

Tips for Starting a Service Learning Project

- **Start small** and be successful.
- **Seek strong student ownership** and leadership of the service program.
- **Be clear and explicit about the goals** for the young people including learning and personal development. Take time to sit down and outline the steps of the project.
- **Explore the structural causes** for the social issues the youth are addressing.
- **Plan far enough ahead** to allow community organizations to participate, usually a minimum of four weeks.
- **Each organization is different:** different procedures, training, supervision and mission. Find an organization that has a good mix between support for volunteers and flexibility in approaching new projects.
- **Serve *with* the young people;** lead by example.
- **Survive failure by learning from it;** treat all your efforts as experiments.
- **Conduct formal reflection** with the youth: at the agency, back in the classroom or both. Agency staff can be very helpful in facilitating reflection discussions.
- **Maintain open and regular communication** with the Volunteer Coordinator at the agency.
- **Celebrate when the project is over** and recognize the young people's accomplishments. Include agency staff whenever possible. Media coverage of the project is an excellent form of recognition.
- **Conduct an evaluation** of the project with everyone involved: youth, parents, agency staff, clients, etc. Share the results with the agency Volunteer Coordinator.
- **Recognize the community organization's efforts** through thank you cards, letters of commendation to the executive director, newsletter article, etc.
- **Have FUN** with the project!