

SGA Christmas Service Day

By Alan Rusnack

Each year our student council (SGA) sponsored a "SGA Christmas Service Day." One of the service projects had the student council members adopting 4-5 local families in need for Christmas. We would specifically try to identify and focus on our own teen mothers and their families. Approximately 25 SGA members participated in this activity. The students identify the families in need, contact and meet with the families regarding their needs, conduct a school-wide food drive, make shopping lists, shop for gifts, wrap the gifts, and then actually deliver the gifts to the families.

Meet a recognized community need: There were many families in our school district that were in need and the needs of such families are magnified during the holidays. Such families do not have the funds to make the holidays special for their families. Our students also recognized the unique needs of teen mothers.

Achieve curricular objectives: There were many links to the Cecil County Guidance Curricular objectives, core-learning goals, Character Education Program and to the required government class. Some of the outcomes of the project were: Students demonstrated decision-making skills. Students demonstrated social and civic responsibility. Students utilized verbal and nonverbal communication skills, writing skills, and research skills. Students demonstrated "caring for other" and "empathy" for others. Students increased their "self-esteem".

Reflect through the service-learning experience: Reflection - individual and group - took place during and after the project was completed. Students would reflect on the personal impact of the project on the families. Students shared their experiences at the next student council meeting.

Develop student responsibility: Our SGA members involved in this project were divided into groups of five. Each group was assigned one of the "adopted families." The members were responsible to contact and meet with their family. They would explain the project and get the family's permission to be "adopted" by our SGA. The students would collect information about the family's needs and come up with a Christmas list. The students were responsible for their "family" from start to finish.

Establish community partnerships: The Christmas project involved partnerships with many community agencies. Student would establish partnerships with local businesses, which allowed them to place money donation boxes at their sites. The local Wal-Mart was contacted to provide discount and tax-free shopping. Partnerships with local food marts were also established to help with the can food drive and provided free gift fruit baskets for each adopted family. In addition, the local Pizza Hut was contacted and they provided free pizza coupons used in the project.

Plan ahead for service-learning: We started planning for our Christmas Day project at our October student council meeting. The needs in the community were discussed and various projects were developed and planned to meet the needs. Identifying local families in need was the first order of business. Teen mothers were invited to the meeting to speak to our members. Students who participated in the project in past years shared their experiences with the current members of the SGA. Each step of the project required much coordinated planning on the part of the students.

Equip students with knowledge and skills needed for service: Upper class SGA members prepared younger members to work with the families in need and about respecting the feelings of the families we were adopting. Since we conduct this project each year, the upper class members knew about the local established partnerships. The senior members provided the leadership for the younger members, and each group had at least one senior.

