

# *Rebuilding Together with Christmas in April*

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Each year, the Frederick County Service Learning Advisory Board (SLAB) adopts a house through Rebuilding Together with Christmas in April. During one day in April, approximately 80 students from all over Frederick County help rebuild a person's house that lives with a disability or financial barrier. This project is amazing because it really shows what impact students can have on people's lives and society.

**Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project?** In our community, senior citizens, mentally and physically disabled, and economically challenged people are having problems maintaining their houses. Their houses are in disrepair and the homeowners are unable to repair their homes themselves. Our Christmas in April project enables these homeowners to remain independent, safe, and comfortable in their own homes. SLAB has been involved with the Christmas in April project for three or four years. Frederick County has been rehabilitating houses through Rebuilding Together for ten years, and each year there are more than 20 homes that are repaired through this project. Also, SLAB members were prepared for this project by viewing a video on the nationwide Christmas in April effort.

**Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives?** This project is connected to school curriculum in a number of ways. First because the schools are involved, SLAB makes sure to ask the Tech Ed Classes if they would like to be involved as well as SLAB members. We also get a number of participants from the Career and Technology Center (CTC), a facility that trains students in the trades. This is connected with the curriculum of the CTC students as well as the Tech Ed students. They are able to use what they have learned in the classrooms and take that knowledge to the real world when restoring a house.

**Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project?** There is ongoing reflection throughout the entire day that the work on the home occurs. During breaks, students are asked what they have done and how they are feeling. There are similar discussions during lunch. After the event, students go through a thorough reflection where they provide comments on the day and express their feelings. A written reflection is requested from each participant after the work is completed. We are also trying to set up a day for us to go back to visit the house we restored to reflect on the lasting impact of our actions.

**Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project?** Students take a number of different roles during this project to enable a successful event. First, students from SLAB are in charge of recruiting others from their school that may be interested in being involved in the activity. Also on the day of the event, students serve as leaders in specific fields. These students come from the Career and Technology Center and are trained specialists. Finally SLAB works to raise funds to "purchase" the right to work on a house each year.

**Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project?** Many community partnerships are built during this project. Through Rebuilding Together with Christmas in April, we have a partnership with not only these organizations but also with the organizations that provide materials. We also count heavily on the partnerships we have with the CTC and the Frederick County Public Schools. For lunch, we partner with a number of different church groups who donate food for all of the hard working students. In addition, we partner with a group of professional remodelers, who help guide the students throughout the day. One of them acts as the House Captain for the project.

**Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project?** We had to plan for this project by viewing a video on Christmas in April. We also had to recruit students to show up for the project as well as gather materials for the project.

**Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project?** Students gained experience with working with their hands, fundraising, persuasive speaking (recruiting), and writing. They also gained an greater understanding of the variable standards of living for some people in Frederick County. Finally, students experience that their actions truly can make a positive difference in someone's life.