

Making the **Hours** Count

Transforming Your **Service** Experience

Leader's Guide

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No part of the student workbook may be reproduced by any means.

Introduction

Welcome to the leader's guide for *Making the Hours Count*. This manual is designed to aid you in helping young people make the most of their service experiences. The student book and the leader's guide provide both practical resources and deeper reflection concerning moving students into service. I hope they help you reflect on your experience as well. Journeying with young people as they discover the joy of service enriches our lives as well as theirs.

If you are just beginning a program, these books can assist you in building a solid foundation. Strong service programs take time to build, so be patient with yourself. Some learning happens only by trial and error. But from the very beginning you will see the incredible blessings that service can bring to young people's lives.

If you are working in an established program, later chapters in the book will be especially valuable for you. With the practical aspects of a program running smoothly, you will have more energy and time to devote to helping your students grapple with the challenges of Catholic social teaching, analysis, and advocacy.

This guide is written for people working in a variety of settings. Some readers will be coordinating service programs through a campus ministry program, others through a parish youth group or Confirmation program, while still others are teaching a course based in service. For some, the service program forms most or all of your job description. Others are trying to squeeze these responsibilities into an already overcrowded schedule. You can select from and rearrange the order of these materials to suit your needs and those of your program.

Many of the forms and materials you will need for your program are contained in the student book. For this reason, it would be most efficient to read each student book chapter before turning to the leader's guide. The leader's guide provides background and troubleshooting ideas for each chapter, along with recommended resources. The recommended resources can be invaluable in providing you with greater understanding and practical ideas for how to bring your program to life.

Feel free to skip around in this book. Chapters one through four and chapter ten are practical; chapters five through nine are theoretical. You may find you need several weeks to guide students through the first four chapters, helping them find a project and getting them established. Chapters five through nine can provide you with discussion topics while the students' actual service projects get up and running. However, these same chapters will become much more vivid when your students bring real-life experiences to bear on theory.

If You Are Beginning a Program

Running a successful service program requires attention to detail and flexibility. Establishing an efficient filing system, where you can keep track of young people's hours and your agency contacts, will save you time and headaches. Over time you will develop a list of trusted agencies, making your job much easier.

Outside speakers can add immediacy and depth to the information you provide for your students. Many of them run on very tight schedules; be sure to plan ahead in arranging for speakers to avoid disappointment. It can also be helpful to plan site visits for early in your program, which necessitates calling and scheduling them even before the program begins.

Legal liability is a growing concern. Be sure your organization is well informed on liability issues and your program is covered by insurance. Never allow a student to go to a site without a signed permission form in hand. Keeping parents, guardians, and your administration informed is important in any case, but particularly with the changing climate of litigation.

Grading

You may well be working in a program that “counts” student hours toward a grade, a graduation requirement, or Confirmation eligibility. Obviously, good recordkeeping and verification of students' hours is important in these programs. An area of potential disagreement is the question of what exactly constitutes service. Some programs count hours students spend helping family members, others do not. Some programs count hours in extracurricular activities, such as building sets for plays. Our mission as Catholic parishes and schools includes teaching our young people about Catholic social teaching, and in-house tutoring or coaching programs, for example, have limited capacity to bring this about. There is a legitimate argument for having at least some service hours served with people who students may have traditionally seen as “other.” Whatever your guidelines, it is important to communicate them clearly and promptly. You may well find that your parameters shift with experience. Clear and repeated communication throughout the course of the program will help avoid disappointment or unpleasantness as student projects end.

Prayer

Simple prayers are provided for each chapter of the student book. You can add depth to these moments by helping your young people settle into a quiet mood and call to mind events that have touched them since your last

meeting. A candle, some quiet music, and perhaps a small prayer table can help students transition out of the hectic activity of their lives. Students can rotate responsibility for leading the prayer, or you can provide that leadership. Consistent prayer times throughout the program help transform student service into truly Christian service.

Finally

Those of you who are just beginning a program have yet to discover the tremendous satisfaction that comes from matching a student with a life-changing service experience. Veterans know the miracles that occur—even amid the daily hassles of transportation and schedules. At times the practical demands of running a program can seem overwhelming. But no matter the level of work or the potential obstacles, the ministry you are undertaking is worth it. Your program truly has the capacity to transform the lives of young people and their community. Only God knows where the transformation ends.

Chapter 1

YOU AND YOUR PROJECT

Key Points

- Introduce young people to the process of discerning a service project
- Assist young people in evaluating their gifts, talents, and temperament
- Inspire young people to be committed to making a difference
- Prepare young people to succeed in their service endeavor

Getting the Ball Rolling

The first weeks of a service program are rarely the best part of the package. Getting students started in service requires a delicate balance of enthusiastic cheerleading and consistent nudging. In a program with more than just a handful of students you will most likely find your patience, ingenuity, and organizational skills tested during the early days of their service projects. You will encounter students who are committed and want to take on more responsibility than they should. You will run up against students simply trying to meet the minimal requirements so they can move on to something else. You will have students who want to serve but lack the follow-through or resources to make it happen without your help. You very likely will also be challenged by parents who question the value of their child “wasting time” on a service project. Despite the headaches and challenges, being persistent and consistent in what you ask of your students at the start of the program will provide everyone involved with a worthwhile outcome.

Remember at the start of your service program that you may have numerous participants who are unfamiliar with or inexperienced at significant service experiences. Students who have never engaged in service are often apprehensive before they begin. Even self-confident, assertive students may feel more anxiety than they show. This often translates into an exasperating lack of initiative on their part. You have to be willing to offer or arrange for a little more hand-holding for these students until they get their feet under themselves.

An equally challenging situation at the start of a service program are the students who have extremely full schedules or believe they have “plenty of time” to get started on their service project. In both cases you will need to light a fire under them to get them going.

Getting Their Feet Wet

You can do several things to get your students moving and excited about their service project. First you can invite veteran volunteers to speak to your group. Ask some of your students who have completed their service project or are engaged in ongoing service to speak with students just starting the process and share what they have gained from their experience—they are often eager to do so. You can also arrange to have speakers from an agency address your group. Any face-to-face connection helps students be more ready to take that first big step. Knowing they will see a familiar face on their first volunteer visit can help the students move along.

Another way to get your students moving is direct contact with service. Direct contact is the best way to help students get over their fears and show them that service is something they can do. A field trip allows you to introduce students to sites and helps them become more comfortable. You can arrange a “plunge” experience, where students visit a variety of agencies from which they might like to select. Or you can tour an individual agency, giving them a taste of what they are likely to encounter. Bringing a group into an agency or other setting can create an uncomfortable dynamic in which clients or neighbors feel as though they are on display. For this reason, some agencies do not do such tours. Others are aware of this disadvantage but decide in favor of the benefits provided. If you do tour agencies, remind your students to be sensitive. Follow-up discussion is important in helping students voice their concerns or questions.

Though the student book does not formally address students’ choice of a service site until chapter 2, you are wise to begin exposing students to agencies as soon as possible. Selecting a service project takes time, and students are limited in the amount of new information they can absorb at once.

Encouraging the Students

An essential step is helping the students recognize their own gifts and talents. Students who excel in academics, music, or sports are already aware of those gifts. Service helps students recognize and develop qualities such as warmth, generosity, intuition, or sensitivity, or less recognized skills such as drawing, yoga, or the ability to organize. This aspect of service is particularly beneficial to students who have a difficult time in the traditional classroom or among their peers. Students need encouragement that they have something to offer and that they can make a difference.

The self-inventories in chapter 1 of the student book encourage students to recognize their gifts. Young people, like all of us, tend to be most conscious of gifts that are explicitly affirmed by others. Students may omit gifts or talents out of a false sense of modesty, or a fear of appearing different. One method to help identify gifts is to ask students to generate lists of strengths they see in other members of the group. Have the students share their lists with one another.

In addition to talents and skills, students' temperaments and personalities will determine which projects are best for them. One major personality factor that can greatly impact students' success on a service project is whether they are introverted or extroverted. Students who appear to be shy may actually be perfectly secure introverts, or they may be extroverts who simply need the right new environment to find their confidence to shine. Some students thrive on the unexpected challenges of serving meals at a homeless shelter, while others will be much more successful in a one-on-one tutoring relationship. Some students do best in a single extended project, while others benefit from sampling a variety of settings. You can encourage young people to reflect on their innate preferences as they choose a project, while also being open to growth in areas of potential weakness.

“It Matters . . .”

Sometimes people feel overwhelmed when they open their eyes to the suffering in the world. It is important as we lead young people to balance awareness with hope that they know they don't have to do everything but they are called to do something. You can share the following familiar story with your students to help counteract discouragement or even cynicism.

A man was walking along a beach on a beautiful evening. The sun was setting over the shimmering waves, but there were signs of disaster on the shore.

Earlier in the day an unusual storm had washed thousands of starfish up on the beach. Stranded far from the waves, the starfish were unable to move back into the water, and some were already dying.

As the man continued to walk along he noticed a woman moving slowly toward him. The woman was making very slow progress because every few minutes she stooped over. As he drew closer, the man realized she was picking up starfish and throwing them back into the ocean.

When he finally reached her, the man asked, “Why are you bothering to pick up those starfish? Can't you see there are thousands left here to die? What difference does all your work make?”

The woman looked thoughtfully at the starfish in her hand. “It makes a difference to this one,” she said, as she tossed the starfish back into the water. She then continued on her way, intent on her mission.

Remind your students that they, like the woman on the beach, can make a decisive difference to the people they meet. Even if you don't have the opportunity to get to know your students well, you can guide them in their decisions. Encourage them to pay attention to their own internal limits while at the same time being open to new challenges.

On Being a Christian

Service can strengthen young people's faith, but they will not necessarily make that connection without your help. Discussion, example, and assignments can help students reflect on their faith and deepen their experience of service. Your program can stimulate students to talk about their faith more personally. Academic theology classes may or may not invite students to discuss their faith journey. Sometimes there is a gap between students' (and adults') knowledge and their faith life. In spite of rigorous Scripture classes in Catholic schools, how many students read Scripture on a regular basis? Too often our knowledge about our faith remains purely intellectual. Service projects are hands-on; they provide an opportunity to make faith hands-on as well.

Throughout your students' projects, you can invite them to reflect on God's presence in the people they meet. You can invite them to journal or discuss their response to the question, "What was one moment when, at least in retrospect, you could see God's presence this week?" You can also help them turn to God for help when they need guidance or strength. Providing the opportunity for young people to pray for specific intentions during group prayer, or having students design and lead a prayer service, gives each student the chance to practice and to learn from watching others. Some students already pray on a regular basis. Others need help in learning how. One way to do this is by sharing your own God-moments and letting your students see you draw on God's guidance in your role as coordinator.

A delicate balance exists between inviting students to see God's presence and pressuring them. Young people come with a wide range of faith experiences, positive and negative. As adolescents, on any given morning their perspective may change dramatically. One incident of feeling pressured or shamed can turn some students off for the rest of their project. Be mindful of offering students options as you invite them into dialogue about faith. If they don't see God in a situation, they should feel free to say so, as long as they state their position respectfully. But hearing you and their peers share experiences can help them recognize God in places where God has been hidden from their eyes.

Structured Reflection

A well-designed service project that matches a student's gifts and preferences is powerful. Solid structured reflection moves service to a whole new dimension. Well-crafted reflection helps students recognize and remember the life lessons contained in their experiences. You may invite students to keep a journal of their service experience. Common journal questions are, "How did you feel about your experience today?" "What surprised you?" "What would you do differently?" Though these are useful questions, they are limited in their potential. Using the information in this book and adapting it to your setting will yield the richest possible learning for your students.

Each chapter of the student book contains numerous opportunities for journaling and reflection. Encourage your students to take the necessary time to respond to these questions. You may also choose to review your students' journal responses periodically or have another adult do so. By doing this you can check on the students' progress as well as become aware of any potential problems, such as falling behind on hours or unhappiness with the project, before they get out of hand. If you plan on doing this, be sure to let the students know you will be checking their journal responses periodically.

Service learning is an educational movement that helps adults translate academic learning to the real world. The core components of service learning are *(a)* authentic service, *(b)* structured reflection, and *(c)* integration with a subject to be learned. Service, with the inclusion of structured reflection, can help students learn about God's personal presence in the world and about the specific vision of God represented by Catholicism.

One goal of reflection is to help students see their own growth throughout their project. The activity at the end of chapter 1 of the student book titled, "Expectations of Yourself," helps students record their attitudes, beliefs, and expectations as they embark on their adventure. Invite your students to complete that activity and turn their responses in to you. Hold these responses for your students, and use them as a reference at the end of the project. You and they will be touched.

Additional Resources

A wealth of resources on service learning are available. Your public school district or state department of education will have resources to offer you. Secular resources on service learning need to be adapted, but they can provide a philosophy of learning that grounds our projects more deeply in our mission. The best-known resources on service learning are the National Youth Leadership Council, which offers conferences, consulting, and other services, and the National Service Learning Clearinghouse.