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**Best Practices in School Community Service Programs:
Evidence From Canada and Abroad***

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Best Practices in School Community Service Programs: Evidence From Canada and Abroad

Introduction

During 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 & Shields, 1998; Meinhard & 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. ~~The voluntary sector has been forced to seek solutions. [Solutions to what? Do you mean, to seek resources?] elsewhere.~~ In order to maintain their levels of service, voluntary organizations have reached out to individual donors, sought partnerships with corporations and other nonprofit organizations, and increased their efforts to attract and retain volunteers (Foster & 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 & 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 & 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.¹ 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.

¹As 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).