum. A variety of state and local standards can be addressed through the investigation, preparation, action, reflection and celebration/demonstration/evaluation phases of service-learning.*

*So . . . how did your students use their academic knowledge and skills to “make a difference?” How did they become scientists, writers, artists, researchers, etc. to support this project? What curricular areas were addressed through this project? What were some specific standards or learning objectives that were covered? What kinds of interdisciplinary planning and learning occurred?*

**Language Arts:** letter writing, persuasive writing, creating brochures, developing and giving speeches/presentations/skits, writing slogans, reading and interpreting information related to the project

**Math:** making change, interpreting/analyzing statistics, doing cost analysis, pricing items

**Social Studies:** economic concepts, community needs assessment, citizenship skills and concepts

**Visual Arts/Media:** designing products, posters, and media presentations

**Health/Life Science:** nutrition, safety, and pet care concepts

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

*There is an increasing emphasis on helping students develop and demonstrate 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (Ken Kaye et. al.) Service-learning provides an excellent way to incorporate these skills in an authentic way. Please check the themes and skills that were addressed in your project.*

- ☒ Global Awareness
- ☒ Financial, Economic, Business, and Entrepreneurial Literacy
- ☒ Civic Literacy
- ☒ Health Literacy
- ☒ Creativity and Innovation
- ☒ Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- ☒ Communication and Collaboration
- ☒ Information Literacy
- ☒ Media Literacy
- ☒ ICT (Information, Communications, and Technology) Literacy
- ☒ Flexibility and Adaptability
- ☒ Initiative and Self-Direction
- ☒ Social and Cross-Cultural Skills
- ☒ Productivity and Accountability
- ☒ Leadership and Responsibility

*Please provide at least one specific example or anecdote of how one of the skills was evident in your students' work.*

### **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving**

This project embodies the essence of being a problem solver. Students wrestled with questions such as: What can we do about preventing the overpopulation of pets? Who will take care of homeless/abandoned animals? When raising money to donate to pet organizations, what kind of creative thinking can be done to make as much money as possible? How can we educate people to be responsible pet owners? What activities will reach the biggest audience? How can we help kids and adults understand the impact of the pet overpopulation problem?

### **Impact: Kids Using Their “Best Stuff” To Make A Difference**

*Curricular skills/knowledge and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills are certainly part of students' “best stuff.” In addition . . . how did your students use their individual gifts, passions and strength of character in carrying out this project?*

For many students, this project allowed their passions to come forth in a positive and meaningful way. For animal lovers, this was a perfect activity -- they could be involved academically on a topic about which they cared deeply. They could make a difference.

*Do you think your students felt empowered by this project? What "voice" and leadership roles did they have? How did they "take charge" of certain aspects of the project?*

There were many opportunities for the students to be leaders. Not only were they the voices of the project, but they were able to spearhead the business aspects of the project. Because the students have a connection to their own pets and care about them, they could extend their caring to other animals in Central Ohio.

*What aspects of the project made your students especially proud?*

The children were proud of the fact that they spread the word about a big problem and worked to solve it. They also were very proud of the amount of money that they, as little kids, raised. Presenting the checks to the organizations was so exciting!

### **RIGOR, RELEVANCE AND RELATIONSHIPS**

*Willard Daggett and others have identified rigor, relevance, and relationships as key components of school reform. Include any further thoughts you have re: how your project reflected and enhanced these elements for your students.*

#### **Rigor**

*How has service-learning helped your students achieve at a higher level and to a greater depth?*

Rigor involves deep learning, serious thinking, and significant responsibility. Kids for Critters reflect these outcomes in several ways. It helps the children deal with the realities of pet ownership -- the physical, emotional, and financial realities that come with a pet (cat or dog, primarily). Being a pet owner is more than just playing with a pet and taking it for a walk; it involves being responsible 24/7. For many kids, that is a stretch from their realm of being an occasional caregiver for someone/something else. It takes them from the fun stuff to the basic responsibilities of life and beyond.

In addition, the students' understanding of economics was significant. Instead of simply reading about economic concepts, they were living them. And the concepts we addressed were complex and numerous!

#### **Relevance**

This project allows students to learn about and devote their energies to a cause that is both near and dear to their hearts and evident across the country. They were able to take action to educate many people and improve the lives of many animals.

## **Relationships**

This service-learning project allowed our students to work side by side in a new way. They recognized and appreciated strengths in some of their peers for the first time. They also interacted with adults in business settings and gained an interest in talking with adults in a more mature way.

## **And Now, Some Numbers . . .**

*Please estimate the time spent on your project:*

Number of Project-Related Hours per Student: 28

Number of Students: 50

Total Estimated Hours of Service and Learning: 1,400

## **Next Steps/Call to Action**

*What things might happen next as a result of this project? How might your students continue to “create positive legacies” in response to this issue and others?*

As a result of their work on this project, students will be able to use their newly developed skills to organize other such programs, encourage teachers and future classmates to initiate future service-learning projects, provide leadership for such endeavors, and apply entrepreneurial skills in their daily lives.

Through Kids for Critters, the students were introduced to the needs of pets and pet charities. Some students became very involved and continued to raise money for these organizations. They had learned about the elements of a business and continued to utilize their entrepreneurial skills with efforts such as lemonade stands, garage sales, and bake sales. These skills were also reinforced at our school with other experiential economic activities. In addition, connections were made to the needs of pets and the necessity of people being responsible pet owners. One student who wrote a memoir of her volunteer experiences at a pet shelter succeeded in having her book published.

Kids for Critters also raises students’ awareness of future careers, since the students learn more about their areas of expertise and interest. There are also many opportunities for future jobs connected to the animal world.

This project could easily lend itself or extend itself to a Capstone project for the seniors in high school. It also could be a jumping off activity for an Eagle Scout, Girl Scout, or church project.

## **Other Insights/Your Own Reflections**

*Can you describe one or more of the “magic” or “aha” moments that happened as part of this experience?*

The entire Barrington School learned and grew in awareness of the pet overpopulation problem, as did the families of the students who participated in the project. It wasn't just the money aspect; it was the team effort and the fact that 3<sup>rd</sup> graders made a big difference! Parents viewed their children as true entrepreneurs and difference makers.

*What impact did the project have on you as a teacher?*

Seeing quiet, shy, reserved students “come alive” and blossom was truly magical for me as a teacher. Not only did this project connect to the standards and all the academic arenas; it also was an opportunity for the students to grow and learn personally -- both emotionally and socially!

Each time we do this project, it takes on the personality of the children/ the group. I have learned to go with that flow and allow the unique qualities of the particular children to be highlighted.

**Note**

This project is based on the work of Claudia Miller, a former Barrington teacher who passionately loves animals and believes equally as passionately in the value of service-learning. She introduced this project in 1997. Over the years, it has been tweaked by a variety of teachers and teaching situations.

**Contact Info:**

**Name:** Bonnie Emery

**Position:** 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher

**School:** Barrington Elementary School

**School District:** Upper Arlington Schools

**School Address:** 1780 Barrington Road, Upper Arlington, OH, 43221

**School Phone:** 614.481.8738

**Email:** bemery@uaschools.org