

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: Run the Race

"Service-learning is an eye-opener. It teaches you to care for others. It builds respect you have for others and yourself. Service-learning was an amazing, fun, and valuable experience."

-- Khaila, 8th Grader, St. James the Less School

Big Idea: Our students supported a vision for a brighter future for inner city children on the west side of Columbus by providing funds for special projects for the "Run the Race" Club.

Teachers: Vicki Petrella and Colleen Gomez, St. James the Less School, Diocese of Columbus, Columbus, Ohio

Students: 35 8th graders from diverse backgrounds

Curriculum Area(s): Language Arts, Religion, Physical Education, Math, Social Studies

Community Partner(s): "Run the Race" Club, Charisma Products

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?

Rachel Muha came to speak to the students during Lent last spring. She told the story of her son, Brian, who was murdered in Steubenville, Ohio ten years ago by three young men with drug addictions and poor role models. Rachel is a rock of faith and inspiration to many.

She decided to turn this tragedy into something positive by starting the Brian Muha Foundation in her son's name, and the "Run the Race" Club, an organization on Columbus's west side that cares for inner city youth after school and during the summer.

The goals of the "Run the Race" Club are to support children's growth through loving relationships with caring adult volunteers who help them with academics, social skills, and learning about service to others. Rachel has an arrangement with the city of Columbus to use the Holton Recreation Center, on the west side, free of charge until her foundation can raise enough money to buy its own building. For now, this space provides a safe haven, a meal, clothing, tutoring, extra-curricular activities, gardening, music lessons, and a moral lesson of the day after school and during the summer.

Our students were inspired by Rachel Muha's determination to help children make positive choices and serve others, so they decided they wanted to make a difference. Even though some of our students don't live in the best neighborhoods or have the best home lives, they felt empowered to make a difference in other children's lives by raising funds to purchase items on the "Run the Race" Club's wish list, such as equipment for their music studio.

Preparation

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

We want students at St. James to appreciate the legacies of people who have "made a positive difference." Beyond this, we want the students themselves to make a positive difference and continuously create legacies of which they can be proud. Toward this end, we use the "Everyday Heroes" materials (© Partnerships Make a Difference) in our Religion curriculum for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades to help students identify positive role models in the world and in their own lives.

At the end of each year, our 6th grade students recognize their "Everyday Heroes" at our Service-Learning Awards ceremony. This recognition helps initiate the 6th graders into service-learning and prepares them to take a more active role the following year. Building on the 6th graders' interest, we then implement a two-year model for service-learning that begins with students' exploration of a given project and related issues during their 7th grade year and continues with fundraising and other positive action during their 8th grade year.

For the "Run the Race" project, in their 7th grade year, our students brainstormed issues children face every day. Some of the issues that they listed were hunger, homelessness, negative peer pressure (gangs, drugs, crime), learning disabilities, being orphaned, death of a loved one, and fear of the unknown. The students then chose four issues to investigate: poverty among children, children of parents who are substance abusers, children and health insurance, and the effects of divorce on children. Once they had a better understanding of the issues children face, our students began to brainstorm ways to help Rachel and the "Run the Race" Club.

All of the St. James' teachers became invested in Rachel's mission, too. In July, we spent a day at the Holton Recreation Center, where the "Run the Race" Club meets. We fed the children, played games,

tutored, gardened, and created artwork with them. Following our day at the center, we brainstormed ways that we could promote this service-learning project to the whole school. Our staff day got us very excited and inspired.

Many of our students' parents were eager to help, too. Our students had older siblings who had completed previous service-learning projects, so our parents were invested in the process and were eager to help with the fundraising.

Once the students were in 8th grade, our schedule allowed us some flexibility to designate a weekly service-learning period. Each Wednesday, the last period of the day was devoted to service-learning. The entire 8th grade spent time working on project-related tasks.

A local company called Charisma Products agreed to supply "Run the Race" t-shirts for the St. James students to wear in support of our partnership with the club. Each grade level wore a different colored t-shirt. The t-shirts were sold at cost, which made them affordable to our students.

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.

In keeping with our "Run the Race" partnership, we decided to sponsor a school-wide relay race to kick off our project. All 8th graders were assigned to four-person relay teams. Each team was assigned a color and a team of cheerleaders. The team of cheerleaders was made up of younger students from our lower school. For example, the kindergarteners were the purple team's cheerleaders/sponsors.

Each relay team created a PowerPoint display or oral presentation to educate others about the "Run the Race" Club and persuade its cheerleaders to sponsor a special "head start" for the team. Each lower school grade level was encouraged to bring in spare change, and for every dollar donated by the students in a particular grade, that grade's relay team would get a 1" head start for the relay race. Overall, the 8th graders earned \$225 for the "Run the Race" Club.

Before the relay race started, we gathered in the gym for an assembly. Rachel Muha came to collect our donations, receive the mural the teachers had created from their field trip to the center in July, talk to the entire school, and watch the race. She was extremely impressed and inspired by our children. One especially touching moment occurred when the 8th graders advertised their t-shirt sale with a fashion show, complete with runway models, and then presented Rachel with a t-shirt.

When it came time for the race, we made a track out on the school's field using string and a tape measure. Each contribution was counted and plotted on the track. Relay teams had color-coded batons to pass. Following the assembly, the 8th graders led their cheerleaders to their places at the track. The grades K-2 cheerleaders were positioned in the center of the track, and the grades 3-5 student cheerleaders were positioned around the outside of the track to watch and cheer their teams to victory.

A "Run the Race" t-shirt was displayed on a piece of wood as a kind of Olympic torch, and one member of each relay leg carried the t-shirt around the track to signify the beginning of the race, much like the pace car at an Indy 500 race. Once all the spectators were in place and the racers were positioned at their starting points, Rachel signaled the start of the race. The purple team was victorious, and its cheerleaders received popsicles for being the sponsors of the winning team. It was a spectacular event that rallied and united all of the students to help the "Run the Race" Club.

Following the kick-off race, the 8th graders began the t-shirt sale. The teachers were grateful because the 8th graders were completely responsible for all aspects of this sale. When the t-shirts arrived, the 8th graders sorted, bagged, and distributed the 400 t-shirts ordered. All of this was accomplished during their weekly service-learning period.

Next, the 8th graders began working on their annual sub sandwich sale. They created posters, fliers, and bulletin announcements; took orders at home and at our church masses; and assembled and delivered the subs. On the morning of the OSU/Michigan football game, 30 of our 35 eighth graders came to school to assemble the 1,000 subs they had sold. Although there were many parents there to help, our eighth graders truly took ownership of this event. The OSU vs. Michigan sub sale earned \$2,000 that went toward the purchase of equipment for the "Run the Race" Club's music studio.

Following the sub sale, the upper school sponsored a sock drive because they learned that many of the kids in the "Run the Race" Club needed new socks. Since socks were also essential to our students as they ran their relay race, they felt that this would be a symbolic item to donate to the children they wanted to help. We collected over 200 pairs of socks, and on the last day before Christmas break, we celebrated the success of the sock drive with a sock hop in the gym as part of our Christmas parties.

Further, each year in December, the 8th grade assembles a candy house Christmas village. The candy houses are replicas of actual buildings in Columbus. A donation of one candy house is always made to the St. Stephen's candy house auction, a fundraising effort that includes other schools and churches. This year, we auctioned off our replica of Reiner Realty, which earned \$5,000 for St. Stephen's Community Center.

In honor of our service-learning partnership with the "Run the Race" Club, our candy house village was named "Places of Hope." One of the other candy houses the students made was a replica of the Holton Recreation Center, which houses the "Run the Race" Club. It included the playground, too. This candy house was not part of the auction, and our students decided to donate it to the "Run the Race" Club.

The 8th graders were so happy with the success of their sub sale in November that when we came back to school after the holidays, they decided to host a second one. Before the Super Bowl in January, the 8th graders set the project in motion. Again, they raised \$2,000. Half of this money was earmarked as seed money for next year's service-learning project. The other \$1,000 went to the "Run the Race" Club for additional instruments for their music studio.

Another fundraising initiative that benefited the "Run the Race" Club came out of a policy change at our school. This year, we began school an hour earlier than last year. As a staff, we were concerned that because of the earlier start time, our students might skip breakfast, so we decided to open a breakfast bar. The 8th graders ran the breakfast bar every morning for 20 minutes, selling cereal and breakfast bars. This yearlong project fed our own children so that they would have energy to learn *and* earned \$500, which we donated to the "Run the Race" Club.

We also began a pen pal relationship with the "Run the Race" Club. Occasionally, throughout the year, our students sent notes to the racers. It was great fun.

Every day, and at masses throughout the year, we prayed for the "Run the Race" Club. We found out that club members prayed for us and for all of their supporters, too.

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?

Before our service-learning celebration, our 8th graders wrote essays about the people who are "pencils in the hand of God" in their lives and how they are like pencils. They also reflected on what this service-learning project meant to them. Two of our 8th graders created a PowerPoint presentation under Mrs. Petrella's supervision. Four other 8th graders presented the PowerPoint at the celebration.

During 8th grade art class, teacher Annette Lasker presented information about Giacometti, a sculptor who worked with copper and metal to create large stick figures. After studying Giacometti's work, each student created his or her own sculpture. Each sculpture represented a racer in the race of life. Each sculpture was accompanied by a story that explained the piece. For example, some of our children created racers that symbolized their fathers because their fathers work so hard for their families. Several students created an image of Mrs. Muha with her children. Other students created racers preparing for the race.

During the last week of school, our students reflected on the learning and work they did throughout the year. They identified successes and suggested changes that need to be made in the future. All agreed that service-learning at St. James is a fun and worthwhile experience.

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?

Each year since we began doing service-learning, we have celebrated our success with a party to thank all of our special "angels." This year, reflections were displayed, refreshments were served, our "Pencils in the Hand of God" song was sung, the cafeteria was transformed into a party room, and a check was presented. The Giacometti-inspired sculptures decorated each table as centerpieces. The stories that went with each sculpture were placed at the tables. The celebration allowed us to

showcase our students' work and tie it all together. Rachel Muha brought twenty of her racers to share in our celebration. As an added surprise, several of her children performed a vocal musical piece to show their gratitude for all of our efforts. They also presented us with a thank-you banner. That evening allowed students and parents to see the total impact of the project. Our parents and students then begin to ask, "What is next?"

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?

Students demonstrated their learning in a variety of ways. In language arts, each student conducted research about poverty among children, children of parents who are substance abusers, children and health insurance, and the effects of divorce on children. Students presented their findings by writing formal research papers.

In religion class, students studied the concept of social justice and wrote essays relating their work on the "Run the Race" project to their confirmation saints, Mother Theresa's work, and their own "everyday heroes."

In math, students had to apply designing with materials concepts and double-check their measurements to be successful at building the candy houses.

Finally, students wrote self-assessments of their teamwork skills and contributions to the project throughout the process.

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?

Social Studies: current events, writing a position paper, identifying information from primary and secondary sources, presenting information orally

Religion: mission of service for the church, development of the Christian person's call to dignity, relationship, and service

Math: currency, data analysis, problem-solving strategies

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Art: using a variety of media, becoming familiar with known artists, creating representations of known art forms

Communication Arts: utilizing a wide range of print and non-print text for a variety of purposes, comprehension skills, writing process, writing informational essays or reports, using technology to summarize and present information

21st Century Skills

There is an increasing emphasis on helping students develop and demonstrate 21st 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

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

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

Financial, Economic, Business, and Entrepreneurial Literacy; Productivity and Accountability; Leadership and Responsibility

The Breakfast Bar was open every morning to sell cereal and breakfast bars. 8th graders decided upon and organized the food order, counted the money, sold the food, restocked the shelves, and closed up shop every day. The proceeds from the breakfast bar benefited the "Run the Race" Club.

Creativity and Innovation

Creating the sculptures provided a meaningful extension of our project into the arts.

Impact: Kids Using Their "Best Stuff" To Make a Difference

Curricular skills/knowledge and 21st 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?

In the past, our 8th graders were assigned to committees, but this year we placed a service-learning period into our weekly schedule. Since earlier we had helped students explore their gifts and talents, students volunteered for specific jobs that they felt comfortable performing. They were artists, speakers, technical support specialists, entrepreneurs, organizers and creative geniuses.

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?

Our students took charge by running the Breakfast Bar daily. They also contributed to each of the fundraisers with their time and talents and shared their feelings with each other and the parish communities at their celebration.

"I would tell people that service-learning is fun and opens you up to the things you can do to help people." -- Rachel

"This was a truly great and humbling experience." -- Connor

In what ways did they develop a deeper appreciation/understanding of other viewpoints, perspectives, circumstances and/or backgrounds?

As we read through the students' reflections about this project, it amazed us how much they wanted to help, and how deeply they valued their ability to make a difference in other young children's lives.

Khaila wrote, "Before "Run the Race", I never knew what it was like not to have a caring family, like I do. "Run the Race" gave me a 'behind the scenes' view of that. Now, I am so grateful for what I have."

Errek wrote, "Service-learning is designed to benefit others, makes you feel good, and becomes part of the St. James legacy."

How did they experience and demonstrate a stronger sense of community (within the classroom, locally and/or globally) and/or civic engagement?

This project made the students feel united. These young people felt good about themselves and felt valued. They knew they had made a difference. This year's 8th grade class was a closer group of students than in the past, but I also think that the service-learning project united them under one goal -- the need to help others.

What aspects of the project made your students especially proud?

Our students were most proud when they saw the expressions on the racers' faces when we gave them their candy house and the items on their wish list.

From the students' perspectives, what difference did their efforts make?

The students knew they were trying to make things better at the one place on the west side that was a good "safe place" for these children.

Are there any ways you haven't yet mentioned in which the project benefited your students? Your school? The community/world and those you were trying to help?

We know we have been successful when our 8th graders go to high school and lead their own service projects. Recently, we had a small group of alumni that volunteered to be a relay team for *Relay for Life*. Their goal was to raise \$250.00. They began by making beaded bracelets to sell to friends and family in memory of someone in their lives who had been diagnosed with or died from cancer. They had sold all of their bracelets but were \$120.00 short of their goal.

The high school students decided to come back to their alma mater to ask for help with meeting their fundraising goal. The students met with our principal, and it was decided that we would collect spare change in our "Fasting Friday" buckets if they would educate our students about their project. They wrote an announcement, that one of the younger siblings read over the P. A., and a flier that went home to every family. Our students came to their aid and donated \$218 for their cause. We were extremely happy and proud of our former students because their tenacity truly showed that they "got it."

And Now, Some Numbers . . .

Please estimate the time spent on your project:

Number of Project-Related Hours per Student: 100

Number of Students: 35

Total Estimated Service and Learning Hours: 3,500

Money Raised: \$4,500

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?

Our students plan to continue doing service in this fashion in high school. Some may even try to help at the "Run the Race" Club this summer.

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 relay race to kick off the fundraising year was a magical moment because the students had worked so hard to get their message out to the rest of the school and to gain the support of their schoolmates. Additionally, our faculty came together to work with the "Run the Race" Club kids this past summer, which was a magical and unifying experience.

Other words of wisdom/advice for other teachers . . . What did you learn? Is there anything you might do differently next time?

As the students reflected on this project, many of them said that they wanted to go and spend a day at the center to work with the racers. Unfortunately, our school hours did not match the center's hours. We want to consider how to make this type of experience possible in the future.

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"Rachel's story and faith are inspirational to me. This project also helped me to appreciate the talent and generosity of our students more."

-- Colleen Gomez

"The project had real personal meaning for me. Mrs. Muha's son was a personal friend of my children. It was wonderful to have my own children and my students experience the joy and holiness of Mrs. Muha. She became a real example of how to combine true Christian charity with real civic action."

-- Vicki Petrella