



Family Service Project Guidebook



MOMENTOUS
INSTITUTE

About Momentous Institute

Momentous Institute, founded by Salesmanship Club of Dallas in 1920, exists to build and repair social emotional health with children, families and communities since 1920. Each year, the organization partners with over 5,500 children and family members through innovative education and therapeutic services. The organization also invests in research and training, including the annual Changing the Odds conference, to reach far more children than could ever be seen directly.

FAMILY SERVICE PROJECT GUIDEBOOK

Many families want to help kids understand the importance of acts of service and helping others in their community. But doing a service project as a family can feel overwhelming! Where do you start? What projects can kids participate in? How do you ensure that they're getting the most out of the project, and that the project is really helpful to others?

Let's take a look at the four components of a great service project to help you and your family find just the right fit.

A successful service project has four parts:

1. Brainstorm

2. Plan

3. Act

4. Reflect

Step One: *Brainstorm*

The brainstorm step gives the whole family a chance to offer ideas about how they can help the community. Young children may not know what they are capable of doing for others, so this step may have to be mostly facilitated by adults. With young children, adults can pre-select a few options and ask kids for their opinion. Older children will benefit from designing their own project and having more say in what the family does together.

Brainstorm QUESTIONS:

What causes are we most passionate about as a family (rescuing animals, protecting the planet, helping our neighbors)?

What are some things we can do to help the people/causes we have identified?

What people or organizations in our community can we partner with to help the people/causes we have identified?

Who would benefit from this project?

How would the people who benefit feel as a result of our project?

Brainstorm CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Using the questions above, identify the need(s) in your community.
- ☐ Using the questions above, discuss ways to address the need(s).
- ☐ Find and share an example of kids providing a service to a specific group (www.goodnews.org is a great source for examples!)
- ☐ Make a list of potential projects your family can do together.
- ☐ For each project idea, identify the people who would benefit from the project.
- ☐ For each project idea, describe how the people who benefit might feel as a result of the project.
- ☐ Go through the list and discuss the pros and cons of providing service to each of the individuals or groups suggested.
- ☐ Together, narrow the suggestions to two, being careful to affirm the value of each idea.
- ☐ Allow each member of the family to cast a vote for the idea of their choice.

Step Two: *Plan*

Constructing a plan together will help children understand how the project will unfold. In this step, adults should think about logistics and details, and what materials are necessary for the project. Some projects may have several tasks that must be completed. Depending on the project, adults may want to write a checklist or use visuals to show each task. Be sure they're written in chronological order and come back to the list after each step to check it off. This helps kids see the progress they're making on the project as they go!

Plan QUESTIONS:

What materials and supplies do we need?

How/where will we get these materials?

If the project requires any kind of assembly or construction, where and how will we do it?

When do we want the project to be completed? When do we need to start to meet that goal?

What are all of the tasks we need to do (in order) to meet our goal?

Who (if anyone) will be helping us with this project?

Plan CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Briefly review the brainstorm process that led to the selection of a need and service learning project.
- ☐ Decide what materials or supplies are needed.
- ☐ Determine how the material or supplies will be gathered.
- ☐ If the project includes any type of construction or assembly, decide where and how this will occur.
- ☐ Determine when the project will begin, emphasizing how much time there is to prepare for the project. (Consider making a special calendar for this project.)
- ☐ On chart paper, list all tasks from beginning to completion of project in sequential order.
- ☐ Let everyone volunteer to complete specific tasks, making sure that all members of the family participate.
- ☐ Take photos or videos as kids engage in research and planning.

Step Three: *Act*

This is where the project comes to life! In this stage, the family carries out the tasks in the plan. Expect that children will be very excited during this part of the project. Be sure to be clear around behavior expectations and any procedures that support self-regulation, cooperation and independence, especially if the project will be completed in an unfamiliar setting or around unfamiliar people. Be sure to praise children for their efforts, so they can gain a sense of satisfaction that comes with serving others. This is a chance for children to gain confidence and see that they can make a difference! And don't forget to take photos of your family in action (if appropriate) so you can look back on them to reflect.

Act QUESTIONS:

What do you think this project will be like?

How will you show respect during the project?

What will we do when we have a big feeling, like excited, nervous or unsure?

Act CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Frequently remind the family of the purpose of the project, emphasizing the importance of making positive changes in the community.
- ☐ Review social skills that kids will need to exercise to successfully complete the project.
- ☐ Using your timeline, begin the project as outlined.
- ☐ Keep track of each task as it is completed, indicating its status on the calendar.
- ☐ Take photos as the family serves through the project, if appropriate.

Step Four: *Reflect*

This is the most important part of the service project process. After the project is complete, guide children to reflect on the work they did and why it was important to them and to the community or people affected. It is often helpful for adults to model this reflection by sharing how the project made them feel, how others responded and how proud they are of the children's efforts. Discussing these things will build children's understanding that they can be agents of change. If you have photos or video, look through them together as a family to help build their recollection of the different stages of the project.

Reflect QUESTIONS:

Why is it important that we help in our community?

What was really fun about this project?

Did we have any challenges or setbacks during the project? How did we handle them?

How do you think (recipients) felt after the project?

What makes you think that?

How did helping someone make you feel?

What else could we do to help our community?

Reflect CHECKLIST:

- ☐ Display the photos or videos that have been taken throughout the project, by making a slideshow, printing a small album or just scrolling through them together. These will support everyone's recollection of the stages of the project.
- ☐ Telling children your feelings about their effort and achievement.
- ☐ Describe how others felt as a result of the project.
- ☐ Ask kids to talk about their experience and feelings. If they have difficulty, ask open-ended questions, such as those listed on the previous pages.

Example Projects

FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN

Paper Hugs

Send paper hugs to community members who help your family in some way – mail carriers, grocery clerks, sanitation workers, etc. This project builds compassion for people who support our daily lives and keep everything running smoothly!

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Cardstock or heavy paper

Paint

One 24-inch length of ribbon for each paper hug

TIMELINE:

One week

PREPARE:

If possible, find out the names of possible recipients in advance

BRAINSTORM:

Tell kids that you would like to do something nice for people in the community, but you need their help. Identify a few people you'd like to consider sharing a paper hug with, and tell the kids their names and what they do, if you know. If you don't know each person, brainstorm a list of jobs that support our daily lives. Reiterate that these people work every day to make our lives easier. We don't often think about the work that goes on "behind the scenes" to make everything function, but there are people working to support us in all of these ways! Tell the kids that when we appreciate someone, we like to give hugs or high fives. But it can be hard to give hugs or high fives to everyone,

so instead, you're going to make paper hugs and high fives, and then write simple notes telling each person how much you appreciate them. Give them time to respond and ask questions, making sure they understand the purpose of the project.

PLAN:

Make a list of the materials that you'll need for this project. Make a list of each task that will need to be completed in sequential order. You can even start a special calendar just for this project with a start and end date!

A paper hug is made by dipping both hands in paint and making two handprints on cardstock. When dry, you cut around each handprint. Write a brief note on the inside of one handprint, and on the inside of the opposite handprint, sign your name. Staple each handprint to opposite ends of a 24 inch length of ribbon. When the ribbon is placed around a person's back and arms, the hands should come together in front of the individual's chest to resemble a hug.

ACT:

Work on the project together, making sure to check off each task as it is completed. Gather completed paper hugs and pass them out. Practice an appropriate greeting for the child to offer as they hand out their paper hugs. Be sure to notice people's reactions as they receive them!

REFLECT:

A few reflection questions to consider:

What was really fun about this project?

Did you have any challenges or setbacks during the project?

How did you handle that?

How do you think (recipients) felt after the project?

What makes you think that?

How did helping someone make you feel?

What else could we do to help our community?

Puppy Love

Help animals in the local shelter find permanent homes by creating flyers to raise awareness. This is a great project for kids and families to act on their compassion for animals!

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Cardstock paper

Art supplies such as markers, crayons, paint and/or colored pencils

Pictures of dogs and cats available for adoption from the local shelter

TIMELINE:

One week

PREPARE:

Call or visit the SPCA or local animal shelter to learn about the needs of the animals that are housed there. Connect with a director or staff member to explain the goal of the project, and if possible, see if the children can tour the facility or meet with a director to learn more. Ask the director for photos of animals available for adoption (some locations will have them posted on their website).

BRAINSTORM:

Explain that there are many animals without homes that are ready for adoption at animal shelters. Consider reading a book, such as *Buddy Unchained* by Daisy Bix, that tells the story of animals looking for homes. Then explain that sometimes people don't know about the animals available for adoption, and that by sharing about it, you can help animals find forever homes. Explain that you'll be helping the local animal shelter make flyers about pets that are currently in need of homes to help spread the word. Give them time to respond and ask questions, making sure they understand the purpose of the project.

PLAN:

Make a list of the materials that you'll need for this project. Make a list of each task that will need to be completed in sequential order. You can even start a special calendar just for this project with a start and end date!

Explain that you will create "Home Wanted" and "Family Wanted" posters showing the animals that need to be adopted from the shelter. The posters will be delivered to community spaces, such as grocery stores, restaurants and laundromats, in hopes of finding the animals new homes. Part of your planning will be to outline the information that should be included on each poster. The shelter should be able to provide photos of animals or may have them listed on their site. Be sure to coordinate with the shelter for what information should be listed on the flyers for people to learn more.

ACT:

Begin the project as outlined in the plan. Be sure to check off each task as it is completed, reflecting with students about the challenges and successes in each completed task. If possible, arrange to visit the animal shelter.

REFLECT:

A few reflection questions to consider:

What was really fun about this project?

Did you have any challenges or setbacks during the project?

How did you handle that?

How do you think (recipients) felt after the project?

What makes you think that?

How did helping someone make you feel?

What else could we do to help our community?

FOR FAMILIES WITH OLDER CHILDREN

Older children can focus on identifying a need in their community. Examples include:

- School
- Younger kids (at school or in the community)
- Community members, neighbors
- Nursing homes
- Homeless people
- Animals

Once narrowed down to a population, then you can brainstorm around specific ideas. Here are a few to consider:

SCHOOL

Redecorate, clean and organize a specific area of the school (i.e., the entrance, the lobby, a hallway, the restrooms, the playground).

YOUNGER KIDS

Serve as reading buddies, math or spelling tutors to younger students by making flashcards or reading with them on a scheduled basis. This can be done in a local school or a community center or after school program.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Knit, weave or craft small projects like hot pads, drink koozies or placemats for firefighters, police and nurses.

NURSING HOMES

Visit, read, sing or perform a play.

HOMELESS PEOPLE

Collect and donate new items like socks, hats, gloves, toothbrushes and school supplies

ANIMALS

Make pet toys or treats; make dog beds out of an old pillow. Visit the animal shelter.