

Have a Heart for the Homeless

By Amy Gallagher

My most memorable experience engaging my students in service-learning was the project entitled "Have a Heart for the Homeless." Our project objective was for students to participate in activities to gain an understanding of the issue of homelessness in our area and develop activities that are designed to provide money and necessary items to these shelters. Our project, developed primarily by the students, included written and visual preparatory activities, a collection for a local homeless shelter, and written and visual reflection activities.

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project (e.g. health, education, environmental or public safety need)?

The community need addressed in this project was homelessness. In our local area, there are several homeless shelters that are always in need of basic supplies.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to school curriculum (e.g. what course outcomes were met and/or how did the project reinforce or enhance student academic learning)?

-Social Studies Voluntary State curriculum - we discussed the idea of civic responsibility and awareness, economic principles related to cost of living, and social programs established by the government.

-Integrated Language Arts Voluntary State curriculum -we used non-fiction reading strategies and met writing outcomes.

-Algebra Voluntary State curriculum -we examined and displayed data using graphs and charts.

Best Practice 3: How did you reflect on your experience throughout the project?

There were two major written reflection pieces to this project. The first was a written response to a series of questions, read only by me, that showed how students felt about the planning process, specific activities, their interest in the topic, and their reaction to having completed this project. The second was a letter written to next year's students to describe the parts of our project.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project?

With the exception of deciding when activities were specifically completed and creating parts of specific activities, the students planned and complete the majority of the project, especially the action portion.

Best Practice 5: What community partners did you work with on this project (e.g. non-profits, civic organizations, business that provided donations, etc.)?

We established a partnership with a local shelter. We collected basic items such as food, toiletries, games, books, paper towels, toilet paper, paper plates, and clothing.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project?

In the beginning of the year, we established a Service-Learning Project Committee, which consisted of 13 students from our teaching team that essentially created our service-learning project.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project?

The first thing that we did to prepare for service-learning was to view the video "Learning in Deed" which describes in detail three different projects. From this, we were able to discuss the preparation, action, and reflection pieces of any service-learning project. With this background, it made it much easier to brainstorm ideas with the class for our own project because they understood the purpose of the activities.