

Helping the Community is Essential for Students

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“The need for imagination, a sense of truth, and a *feeling of responsibility*—these three forces are the very nerve of education.” - Rudolf Steiner

The benefits of providing students with opportunities to volunteer in service to the community has a far-reaching impact, not only on the recipients but on the students themselves. In this 1996 meta review of research [The Effects of Volunteering on the Young Volunteer](#), young people in particular most certainly gain benefits from volunteering.

Study authors [Cynthia W Moore](#) and [Joseph P Allen](#) say: “Diverse, successful volunteer programs for adolescents, along with school-based support, are related to improvements in both the academic and social arenas. Volunteering is how [students] express their identity, or their values. Intrinsic rewards, those that are embedded in the act itself, are difficult to describe in the language of cause and effect. Self-discovery is not [just] the effect of volunteering; it is volunteering itself.”

As the authors imply, when we talk about something as powerful as giving back to our communities and finding space in our lives for altruism and compassion, scientific studies on “effect” will ultimately fall short of demonstrating proof of the benefits to the individual providing the service.

However, educators clearly see the multiple benefits that students receive through social and community engagement.

Empowerment

When engaging in community, students see firsthand how their actions have an immediate impact on the lives of others. In today's 24/7 news cycle where our youth often see injustice and tragedy happening across the globe, feelings of disconnect and discouragement can become the norm. It is therefore essential to help young people connect in meaningful and impactful ways with their community so that they see the connection between awareness, action, and change.

Skill Building

Volunteering in groups with fellow students and community members allows students to practice important life skills that are valuable inside and outside of the classroom. Placing real-world and relevant outcomes to actions such as problem solving, collaboration, communication, and leadership further the application of these skills in other areas. [Multiple studies show](#) that students who give back to the community perform better in school, particularly in subjects such as math, reading, and history.

Perspective

Volunteering affects a student's worldview. Young people's lives are often insular and their worldviews are built around themselves, their school, and their individual family environment. When working in the wider community, students have the opportunity to see how others live differently than they do, and also what others may need that they take for granted.

Human beings benefit from interacting regularly with those who are different. It is essential for all of us to understand the different perspectives and conditions of living outside of our immediate circle so that we may better understand one another and work together to make our global and local communities better places to live.

Connection

Students who engage in projects aimed at helping others begin to see their role as a connected and valuable part of the whole. Like a seed or a squirrel, the rain or the sun, each thing on this planet has a role to play in maintaining the ecosystem of life and society. Each player has meaning. Each and every role is important. This is one of the most essential and valuable lessons of life for all of us, and nothing connects us to our inherent value in the world like stepping out to help others or our environment.

For example, in 2017, students at the Waldorf School of Bend in central Oregon had the opportunity to connect with their community when the forested areas near the school were ravaged by the Milli Wildfire. Twenty-four thousand acres of central Oregon woodland was devastated in the Deschutes National Forest and Three Sisters Wilderness area.

The greater Bend community was deeply impacted by this natural disaster. The school community remembers how they personally were impacted as well. But the students saw how tragedy turned to triumph as their school helped rally their community to both raise money for trees and then physically plant them.

Students will grow up alongside those areas replanted by the school. They will witness the impact of their love and labor. The newly planted forest, as it grows and thrives, is expected to offset over 283 tons of carbon. Each student at that school will be able to see and understand the essential role they played in rebuilding their environment and their local community.

Living and thriving within a community -- whether a school, local, or global one -- is about looking deeply at ourselves and our community to determine how we can best work with others to improve the whole. This interconnection reflects the true meaning of community and life.

Photo Credit: [Emerson Waldorf School](#)