

Have a Heart for the Homeless

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Our 8th grade students completed an indirect service-learning project January through March 2002. It was our goal that students demonstrate every individual's role in affecting positive change. In fact, our motto throughout this project was, "Kids CAN make a difference!" This year, we worked with a local homeless shelter to collect a range of items at our school and within the local community, which was then donated to adults and families in need in Howard County. All of our activities were created to help individuals who are underprivileged in our community.

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project? Homeless shelters receive most of their donations during the holiday season, but are in need of items throughout the year. Our service-learning project provided a community homeless shelter with food items, personal items, first aid supplies, cleaning supplies, paper products, gift certificates, baby items, games, and school supplies. The shelter identified the items they needed to help people who are homeless.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives? The following Maryland Learning Outcomes were achieved through our service-learning project. An explanation of how the outcomes were achieved follows each Outcome.

- Social Studies: Analyze examples in which individuals and groups bring about civic improvement. By helping people who are homeless, students realized that their efforts directly impacted and changed the lives of people in our community.
- Math: Organize, display, and interpret data using tables, pictographs, and bar graphs. Graphs of each homeroom's contributions were created. These graphs determined which homeroom earned the reward for bringing in the most donations.
- English: Write essays for an intended audience and purpose that state the thesis or purpose of the paper, that follow an organizational pattern, and that offer compelling evidence in the form of facts and details to support the thesis. Students wrote a description of our project for the PTA Newsletter, our news broadcast at school, and local newspapers.

Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project?

Discussion and brief written responses to prompts provided the vehicle by which students reflected on their service-learning. For example, after watching a video, "Shelter Boy," students wrote down what they could do to help a boy like the one in the video. At the end of the project, students invited a speaker from Grassroots to come back to accept our donations. After hearing how the donations would help the people Grassroots serves, the students wrote how the service-learning impacted their community.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? Each group of students was assigned a task in relation to the project. For example, one group was responsible for maintaining the graphs, another for advertising the project, and another for collection of the donations. Within each group, the students were responsible for ensuring the success of our project.

Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project? Our community partners for this project were Grassroots, the student body, and the Parent Teacher Association.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? We prepared and planned for the project by watching "Shelter Boy," about a 12-year-old boy and his family who became homeless. Students analyzed how they could help people like those in the video. A speaker from Grassroots, a local homeless shelter, talked to the students about homelessness in our community. The speaker identified how our service project would help people in need.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? People who are homeless are not addicted to drugs or lazy citizens who don't want to work. Students now understand that homelessness is not a choice that some people make. Circumstances beyond a person's control contribute to homelessness, and that is why it is so important that community members become involved in helping people get back on their feet. Students also saw the real world applications of writing and graphing skills. Students also used organizational skills to ensure the efficiency of collecting and packaging the items for the shelter.

