

Partnership with the Frederick County Youth Center

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The Frederick County Service Learning Advisory Board (SLAB) initiated a partnership with the Frederick City Youth Center. Together, we developed a mentoring/tutoring program between 20 high school students and 20 children enrolled in the Center's after school program for at risk youth. Individual relationships were formed as high school students were matched with younger students to provide support with homework and other activities such as combined service-learning projects. SLAB members also acted as role models and mentors for the younger students.

Best practices:

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project? Many of the students who attend the Youth Center have some type of learning disability and benefit from the one-to-one attention of an older person. Based on the need for more one-to-one attention for Youth Center participants, our partnership came up with the mentor/tutor idea. In addition, the children at the Center often come from single parent homes where their parent works to support the family, leaving little time for personal attention and help. With their families not always able to provide the support that they needed at such a young age, we thought it was important for them to have a positive role model who could lend a hand as they went through the most intense developmental years of their lives. We also felt the need to help them with issues they confront and struggle with daily such as good nutrition and problem solving techniques.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives? This service-learning project connected with a number of different curricular areas. For the Center participants, it provided a way for students to receive extra help in any of their classes. SLAB provided 20 tutors who helped students with their homework at least once a week. There was a lot of improvement academically with Center youth over the period of the partnership. Also, during the project, SLAB members led a number of educational activities. SLAB members gave presentations on nutrition, acceptance, and other topics. That required SLAB members to relate this project back to various areas of their curricula, such as public speaking, research and communication skills, project planning and organization skills, English, math, and health. SLAB members were trained to be mentors, tutors, leaders and facilitators.

Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project? There was reflection throughout the entire project. After every presentation and project, we would have a group reflection. We made sure, especially after each service-learning project we did with the children that everyone reflected. We were able to do a number of these projects such as sorting food at a food pantry, and making hygiene kits. We also had an end of the year celebration to look back on what we had accomplished. Finally, after everything was over, we came together to reflect on the positive and negative aspects of the project and decided what we could do to make the project more beneficial and easier to accomplish in the future.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? The concept for this entire tutoring/mentoring project, as well as each service-learning project carried out with Center youth, was led by a SLAB student. We were in charge of making contacts, gathering materials, and facilitating the projects. In addition, each SLAB student had to become a leader and role model to the child s/he tutored. We had to be responsible for coming to the youth center at least once a week. The \$4000 grant from the Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism (GOSV) that was used to start this project was also entirely student written.

Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project? This project was built on partnerships. SLAB first had to start a partnership with the GOSV to fund the project. An outline of specific projects and partnerships had to be written to secure funding. Throughout most of the project, we needed to find community partners to help us educate the children at the Center. We formed partnerships with Kids on the Block, the American Heart Association, and Veggie Annie, who all helped with segments of our education projects. We also started a partnership with Thorpewood Environmental Garden and helped them carry out their In-Town Garden project. For our hygiene kit project, SLAB student solicited donations from local hotels for hygiene items. We were able to get supplies for 200 kits that contained shampoo, soap, conditioner, lotion, toothbrushes, toothpaste, washcloths, combs, and razors. Of course, the entire project was a partnership between the Frederick City Youth Center and SLAB.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? This project took many weeks of preparation. We prepared for the entire partnership through meetings and grant writing. Then we prepared for each individual project, arranging speakers, gathering supplies, and recruiting SLAB members to become mentors / tutors. We also prepared Youth Center participants before each project. Finally, each SLAB student had to be trained on techniques for being a mentor and tutor.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? There were many skills and much knowledge learned from this project. Youth Center participants learned about hygiene, healthy eating, and making good choices. They were also able to grow as individuals during each service-learning project by learning the importance of giving back to their communities. Youth Center children's schoolwork also improved because of the help and guidance of their mentors. During the In-Town Garden project, students and mentors alike learned how to take care of their own garden by planting, tending, and harvesting vegetables. SLAB students learned how to be mentors, leaders, project planners, grant writers, and public speakers, as well as learning about the importance of diversity. One of the funniest parts of the project was during the healthy eating presentation. The Youth Center children were fighting over the healthy food offered when, before, they only wanted unhealthy food and would never even touch a vegetable.

