

# BEST PRACTICES IN SCHOOL COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAMS: Evidence From Canada and Abroad

Draft Research Report to the Knowledge Development Centre Imagine Canada,  
January 29, 2007

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**D**uring the past two decades, the voluntary sector in Canada has been experiencing a radical shift in government priorities, effectively eroding the welfare state that had been put into place in the in the thirty years following World War II (Brock, 2001; Evans and Shields, 1998; Meinhard and Foster, 2003). Those post-war decades had been characterized by close cooperation between all three levels of government and the voluntary sector; government programs encouraged the growth of the sector through the provision of generous grants. This generosity has come to an end; governments have cut budgets and changed funding formulas.. In order to maintain their levels of service, voluntary organizations have reached out to individual donors, sought partnerships with corporations and other non-profit organizations, and increased their efforts to attract and retain volunteers (Foster and Meinhard, 2005). These strategies pose significant challenges in a country whose citizens had been used to easy and, for the most part, free access to government-provided or government-supported social services. These challenges are amplified by the fact that “the nonprofit sector . . . continues to face a significant problem of visibility and public awareness” (Salamon and Anheier, 1996, p. 116).

It is broadly recognized that education is the primary tool to increase awareness of the sector and to create the values needed to support it. Without education, “the ethos of giving [and volunteering] will fail to develop” (Salamon and Anheier 1996, p. 126). To be effective, education must start early. The school system provides one structure within

which familiarity with the voluntary sector and the values of service to the community can be fostered. In fact, in many educational jurisdictions in Canada and abroad, governments are actively promoting the inclusion of community service programs in the curriculum, often as requirement for graduation.<sup>1</sup> This new interest in promoting community service in educational institutions is based, in part, on the belief that volunteering to serve one’s community creates strong communal values and better citizens. It also encourages collaborative behaviour, a form of social capital that is necessary to compete in a knowledge-based global economy (Putnam, 1995).

In this report, we describe the best practices for setting up community service programs as gleaned from a literature review of Canadian and worldwide sources and from interviews with key informants from across Canada.

## *Methodology*

This compilation of best practices relies on two sources of information: one, the vast body of knowledge available both electronically and in the printed media about community service programs in Canada and abroad; and, two, information gleaned from in-depth interviews with key infor-

**Acknowledgements:** The authors gratefully acknowledge the dedicated contribution of our wonderful team of research assistants: Greg Whitfield, Megan Gayda and Wanda Vrasti at Wilfrid Laurier University and Itay Greenspan, Ella Levinsky, Phaedra Livingstone, Geetha Rahupathy and Maame Twum-Barima at Ryerson University.

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mants representing the three main players in the community service arena: schools and school boards, gateway voluntary organizations, and service voluntary agencies. Gateway organizations are umbrella agencies or volunteer centres that help prospective volunteers find suitable placements or that help coordinate volunteer programs among their member agencies; they usually do not provide volunteer opportunities themselves. Service voluntary agencies are organizations that actually deliver community services directly to their constituents and that use volunteers to help them fulfill their missions.

## *Literature Review*

The Laurier-Ryerson research team conducted a comprehensive literature search and reviewed 205 published articles, Web documents, books, reports, and manuscripts for descriptions of community service and service learning programs.<sup>2</sup>

## *Key Informant Interviews: Schools and School Boards*

Key informants from schools and school boards were selected on the basis of the surveys conducted in the first phase of our research, in which we contacted 321 schools and school boards across Canada to gauge the extent and types of community service programs offered or mandated in secondary schools.

We flagged survey questionnaires from schools and school boards that contained evidence of interesting and comprehensive community service programs. We then re-contacted the original respondents and asked them to participate in a longer, more detailed interview about their programs that would help us prepare a report on best practices for community service programs. Because we found only a few comprehensive and distinctive program models in Canada, the resulting sample pool was quite small, comprising 6 private schools and 2 school boards. Although several private schools had fairly comprehensive programs, we were able to identify only six whose programs were truly distinctive. This number represents almost 10% of the private schools surveyed. Our final sample of school informants is drawn from three of the six private schools identified and two exemplary school boards, one public and one reli-

gious. We were unable to schedule interviews with the three remaining schools.

The interviews were guided by an interview protocol that we developed from information gleaned in the literature review phase (please see Appendix A.) Thirty-three questions were organized into five sections probing the following aspects of the community service program:

- program details,
- teacher/staff involvement,
- school-community liaison,
- student experiences, and
- advice for best practices.

## *Key Informant Interviews: Gateway Organizations and Service Voluntary Agencies*

We had hoped that after interviewing key informants from the schools and school boards, we would be able to identify and contact the voluntary agencies with which they had formal or close relationships. However, formal arrangements between schools and agencies were rare. In only one instance did a school informant refer us to an agency. In order to complete our sample of five, we revisited the original survey responses and selected four agencies that were mentioned in the surveys as places where their students volunteered.

As with the interviews with the school key informants, our questions for key informants from gateway organizations and service voluntary agencies were guided by information gathered in the literature review stage (please see Appendix B.) Twenty-one questions were organized into four sections probing the following aspects of the community service program:

- context,
- arrangements with schools or school boards,
- nature of school involvement, and
- overall impressions.

All interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded with the permission of the interviewees. The recordings were transcribed and then the content was analyzed. The entire interview process as conducted adhered to the Tripartite Ethical Guidelines and was approved by the Ethics Review Boards of both Wilfrid Laurier and Ryerson universities.

Our final sample of key informants, from both the education and the voluntary sectors, came from all regions of Canada: the Maritimes, Quebec, Ontario and the West.

### *Findings from the Literature*

Although many of the articles we reviewed mention best practices or list the features that are necessary for successful community service programs, there is no clear consensus on the relationship of community service programs to valued future outcomes such as adult citizenship behaviour, political involvement, leadership, future volunteering and donating, community-support, and other civic behaviour; or to more immediate outcomes such as enhanced self-esteem, improved academic outcomes, or tolerance of diversity. In those studies in which positive outcomes had been noted, the outcomes were linked to the structure of the programs; well-designed programs being more likely to have both short- and long-term impact on students (Astin et al., 2000; Billig, 2000; Giles and Eyler, 1998; McClelland and Youniss, 2003; Wade and Saxe, 1996; Weiler et al., 1999). The clearest results are found in the area of student satisfaction: structured programs lead to greater student satisfaction (Brown, Pancer, Henderson, and Ellis Hale, 2006; Meinhard, Foster, & Wright, 2006). Thus, the design and structure of programs is important. Below we list 20 different program features that have been identified in the literature as desirable for successful community service programs.

### *Features of Successful Community Service Programs*

Just as there is no consensus in the literature on outcomes of community service programs in high schools, neither is there consensus on the goals of community service programs. Is the goal to spawn better, more informed, tolerant, and more active citizens? Or is it political, i.e., to prepare young people for leadership roles? Some articles even suggest that the goal may be part of a right-wing agenda to replace government welfare programs with communal volunteering (e.g. Hall and Hall, 2002). Because not all community service programs have the same goals, the emphasis on what

works and what doesn't and what are the necessary features or best practices of these programs differs from article to article. Despite this, and despite the fact that some studies base their observations on empirical research while others describe individual experiences, there is considerable consensus in the literature we reviewed with respect to certain best practices for structuring a community service program.

In our review of the literature, we focused primarily on articles that had been published in the last 10 years. We found many articles that identified program features that were associated with successful community service programs. Indeed, most articles addressed this in some fashion. For this review, we have focused on 20 articles that are comprehensive and explicit in their consideration of best practices. We did not distinguish between articles that discuss community service programs and those that discuss service learning programs, mainly because these distinctions were often not clear in the articles themselves, and also because the featured best practices apply to both types of programs. Although we cannot claim to have exhausted all literature sources, we reached a point at which we no longer found new program features to add to our list.

Table 1 lists the 20 program features or best practices that we found through our literature review and the articles that mentioned them. Table 2 ranks these best practices according to the number of articles that mentioned them.

The most frequently mentioned program feature or best practice was "providing opportunities for student reflection," which was mentioned in 12 articles. A related, but less frequently mentioned, program feature was "building on prior knowledge: linking community service to curriculum or courses" (mentioned in six articles). This feature would, of course, help in providing opportunities for student reflection, but it is mentioned as a separate item. This suggests to us that student reflection does not have to occur in class; it can be encouraged at the site of volunteering or can be done by keeping a diary, unrelated to a specific course. By the number of times these two related program features are mentioned, it seems clear that there is broad consensus on the importance of reflecting on the experience of volunteering and placing it in the context of other knowledge. Not

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only were these two features mentioned in many articles, but they were also discussed in detail and were often supported empirically.

The second most frequently mentioned program feature or best practice, “giving students responsibility” in their volunteer placements, was mentioned in 11 articles. Closely related to this feature were “providing opportunities for leadership, problem-solving, and decision-making” and “providing meaningful work/challenging tasks,” each of which was mentioned in eight different articles, and “listening to and considering students’ ideas,” which was mentioned in five articles. Also mentioned in five articles was “matching the placement with students’ interests.” Thus, ensuring the quality of the students’ experiences is seen as very important. The subtext here is a warning not to exploit students by giving them mundane jobs, but rather to engage them with responsible and challenging tasks and to allow them to take initiatives.

The importance of “establishing communication/partnerships between schools and agencies” was mentioned in seven articles. Related to this, and mentioned in six articles, were “creating programs of sufficient duration and intensity” and “ensuring adult involvement.” “Providing financial and administrative support” for these programs was mentioned in five articles. All these items relate to creating and maintaining structures that help to ensure the quality of the student experience. Other desired features related to this, such as program planning, program evaluation, and professional development, were mentioned less frequently (see Table 2.)

There is consensus in the literature that the most important aspects of community service relate not only to students’ actual experiences at their placements, but also, and perhaps critically, to the opportunities provided for reflection and integration of these experiences with students’ prior knowledge and current learning. Next in importance are the structural features that make it possible for these positive experiences to occur. However, it is not clear from the literature if some program features or best practices are absolutely essential while others provide only slight added benefits. It may be that there has to be some “critical mass” of program features or best practices to positively affect the program’s outcomes.

## *Findings From Key Informant Interviews*

The survey answers from 321 schools and school boards across the country indicate that, for the most part, community service programs, where they exist at all, are not well developed. This is particularly true of the province-wide mandated program in Ontario. The Ontario Ministry of Education’s loosely defined guidelines and lack of financial support have not only constrained the development of well-structured programs containing the best practice elements listed above but have also caused schools that already had well-developed community service programs to simplify those programs (Brown, Meinhard, Ellis-Hale, Henderson, and Foster, 2006). Across the country, exceptions to the rule are to be found in private schools, especially private religious schools. These schools often have highly structured and well-designed programs that contain many of the elements of best practices listed above.

With few exceptions (notably Raskoff and Sundeen, 1994), studies investigating community service programs focus mainly on schools and not on community organizations. We have included the perspective of community organizations when investigating best practices as reported in Canada. In addition to the three school and two school board representatives, we also interviewed volunteer coordinators or development officials from five nonprofit agencies. The schools and boards were chosen specifically because their original surveys indicated that they had exemplary and distinctive programs. The voluntary agencies were chosen from among several that were mentioned in the surveys as places where students volunteer. We summarize the findings gleaned from the interviews below.

**Table 1. Review of Literature on Best Practices**

<b>Article</b>	<b>Type of evidence</b>	<b>Planning of programming/ educational goals</b>	<b>Sufficient financial, administrative, and collegial support</b>	<b>Professional development/ training for school personnel</b>	<b>Building on prior knowledge, linking community service to the curriculum/ courses</b>	<b>Pointing out how volunteering helps individuals and/or society</b>
Billig & Furco (2002)	Research-based	x			x	
Billig & Welch (2004)	Experience-based		X	x		
Billig (2000)	Research-based				x	
Blythe et al. (1997)	Research-based					
Camino (2005)	Research-based					
Clary & Snyder (1999)	Research-based					
Conrad & Hedin (1987)	Experience-based	x				x
Conrad & Hedin (1991)	Research-based					
Eyler & Giles (1999)	Experience-based					
Flanagan (2004)	Research-based					
Galston (2001)	Research-based					
Hinck & Brandel (1999)	Review of literature					
James (1910)	Experience-based					
Kahne (1996)	Experience-based	x				
Maybach (1996)	Experience-based					
McClellan & Youniss (2001)	Research-based					
Meinhard et al (2005)	Research-based				x	
Melaville et al. (2006)	Experience-based		X	x	x	x
Melchior (1998)	Research-based					
Raskoff & Stundeen (1994)	Research-based					
Sanders (2003)	Research-based		X			
Shumer & Belbas (1996)	Research-based			x	x	
Shumer (1994,1997)	Experience-based		X	x	x	x
Stoneman (2002)	Experience-based	x	X			

**Table 1. Review of Literature on Best Practices, continued**

<b>Article</b>	<b>Type of evidence</b>	<b>Providing opportunities for student reflection</b>	<b>Ensuring adult involvement: parent, teacher, volunteer coordinator</b>	<b>Creating programs of sufficient duration and intensity</b>	<b>Helping students in the selection process but allowing them to choose their own placements</b>	<b>Engaging in systematic program evaluation</b>
Billig & Furco (2002)	Research-based	x		x		x
Billig & Welch (2004)	Experience-based					
Billig (2000)	Research-based	x		x	x	x
Blythe et al. (1997)	Research-based	x		x		
Camino (2005)	Research-based		x			
Clary & Snyder (1999)	Research-based					
Conrad & Hedin (1987)	Experience-based	x	x		x	x
Conrad & Hedin (1991)	Research-based	x				
Eyler & Giles (1999)	Experience-based	x				
Flanagan (2004)	Research-based			x		
Galston (2001)	Research-based					
Hinck & Brandel (1999)	Review of literature					
James (1910)	Experience-based	x				
Kahne (1996)	Experience-based	x				
Maybach (1996)	Experience-based					
McClellan & Youniss (2001)	Research-based					
Meinhard et al (2005)	Research-based	x	x			
Melaville et al. (2006)	Experience-based	x	x			
Melchior (1998)	Research-based			x		
Raskoff & Sundeen (1994)	Research-based					
Sanders (2003)	Research-based					
Shumer & Belbas (1996)	Research-based	x		x		
Shumer (1994, 1997)	Experience-based	x	x		x	x
Stoneman (2002)	Experience-based		x			

**Table 1. Review of Literature on Best Practices, continued**

<b>Article</b>	<b>Type of evidence</b>	<b>Establishing regular communication/partnerships between schools and agencies</b>	<b>Matching the placement with students' abilities</b>	<b>Matching the placement with students' interests</b>	<b>Providing sufficient training for student volunteers</b>	<b>Providing meaningful work/challenging tasks</b>
Billig & Furco (2002)	Research-based	x			x	
Billig & Welch (2004)	Experience-based		x	x		x
Billig (2000)	Research-based	x		x		x
Blythe et al. (1997)	Research-based					
Camino (2005)	Research-based					
Clary & Snyder (1999)	Research-based			x		
Conrad & Hedin (1987)	Experience-based			x		x
Conrad & Hedin (1991)	Research-based based	x				
Eyler & Giles (1999)	Experience-based					x
Flanagan (2004)	Research-based					
Galston (2001)	Research-based					
Hinck & Brandel (1999)	Review of literature					
James (1910)	Experience-based					
Kahne (1996)	Experience-based					
Maybach (1996)	Experience-based					
McClellan & Youniss (2001)	Research-based					
Meinhard et al. (2005)	Research-based					x
Melville et al. (2006)	Experience-based					x
Melchior (1998)	Research-based		x			
Raskoff & Sundeen (1994)	Research-based	x				x
Sanders (2003)	Research-based	x				
Shumer & Belbas (1996)	Research-based	x				
Shumer (1994, 1997)	Experience-based	x				
Stoneman (2002)	Experience-based					

**Table 1. Review of Literature on Best Practices, continued**

<b>Article</b>	<b>Type of evidence</b>	<b>Giving students responsibility</b>	<b>Listening to and considering students' ideas</b>	<b>Providing opportunities for student leadership/ problem solving/decision making</b>	<b>Providing feedback and indicators of progress and success</b>	<b>Engaging in direct service work</b>
Billig & Furco (2002)	Research-based					
Billig & Welch (2004)	Experience-based	x	x			
Billig (2000)	Research-based	x	x	x		x
Blythe (1997)	Research-based					
Camino (2005)	Research-based					
Clary & Snyder (1999)	Research-based					
Conrad & Hedin (1987)	Experience-based	x		x		
Conrad & Hedin (1991)	Research-based					
Eyler & Giles (1999)	Experience-based	x				
Flanagan (2004)	Research-based			x		
Galston (2001)	Research-based					
Hinck & Brandel (1999)	Review of literature					
James (1910)	Experience-based		x			
Kahne (1996)	Experience-based					
Maybach (1996)	Experience-based	x				
McClellan & Youniss (2001)	Research-based					x
Meinhard et al. (2005)	Research-based	x		x	x	
Melaville et al. (2006)	Experience-based	x	x	x	x	
Melchior (1998)	Research-based					
Raskoff & Sundeen (1994)	Research-based	x		x	x	
Sanders (2003)	Research-based	x		x		
Shumer & Belbas (1996)	Research-based	x				
Shumer (1994, 1997)	Experience-based	x			x	
Stoneman (2002)	Experience-based		x	x		



**Table 2. Rank Ordering of Best Practices According to Number of Articles in Which Each Is Mentioned**

<b>Best Practice</b>	<b>Number of Mentions</b>
Providing opportunities for student reflection	12
Giving students responsibility	11
Providing meaningful work/challenging tasks	8
Providing opportunities for student leadership/problem solving/ decision making	8
Establishing regular communication/partnerships between schools and agencies	7
Ensuring adult involvement: parent and/or teacher and/or volunteer coordinator/supervisor	6
Creating programs of sufficient duration and intensity	6
Building on prior knowledge: linking community service to the curriculum/courses	6
Listening to and considering students' ideas	5
Matching the placement with students' interests	5
Providing sufficient financial, administrative, and collegial support for the program	5
Providing feedback and indicators of progress and success to the student	4
Engaging in systematic program evaluation	4
Planning of programming and educational goals	4
Professional development/training for school personnel	4
Pointing out how volunteering helps individuals and/or society	4
Helping students in the selection process but allowing them to choose their own placement	3
Matching the placement with students' abilities	2
Engaging in direct service work	2
Providing sufficient training for student volunteers	1

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## *Program Context*

Guidelines and protocols that inform community service programs are brief and mostly insubstantial. School boards give schools autonomy with respect to their community service programming as long as the minimum requirements are fulfilled. Few schools have anything more than informal guidelines. Relationships with voluntary agencies also tend to be informal; there are few formal, written arrangements. There are exceptions, however. One large volunteer centre had exchanged some written material aimed at establishing a partnership with two school boards. Another agency reported that it sends “letter of understanding” to both schools and parents. But, on the whole, written agreements are not common practice. Instead, schools and agencies come to verbal understandings about expectations. It appears that these understandings are primarily based on trust because we found no indication of systematic follow-up or general program evaluation involving agencies. One of the respondents in our sample reported that her school re-evaluates an agency only if a student complains or has an unsatisfactory experience. Similarly, two of the agency respondents in our sample reported that they have contacts with schools only if there are problems with the student volunteers.

In summary, even in these exemplary schools and boards, community service programs are not formally structured. In some programs, insurance and/or parental consent is required. Other programs involve group volunteering, where students go as a group to their placement under the supervision of a teacher or staff member; arrangements are made ahead of time by the school and the voluntary organization.

## *Recruitment and Orientation*

Recruitment methods and orientation procedures are generally not systematized. All of our key informants from schools and school boards reported that they have information about community service on their Web sites. Many, but not all, have dedicated Web pages for their community service programs; these list the details and requirements of the program and agencies students can approach. Some also distribute brochures and post information on school bulletin boards and in

school newsletters. One school organizes a special assembly to provide information about the program. Another invites parents to these assemblies. Yet another holds volunteer fairs where local agencies display their literature and explain to the students what they do. Two of the three gateway organizations in our sample are proactive and reach out to schools in various ways: one agency holds a central volunteer fair for all the schools in the city; the other is newly involved with two school boards, developing plans and programs with each that are designed to increase youth engagement. The key informants of the two service voluntary agencies in our sample reported that their organizations make no attempts to be proactive, although they do welcome high school volunteers and are comfortable with signing off on their hour-tracking sheets. On the whole the agency key informants that we interviewed reported that their agencies welcome the opportunity to host student volunteers, although some reported that students can be more of a bother than a help and need more training and supervision than adult volunteers.

## *The Volunteer Experience*

With only few exceptions, our key informants felt that students are given adequate levels of responsibility in their placements. Many agencies adapt to the needs of the student volunteer with respect to training, providing challenging work, designing special programs (see below) and, when necessary, signing the appropriate forms. Some of the agencies in our sample have an age threshold for volunteering, so only senior students are accepted. Some noted that students require more training and supervision than adult volunteers, while others treat the students the same way they treat adult volunteers. Nevertheless, our key informants reported that their schools still receive complaints about volunteer placements that fail to provide an enriching experience.

In one exemplary program, a team of students is in charge of evaluating proposals submitted by students from area schools requesting funding for community service projects. This “for youth, by youth” program involves students in decision making and leadership both at the agency level, where granting decisions are made, and at the school level, where students are actively involved

in preparing proposals and implementing projects.

All our school key informants, without exception, reported that the main goals of their community service programs are being met: students become more socially aware, they learn about responsibility and leadership, they are exposed to social justice issues, and they are involved not only in charitable actions but also in community building. There is general agreement among our key informants from both the schools and the agencies that community service volunteering teaches students things that they cannot learn in the classroom. One key informant talked about the role community service plays in enhancing emotional intelligence. All of our key informants, including those from voluntary agencies, saw community service programs in the schools as a positive initiative, especially when, according to one key informant, “they required students to volunteer for extensive periods of time”. Three Ontario respondents noted that the initial resistance to the government-mandated community service program, evidenced in both the school sector and the voluntary sector, has largely dissipated.

A caveat is in order here. Our key informants were quick to point out that their observations were not based on systematic evaluations or surveys but rather on anecdotal evidence from student comments or journal entries, or from their own individual observations of changes in students. Journal keeping, class discussion about volunteering, and projects and essays were part of the community service program in two of the three private schools in our sample.

#### *Best Practices as Recommended by Key Informants*

The final question in our interview with school and school-board key informants asked them to reflect on what best practices they would recommend to schools wanting to set up a community service program. Our key informants touched on many of the points suggested in the literature. Interestingly, in contrast to the findings in the literature, they did not mention individual reflection in the form of personal journals or sharing experiences with classmates and/or adult supervisors. However, they frequently mentioned the need to integrate community service with classroom ex-

perience. It could be argued that this is also a form of reflection. On the other hand, mirroring the findings in the literature, virtually all school and school board key informants mentioned the importance of meaningful volunteering that offers opportunities for leadership, decision-making, learning, and expanding oneself and one’s skills.

A disagreement was noted among key informants from the educational sector about whether volunteer programs should be mandatory. Two school key informants thought that it is best to keep community service programs voluntary and to extend some form of recognition as an incentive (e.g., volunteer appreciation events, medals, certificates, bonus points, or extra-credits). One, on the other hand was firm in his opinion that making the program mandatory helps to engage all students, especially those that are “at risk.” This key informant also felt that making the program mandatory would raise greater awareness and interest among teachers and would likely bring more community service perspectives into the classroom.

Almost all of our school key informants spoke of the need to provide incentives to teachers to encourage greater involvement. Even in the private schools, teacher participation is relatively low. All three school key informants emphasized the importance of listening to students and to what they have to say about their experiences. Two of our three school key informants and one of our two school board key informants suggested having at least a half-time staff person dedicated to coordinating community service programs, especially when these programs are mandatory. There was also general agreement that increased financial support would be helpful in improving the programs. This was echoed by agency key informants.

One suggestion for best practice was to encourage and teach students to conduct a brief “information interview” with potential placements. This would help them determine whether the placement matched their interests and aptitudes. “Good fit” was seen as important in ensuring a positive volunteering experience, which, in turn, is important in providing a foundation for future volunteering. Finally, several key informants emphasized that volunteering should be fun!

Knowing the community and having a network of contacts was considered essential, especially in

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smaller communities. One key informant suggested that community service “is a way to build capacity to understand the magnitude of community issues” and that it is therefore important to present and structure community service programs not as a charitable acts whereby students give only to the needy but rather as part of an effort whereby communities solve their own problems. Seeing their work “make a difference in the community is a very powerful experience” for the student.

Our key informants also considered parental involvement to be important. “Getting the parents on side” and creating programs that mobilize families in community efforts were both suggested as ways to help increase student volunteering rates. Two agency key informants, however, complained about parental interference in ensuring that their children completed their mandatory hours, begging for placements, and even arguing about hours credited. One agency key informant thought that group volunteering could add to the student experience but acknowledged that when students are in groups, they sometimes don’t take the project seriously.

## *Conclusions*

There is broad consensus both in the literature and among our Canadian key informants with respect to the elements needed to create successful community service programs. Of uppermost importance is ensuring that the student experience is not only positive but that it also builds character by giving students responsibility and providing them with opportunities to apply new ideas, solve problems, make decisions, and build leadership skills. In order for this to happen, community service programs need to include certain structural, pedagogical, and administrative features.

Giving students tools to understand how their service relates to the community, to society, and to their own personal growth is an important pedagogical goal. This is best achieved by setting clear educational goals, providing students with opportunities for reflection, and linking their community service experience to prior knowledge and course work. Teacher participation is also important, both in helping students find appropriate placements and by being available to hear of their successes, help out when they have problems, and

provide them with feedback.

A key administrative component of a good community service program is making sure that there are sufficient financial and human resources to run the program. Several of our key informants mentioned the importance of having a dedicated staff person to administer the program. This person would be responsible for establishing contacts and partnerships with community agencies, making sure agencies provide students with meaningful work and challenging tasks, systematically evaluating the program (including the performance of partner agencies), and ensuring that program goals are being met and students are well placed and are fulfilling their requirements.

Other program features mentioned both in the literature and by our key informants are the duration of the service, the nature of the service work (i.e., direct service or peripheral support), and the involvement of parents and adults. Direct service (i.e., working directly with clients or in the community) and serving for longer periods of time are more likely to leave a lasting mark on the student. Parental buy-in or participation in family community volunteering projects is more likely to encourage students to participate.

Although research has been inconclusive with respect to which feature or group of features is essential for a successful community service program (success defined in different ways, depending on the goals of the program), there is substantial evidence that a program that is well structured both pedagogically and administratively is likely to achieve desired outcomes.

## **Endnotes**

1. As another component of this project, we examined the range of community service and service learning programs found in each of the Canadian provinces and territories. For a report on that component, see Brown, Meinhard, Ellis-Hale, Henderson, and Foster (2006).
2. A community service program is a program in which students, without pay, perform service designed to benefit the community; the program is non-curriculum-based, may be mandatory or voluntary, does not usually include explicit learning objectives or organized reflection, and may include activities that take place on or off the school grounds. A service learning program is a commu-

nity service program in which the service is integrated into an academic course or curriculum; as such, the service has clearly stated learning objectives, and there is an opportunity as part of the course for students to engage in reflective or critical analysis.

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## **Appendix A: Questions for School Informants**

### **A. Program Details**

#### ***1. Can you tell me a little bit about your community service program?***

1. How long has your program been in existence?
2. What are its goals?
3. Are there a mandated number of hours?

#### ***2. Do you have any written protocols about the program?***

1. If yes, how were they arrived at?
2. Are there clearly defined goals and learning objectives?
  - a. How are these objectives decided?
  - b. Are they revisited very year, every 2 years?
  - c. Are community agencies invited to participate in setting these goals?

#### ***3. How was the community service program established?***

1. Is there a designated board or committee?
  - a. Who are the members of this committee?
  - b. Are there formal/informal meetings?
  - c. How often are changes made to the program?

#### ***4. Is there some orientation for students and/or parents regarding the community service program?***

1. If so, when is it offered?
2. Is there a large turn out?
3. What is discussed during this orientation?
4. Do you think the orientation is helpful?
5. Do you think the students/parents feel that it is helpful?

#### ***5. How is information or feedback about the program conveyed?***

1. Do you have an information pamphlet/brochure/summary sheet?
2. Do you have a Web site for parents/students/community agencies?
3. Do you keep a bulletin board in your school with relevant information for the community service program?
4. Do you have a dedicated website that can be easily accessed?
  - a. How often is this bulletin board/Web site updated?
  - b. Do you think this information sharing is helpful?

#### ***6. Does the program have a designated budget allocated by the school?***

#### ***7. Is the program evaluated?***

1. If so, how?
2. Who conducts the evaluation?
3. Are changes made to the program based on evaluations?

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4. Are community agencies given the chance to provide feedback for the evaluation?
5. Does this community feedback influence the program goals or learning opportunities?
6. Are parents given an opportunity to give feedback? If so, is this feedback included in the evaluation of the overall program?

## **B. Teacher/Staff Involvement**

***8. How many teachers/staff members are involved in the community service program?***

***9. How are they involved? What do they do?***

1. Do they help:
  - a. set up the program?
  - b. find partner organizations?
  - c. find placements for students?
2. Do teachers or other staff members communicate with the community service organizations on a regular basis?
3. Is the school principal involved in the building of relationships between the school and the community partners?
  - a. If so, is communication ongoing?
4. Is there training or orientation for teachers in order to prepare them for the community service program?

***10. How would you describe the relationship between teachers and students with respect to the community service program?***

1. Are the students provided with learning goals for each community placement?
2. Do the teachers/staff members brief the students on what to expect?
3. Do the teachers provide any types of resources to assist the students with their community placement?
4. Are teachers involved in monitoring the learning experiences of the students?
5. Is there a time set aside for them to do any or all of the above?

***11. Are teachers and staff members supportive of the community service program?***

1. Do they participate willingly?
2. Are they actively involved?

## **C. School-Community Liaison**

***12. Does your school have a liaison(s) with community agencies with respect to student community service programs?***

***13. Do you have formal partnerships with any community agencies with respect to the community service program?***

1. How do you choose the agencies you want to partner with?
2. Do you have written agreements with them?
3. Are all expectations clarified both from your point of view and from theirs?
4. Do the students or their parents have to sign some form of agreement?



**14. Are community agencies involved in all aspects of planning and implementation?**

**15. Does your school or board monitor the agencies?**

1. Do you make site visits?
2. Do you request reports from them (other than confirming that a student completed hours)?
  - a. How often?
  - b. How detailed?
  - c. Does the report include an evaluation of the benefits and challenges?
3. Do you have guidelines for acceptable practice?
  - a. Have you ever stopped a partnership with a voluntary organization?

**16. In your opinion, do the agencies provide a good setting for students to learn and do they ensure a positive experience for students?**

1. Do they give the students responsibility?
2. Allow them to make decisions?
3. Allow them to experiment with ideas?
4. Do they assist students in meeting their goals?
5. Do they clearly describe their expectations to the students?
6. Do they provide the students with training and prepare them when working with vulnerable members of the society?
7. Do they provide them with governance opportunities?

**17. Do you and the community agencies organize a volunteer fair to familiarize students with what is available and provide a wider array of choices?**

1. If so, when does this occur?
2. Do students and agencies find it useful?
3. If you don't have one have you thought about implementing one?

#### **D. Student Experiences**

**18. How much flexibility do students have to determine their community service path?**

1. Can students determine how and when they are to complete their hours?
2. Can students engage in volunteer activities at the school?
3. Are students allowed to complete their hours during school hours?
4. Are there agencies that students are not allowed to volunteer at?
5. Can they volunteer at for-profit organizations?
6. Can students set their own goals?

**19. Are students given an opportunity to choose their own volunteer placements?**

If so, how do they typically go about finding a placement?

1. If not, how are the placements chosen?
2. Is it the student's responsibility to make the first initial contact?
  - a. If not, who is responsible for that?

**20. Are efforts made to link students with community agencies that reflect their interests and career goals?**

# Best Practices in School Community Service Programs

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## ***21. Is there a clear link between the service program and academics?***

1. Do students see the relevance of the program to their high school career and their future experiences or employment?
2. Is the program discussed in certain classes?
3. Do students have to write an essay on their experiences?
4. Are these essays graded?

## ***22. Do you evaluate students' community service experiences?***

1. If not, how do you get feedback from the students?
2. Do the students engage in reflective practice regarding their placements?
  - a. How often do the students engage in reflective practice?

## ***23. Do you get feedback from your students about their volunteer experiences?***

1. Is it part of a course?
2. Is it formal?
  - a. How frequent?
  - b. What format? (written, oral, diary)
3. Informal?
  - a. How frequent?
  - b. What format?
4. Are students given a chance to express their concerns and/or ideas about the program?
  - a. Do you think they are aware that they can do this?

## ***24. Do the students have opportunities to discuss their experiences (the pros/cons of the program) with peers in a constructive manner? With teachers/staff?***

## ***25. Do you think the students would benefit more from the program if they were required to do more hours of community service?***

**FOLLOWING ARE SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE.**

## ***26. Do you think that students appreciate the value of the community service program:***

1. to themselves?
2. to the community?
3. Do they see a connection between their volunteering and the value of what they are doing?
  - a. Do they feel that volunteering has given them skills (life skills, career skills) they would not have received through paid employment?

## ***27. Are students aware of the goals of the program?***

1. Are these goals outlined to the students early in the program?
2. Are students given a chance to have input regarding the goals?

## ***28. In your opinion, do the students prefer volunteer activities offered at their school or at off site volunteer agencies?***

**29. Many research studies discuss the benefits of community service to students. What would you say the benefits are?**

1. Have grades improved?
2. Have you noticed a difference in truancies and school attendance since the introduction of the service program?
3. Have you noticed a difference in students' self-esteem levels since the introduction of the program?
4. Since community service was introduced, do you feel students have a better appreciation for social justice, moral obligations, or vulnerable populations?
  - a. If so, when are they given the opportunity to express their concerns?

**30. In your opinion, are students challenged by the community service program?**

1. Does the program allow them to explore new ideas/opportunities?
2. Are they applying current skills?
3. Are they learning new skills?
4. Do they exit the program feeling as if they have learned something new?
5. Do they feel they are making a difference?
6. Do they feel that the community service program interferes with their school work?

**31. Is it your opinion that students will continue to volunteer based on their experiences with the program in your school?**

1. Have you formally canvassed them about this?
2. From how many students have you heard back informally?

**32. Overall, would you say that parents are supportive of the community service program?**

1. Do you think parental attitudes reflect the student's attitude towards the program?
2. Are parental attitudes a good indication of the success of the program in your school?

### **E. Best Practices**

**33. What "best practices" advice would you give to someone starting up a community service program in their school?**

**Thank you for your time.**

# Best Practices in School Community Service Programs

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## Appendix B: Questions for Community Agency Informant

### **A. Context**

***1. Could you please describe the service your agency provides, the extent of your volunteer program and the work the volunteers do?***

1. What percentage of your volunteers are high school students?

***2. Can you tell me a little bit about your agency's involvement with the school volunteering programs?***

1. How did your organization get involved in school volunteering programs?
2. How long have you been doing it?
3. How many high school students volunteer with you in a typical year?

***3. What, in your view are the goals of High School Community Service programs?***

1. Do you think that these are the right goals?
2. Would you make adjustments to these goals? What would they be?

***4. Do you have specific criteria when it comes to selecting certain schools for volunteer opportunities?***

1. If so, what are the criteria?
  - a. Type of school
  - b. Involvement level of teachers

### **B. Arrangements with schools or boards**

***5. Does your agency take the initiative to contact the school or is it usually the school that contacts you?***

1. Is a relationship with a school important to your agency?
2. How many schools do you collaborate with?
  - a. Do you have students from schools with which you have no arrangements

***6. Do you have formal partnerships/arrangements with some schools or school boards?***

1. Written contracts?
  - a. Specification of expectations:
    - i. Hours?
    - ii. Type of work?
  - b. Screening
2. Who initiated the partnership?
3. Are the goals of the school and agency clearly articulated?

**7. As a community agency are you involved in all aspects of planning and implementation of the program as it relates to you?**

1. If not, would you like to be?
2. Would this be beneficial to your organization?

**8. Do you have a preference with respect to the type of schools with which you partner or collaborate?**

1. Private schools vs public? Why?
2. Repeat arrangements?
3. Have you stopped a relationship with a certain school? Why?

**9. Do the schools have on-site visits from staff members?**

1. If not, do you think it would be beneficial?
2. If yes, what do the visits comprise and why are they beneficial?

**10. Does your agency participate in a volunteer fair at schools or community centres?**

1. If not, why not?
2. If yes, are they effective?

### **C. Nature of student involvement**

**11. How does your agency assist students in meeting their goals?**

1. Intake questionnaires?
2. Orientation interviews?
3. Mid-point reports?

**12. How do you provide the students with challenging tasks and real responsibility?**

**13. Does your agency clearly identify your expectations of the students and the school?**

1. Are there orientation and training programs?
2. Are there sign-in sheets?
3. Please provides some examples

**14. Are the students well prepared to deal with the target audience?**

**15. Does your agency provide opportunities for student reflection by:**

1. discussing the implications of the tasks they are doing?
2. providing timely feedback?
3. having meetings with other volunteers?

**16. Would the community service program be more beneficial to your agency if the duration of the students' volunteering were lengthened?**

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1. Would this enhance the overall goals of the program?
2. Would you be more willing to take on students if this were the case?

***17. Is there a difference between student volunteers who come to you on their own and those who come from schools that you have arrangements with?***

## **D. Overall Impressions**

***18. How invested are you in the program?***

1. For example, would you see it as a moderate/significant loss if you did not have students during a given year?
2. Do you enjoy having the students and see their participation as a benefit

***19. What are the strengths of the student community service program?***

***20. How can the program be improved?***

***21. Is there anything else you wish to comment on?***

**Thank you for your time.**