

Help the Homeless Mini-Walk-A-Thon

By Jennifer Hallmark

Approximately eighty-five Banneker Middle School students participated in a local Help the Homeless mini-walkathon around the community to raise funds for two local organizations (Montgomery County Dental Clinic and Threshold Services). These organizations contacted the school indicating their need for funds to keep their services in our neighborhood. Students decided the walkathon would be an efficient way to raise awareness and money. Students advertised, coordinated, pledged, participated, and reflected on the project as a group. We raised over \$1200!

Meet a recognized community need: Both organizations help citizens in our immediate school area with free dental care, counseling, mental illness medication, and homeless assistance. This project helped raise awareness and funds to continue these critical programs.

Achieve curricular objectives through service-learning: Curriculum content such as citizenship, belonging to a community, and environmental issues were addressed. Through this project, student knowledge about the issues of homelessness were increased. Students had to apply business skills such as advertising, developing a plan, collecting money, and reflecting upon results. We developed next steps for next year as well.

Reflect throughout the experience: Students had to write P.A. announcements after listening to presenters from the organizations. We had two speakers visit classrooms throughout the school to educate students on the issues of homelessness. Students met at the end of the project as a group and reflected on the process. We took pictures and documented our success in community newsletters.

Develop student responsibility: Students were in charge of determining how we were going to raise funds, learning about and raising awareness of the issues of homelessness/mental illness to the whole student body, collecting money, and responsible for completing the walk. This process helped students realize their social responsibility to the community.

Establish community partnerships: The community partnerships were created with Montgomery County Dental Clinic and Threshold Services. The organizations had heard about our fantastic service reputation (our principal was the 2003 Service-Learning Principal of the Year) and they contacted me to see if we could help. Both partners are within a ten-mile radius of the school.

Plan ahead for service-learning: We prepared and planned ahead for the project by getting a small group of service club members together to discuss how we could help our community partners. We decided to participate in a mini-walkathon. We invited speakers from the organizations, looked up area homeless statistics, and developed an action plan for the project. Once students heard about the project on the announcements, students were eager to participate. A total of approximately 85 students participated in the walkathon.

Equip students with the knowledge and skills needed for service: Students acquired new knowledge about the issues of homelessness and mental illness that occurs in our immediate area. Students realized that homelessness is not just being without a home but

that many factors are involved. If we help our neighbors and businesses, we all can have an impact. Students felt a sense of duty, accomplishment, and pride in their work.