

Introduction

Leading Successful Family Service Projects

Doing Good Together is a collection of group activities that help schools, organizations, and workplaces create successful family service projects. Through easy projects, interactive learning, and reflection, families see how they can make a difference, and they become closer to each other during the process. These family service projects help families understand the importance of caring and compassion, empowering them to make positive choices for themselves and have a positive impact on the lives of others.

The family service projects in this book are organized into chapters based on theme. They serve a wide range of recipients and offer many different benefits. They have been developed for use by schools, organizations (recreation programs, clubs, sports teams, government agencies, and congregations), and workplaces (corporations, small businesses, and nonprofits).

The projects in this book are designed to be used with families with preschool to 12th-grade children—and also with families who don't have children. Because of the broad audience, you may need to customize activities to fit your situation. Schools and organizations that already have service programs will find these projects particularly useful as they begin to explore and expand their programs to include families. Those that are just beginning will find the clear, step-by-step projects a great way to get started and create a successful family service program. Regardless of your experience, we recommend you read the entire

introduction in order to best prepare yourself for organizing family service events.

All the handouts in this book are included as PDF documents on the CD-ROM. They can be customized and printed out.

Integrating Family Service into Your Organization

Since family service projects are concrete and easy to set up, many organizations jump right in. Yet it pays to slow down a bit and be intentional about your approach. If you want to integrate family service into your organization's mission and goals, it's often helpful to follow these six guidelines.

1. Share your family service vision with key people

People excited about family service have found that getting key personnel involved from the beginning helps ensure that their family service efforts are supported. If you're in a school, it's essential to get the support of administrators as well as teachers who are seen as leaders. If you're in an organization or business, connect with the leaders and movers and shakers.

Getting important allies on board from the beginning can greatly enhance your family service efforts. Many leaders have ideas about how to reach families, work within the current systems, and lend support.

2. Build a family service team

Your family service efforts will go much further if you build a family service team. This ensures that everything doesn't fall on the shoulders of one person, which could kill the entire effort if that person happens to leave or move (or get burned out).

In addition, team members bring different strengths to the table. It's often helpful to have committed parents who believe in family service; they often can get the word out to other parents, and they can provide a valuable perspective on how to attract busy families. People who are skilled in communications can help with promotions and publicity. You'll also need individuals who are creative, are great managers (to pull together people and materials for events), and have strong people skills.

3. Develop a vision for family service

Have your team dream about what an ideal family service effort would look like. Ask: "If visitors came from out of state and asked what we're doing for family service that's attracting so much attention, what would we say?"

This often is a good starting point. After discussion, consider creating a vision statement that is a clear written summary of your family service vision. Most organizations can do this in one to four sentences. Remember that a vision statement is different from a mission statement. A vision statement focuses on what you want, whereas a mission statement says how you get there.

Some family service vision statements include ideas like these:

- We believe every family can make a difference in our community through family service.
- The vision for our school is to engage families in meaningful service.
- We envision that families in our community foster caring, kindness, tolerance, and compassion by valuing what truly matters. Our families act on their values by doing meaningful family service.

4. Create awareness, energy, and commitment

You develop awareness, energy, and commitment for family service by helping people understand the idea and motivation behind family service.

The preface to this book contains a lot of information about why family service matters; use that information as a resource when working with families in your organization. It can help people understand why service is so important, and it can inspire them to act.

Provide lots of opportunities to serve. If you make the case for family service and then offer only one family service project, you may have trouble engaging families. But if you make a commitment to offer an annual family service project—or a quarterly family service project—then people will begin to see that it's important to act and keep making a difference.

Your publicity efforts often can create energy around your family service projects. People get excited when they hear about creative ways to make a difference. For example, in one community, a family service project was created for family members to do simple weavings that were then displayed in the foyer of the community's new food bank. The project became a symbol of how individual strengths are woven together to make a difference in a community.

5. Connect with other family service leaders

Who else in your community, school district, or area does family service? Or coordinates general volunteer projects? Get to know these people. Ask about their successful projects and what they've learned. Swap ideas. The best part about family service is that the possibilities are endless. Whenever there is a need, there's a creative way for families to serve. When you connect with others who are also doing what you're doing, you can often generate more energy and ideas than you could if you tried to do it all alone.

6. Make success easy—and ongoing

One of the best ways to motivate families is to provide low-risk opportunities where they have a really good experience and want to come back for more. Choose family service projects that are easy (don't require specific skills) and low cost, and that have immediate success. Most of the family service projects in this book meet these criteria, and will create a sense of energy among members of your organization and the families involved in service.

But getting families into your organization to do family service is only one step. You also want to encourage the step of having families do service on their own. Consider including family service projects that families can do at home in your newsletter or at your website, or creating a hand-out to send ideas home with families. Your efforts will have a long-term impact only if you support and strengthen families' commitment to family service in general.

Not all families will do family service on their own, but if you encourage them to do so—no matter where they are—and provide resources and ideas to make it easier, many will.

Keys to a Successful Family Service Project

We know when family service projects succeed. A lot of families come out to the project. A lot gets accomplished, and people want to do more.

But how do you get to these outcomes? We've discovered seven keys that family service projects need to succeed:

Key 1: Purpose

A successful family service project has a strong sense of purpose. Whether it's feeding the hungry, providing support to the sick, or beautifying the environment, a concrete, appealing purpose draws people in and makes a project worthwhile. Each of the 101 family service projects in this book begins with a purpose.

Key 2: Simplicity

When you're working with families who may have infants, preschoolers, and teenagers, the most successful projects will be ones that are simple—yet meaningful. When you have families together, you want to spend most of your time doing the family service project instead of trying to explain it. The 101 family service projects in this book aim to keep projects simple by providing simple material lists, simple steps before the project begins, and simple steps for doing the project.

Key 3: Creativity

Most family members are familiar with common service projects, such as picking up

litter and raking lawns. After a while, such projects can become ho-hum, even though they are important. Infuse creativity into common projects and develop new projects that have an interesting twist. Many times what gets families talking are the creative projects, such as project 16: Nets by the Numbers, 31: Whisper Phones, 40: Quarter Rally, and 59: Operation Remember.

Look through the "Bonus Ideas" section of each project for ways to inject more creativity into the project. Develop your own ideas to make projects even more engaging. Enlist the help of a creative partner who could add another dimension to your family service project. Ask for ideas.

Key 4: Intergenerational appeal

Successful family service projects appeal to all families. In our society today, we tend to segregate family members by age. We send kids to school to attend classrooms where everyone is the same age. We send elders to "adult day-care" and young children to childcare. Very rarely are families offered opportunities to be together—and serve together.



A family service project that is intergenerational, providing meaningful ways for all family members to contribute together, can strengthen families as well as provide valuable service. Be sure to emphasize to your group that family members of any generation and age are welcome. The family service projects in this book are created to appeal to multigenerational families.

Key 5: Relationship building

Deepen relationships between family members and also between families at your family service events. Create ways for people to connect in meaningful ways. Many successful family service projects begin with a community-building game, such as those found in chapter 12. Some even have a conversation starter, such as “After you say your first name, talk about one low from your week and one high.” The more you build relationships, the more likely families will come back for more.

Key 6: Reflection

Many students and schools are familiar with service learning, which is a learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition of skills, values, and knowledge. When family members have the opportunity to reflect on the service project that they have just participated in, they integrate their experience with their thoughts and feelings. They think about what they’ve done and what they could do next. All the family service projects in this book include a number of reflection questions to ask families toward the end of your time together.

Key 7: A next step

Although you will encourage more participation and a higher rate of success if you make family service projects easy and simple, you also want to encourage families to continue doing service. Some organizations create a list of easy service projects families can do at home. In schools, you can even ask students to bring back the list with checkmarks indicating which projects their families did, then add a loop to a paper chain for each project completed. By building a “chain of caring,” students will have a visual reminder of the family service they have done, and that can motivate

them to do more. You can hold follow-up meetings, send home a newsletter or handouts, or use your website to provide additional service ideas to your families. See Chapter 11: Projects Families Can Do on Their Own.

Doing a Project

Each of the projects in this book contains the following elements. Be sure to read the entire project before you begin.

Purpose

The purpose appears at the beginning of every family service project and provides a quick overview of the project. It succinctly states what the families will do, whom the service will benefit, and why this project matters.

Possible Recipients

This section helps you identify appropriate recipients for the service, such as a homeless shelter, a crisis nursery, or a food shelf. Most projects highlight local recipients as well as organizations with a broader reach, such as national and international groups. Be sure to contact the recipient group you choose before beginning your project. See page 6.

Time Requirement

This includes time needed to plan your project, prepare for it on the day of your event, and complete the project steps with families.

People

Most of the projects in this book appeal to a wide age range, so all families can get involved, though some require older children and teenagers while others may be more appealing to younger children. In the “People” section, you’ll find guidelines regarding what age range is best for the project. And while you’ll want to recruit volunteers from within your organization to help out with general tasks for most projects, the “People” section will let you know if there are any unusual or particularly important needs for volunteers. This section can also help you estimate your expected output.

Materials

This section lists all the materials you'll need to do the actual project as well as suggestions on where to find unusual materials. For most projects, you'll need to decide whether to provide all materials, buy materials and have families make a donation to cover the costs, or ask families to donate the materials. In many cases, a combination of these will be appropriate. Be sure to plan ahead.

Connecting Point

Help families understand the importance of the project with the "Connecting Point," which puts a finer focus on the "Purpose" by emphasizing a real-life, concrete connection between what families are doing and how the recipients will benefit from it.

Doing the Project

These are the steps you'll follow to plan, organize, and execute the project.

Debriefing the Project

A central part of successful family service projects involves "Debriefing the Project." When families can talk about and process their experience, they're more likely to make sense of what they did and see the value in it.

Some people aren't used to reflecting on experiences, which can make the time difficult at first. The more questions you can create for families to discuss, the easier it will be for them to debrief your family service project. Make sure you create ways for kids to talk. (If young children are tired by this point in your project, take a quick break for kids to stretch—or even run around the room if that's safe.) Adults can dominate conversation without realizing it. Asking, "What does each person at your table think about this project?" will help encourage everyone to participate.

The questions in "Debriefing the Project" begin by asking families concrete questions about their experience. The questions then ask families to reflect on their experience before talking about what they can do next. If a lot of families are present, it may be more effective to have families talk within small groups, such as at their tables. Then you can have a large-group discussion after families have had the time to go through the debriefing questions.

Debriefing questions are titled "Talking Points" in Chapter 11: Projects Families Can Do on Their Own.

Helpful Resources

Family members often get excited about the family service projects they're doing and may want to learn more about the social issue you're addressing. This section includes reading suggestions for young children and for teens. Consider incorporating these helpful resources directly into the project or distributing a list of resources that family members can look for on their own. Most of the books are recent and easy enough to get, but we've included a few older books that we consider classics. You can usually track these down through a library.

Bonus Ideas

Although you can do each family service project as it's presented in this book, sometimes you may want to adapt a project or add a creative twist to it. The bonus section gives you additional ideas on how to take a family service project further.

Handouts

Many projects include reproducible handouts that give directions, provide a list of possible donations, or serve as a sponsorship form (for example, for project 35: Family Read-a-Thon) for families. Handouts for each chapter are grouped together at the end of that chapter, so they're easy to find. They're also on the CD-ROM included with this book, so you can customize them and print them out.

Choosing a Project

This book includes 101 family service projects, most of which can be completed in one to two hours. Review the possibilities in light of your goals (what issue is important to your group). You may want to bring families together to do a single project, or perhaps you'd like to create five to ten "booths" or "stations," each of which offers a simple hands-on project that families can choose to participate in as they wish.

Most of the projects in this book are indirect family service projects. That means you don't see the recipients you're serving. The reason for this is simple: to create a low-risk, easy way for families to get involved in service. Even though visiting residents at a nursing home is a great family service project, it is intimidating to many families, especially those who are not used to family service. In addition, direct family service projects, where families work with the recipients, are more difficult to do well because they add a number of layers of complexity. For your convenience, chapter 10 offers direct family service projects for when your group is ready to take that step. Since the main goal with this book is to make family service easy and simple, indirect projects are what we have emphasized.

When you choose a project (or set of projects), consider carefully how much time will be required. Projects that involve collecting and assembling kits or various items, such as 13: School Kits, 20: Baby Kits, and 25: Toy Treasures, can end in a few minutes if you don't have other activities planned. With projects like this, you may want to spend more time on the "Connecting Point" and other education pieces you find (often, recipient organizations have lots of information at their websites). Or create two to five stations, each with a different family service project. For example, if you want to have a family service event to support our troops, consider setting up five stations with five different projects from this book. Finally, consider opening your event by playing one or more of the games suggested in chapter 12. This can add substance and fun to your project.

Also be aware of how much space each project will require. Making blankets, for example, involves a large amount of floor space. You can set up stations in one large room or scatter them around your school, organization, congregation, or community building.

The cost matters as well. Organizations with limited finances or those new to family service projects often choose low- and no-cost family service projects. These types of projects are much more accessible to all kinds of families—especially to those who may not be able to afford an "entrance fee" or a "service project donation fee."

Choosing a Charitable Organization

In your area, you likely have a number of charitable organizations that will happily receive your donations or service. Make your decision of which to serve based on the goals and enthusiasm of your group and the needs in your community. For example, one congregation learned that their local food shelf was in dire need of breakfast cereals. So they created a family service project of collecting breakfast cereals. This got families talking about nutrition, and many children talking about their favorite cereals and wanting to share them with those in need.

Before you do any family service project, always check with the possible recipients to talk about your project and any requirements they may have for receiving donations. Your project will be stronger and more meaningful if you learn in advance what kind of help recipients truly need and what requirements they have. This is particularly true for any military donations, because there are strict laws about what they can and cannot accept.

Many organizations that distribute kits and items to disadvantaged people have religious ties. When we mention these organizations, we are not promoting a religion but rather noticing solid organizations that are doing good. If your group has religious ties, consider seeing if your denomination or religious organization has a volunteer or relief arm that distributes items. If you're in a secular setting, check with government agencies to see if you can distribute items through them or through a local nonprofit.

Usually, once you contact an organization and meet their needs, you'll develop a relationship. Over time, you'll work together to create other family service projects that truly help the recipient organization's mission and needs. This relationship often inspires you—and the families who do these service projects—to want to do more.

Preparing for Your Project

Once you know what your recipient organization's needs are, it's time to start planning how you will execute your family service project. One of the first things you'll need to do is locate a space to host your event. If a space is available in your organization's building, you'll likely have to reserve

Six Questions to Ask the Recipient Organization

Call the organization you're interested in serving and find out whom you should work with to coordinate donations. Explain to that person that you would like to donate items through your family service project, and be clear that you're interested in donating items, not having families come to the organization to serve. Ask these questions:

1. Which items do you need? (If you're meeting in person, bring this book with you and show some of the projects you're interested in doing.)
2. Can you use everything we create? (For example, if you're creating place mats, estimate how many you'll make, such as 50, and ask if the organization will accept them all.)
3. Are there certain days or hours when it's best to bring the donations?
4. How would you like us to bring the donations? For example, do you want us to drop off donations all at once?
5. Can families drop off the donations? If so, can they bring their kids?
6. Can you give the volunteers who drop off the donation a short tour?

it well in advance. If you don't have available space, you will need to look into renting one.

Read carefully through the project or projects you've chosen, especially the "Doing the Project" steps, to begin planning your event. Each project has "Bonus Ideas" you will want to consider, and many have handouts you'll need to photocopy. Do you want to incorporate games (see chapter 12) or education materials from the recipient organization? It's never too early to begin accounting for the materials you'll need, as well. If you'll be asking for donations (for example, craft supplies or food items), identify possible donors and contact them. If you'll need to acquire things like tables and chairs, computers, projectors, garbage barrels, or recycling bins, start locating these items as soon as you can.

Create a sample of the item you will make during the service project. This not only will show families how the finished product looks but also help you prepare for questions families may have when they're doing the project, since you will have gained expertise in doing the project. This is even more important for projects that require assembly or some type of creation.

Create a budget

Consider the cost of materials, food, and space rental (if applicable). Decide which items can be donated. Some organizations are skilled at getting donated items. Others find it easier to have individual families pay a fee to cover the costs. Both methods have their strengths and weaknesses, and some organizations have found that having a mix of the two can be effective.

See if you have families (or even members of your organization) who have ties to companies that may be willing to donate. For example, one parent worked for a corporation that manufactures breakfast foods. When the parent asked about a donation, the corporation was happy to donate all the breakfast foods required to complete the family service project. All the parent had to do was ask.

Money can become an obstacle for families if you're not careful. Many families are inundated with requests and fundraisers. Closely monitor how much you require families to contribute to a family service project. You'll attract more attendees if the cost is low—or nonexistent. A few of the activities in this book can be done at no cost. Check out projects 51: 100 Steps to Peace and 55: Paper Peace Quilt.

Choose a strategic date

When will you hold your event? Be sure to consider things such as holidays, school schedules, and busy times of the year. Many families travel during the summer, so attendance rates can be lower then, although some families are looking for activities to do with their kids during the months away from school. For many families, the months of September and May are already loaded with back-to-school and end-of-school activities. During the school year, schools often will offer a family service project that coincides with parent-teacher conferences or open houses, since a family service project often can boost attendance for these events.

The winter holidays can be a tricky time. For some families, the holidays are already too busy, and they're not interested in adding one more activity to their jammed calendars. But other families are looking for family service projects during this time because they want their kids to focus more on giving rather than on getting. So experiment with the holidays and see what works for your organization.

It's important to set a date early on and get the word out about the date. Although some families are loose about their schedules, some are highly scheduled. Busy families often are interested in family service projects, but they won't be able to come if they find out about your project only a few days in advance. Take a double approach to getting the word out: Publicize the event early and then again shortly before your project. That way you're more likely to attract highly scheduled families *and* families who decide to do activities at the last minute.

Find volunteers

Besides the families who volunteer to participate, you will need volunteers to help make your event run smoothly. Consider asking members of your organization to chip in by focusing on tasks in the following five areas:

- **Setup and cleanup volunteers** will gather all your materials, set up the area for your project, and clean it up.
- **Donation solicitors** will approach businesses (and families who like to give) for donations of supplies and materials.
- **Promotional volunteers** will get the word out about your project and take photos during the event for publicity.
- **Greeters** will be at the doors to welcome families and direct them to your event.
- **Project leaders** will lead and run your service project during the event.

You can also recruit families for these roles. You can often find families by tapping into your employee or membership base or by connecting with your school's parent-teacher organization, such as the PTA, PTO, or PTSO. Family volunteers, in addition to your organizational volunteers, can be critical to your success.

Don't overlook the leadership of older kids and teens. For example, in one K–5 school, the fifth graders were asked to lead family service projects during an event that included a number of different family service stations. The younger kids were excited to spend time with these older kids, and the older kids were proud to show that they could teach families how to do a family service project. Consider asking high school students to help. Many are looking for volunteer opportunities to fulfill class requirements, to bolster college applications, and just because they enjoy it.

You may not need a large team of volunteers to pull this off. Some organizations have one or two volunteers who do it all. Others recruit families, so you have both parents and children helping out. It all depends on how large of an event you're planning.

Recruit families for your service project

Recruit families for your service project by getting the word out through your website, email, newsletters, flyers, and other promotional materials. Recruitment works best when you do it often and in as many different ways as possible. Start as soon as you set the date for your project, and look for promotional outlets beyond the obvious ones just named, including marquees, bulletin boards, and perhaps local media, which often look for stories about families doing good things in the community. Media coverage can get the word out to families you wouldn't be able to reach through your inhouse methods.

Don't underestimate the power of word of mouth. When families get excited about something, they tell other families about it. Even though families are busy, they're always on the lookout for meaningful activities that bring out the best in their family members—and also bring their family together. Personal invitations are particularly powerful. Nothing is more effective than someone personally asking a family to attend and mentioning how nice it would be to see the family there. Some organizations even set up a phone tree to get the word out.

Often, a powerful way to recruit families is by getting kids energized. At one school, volunteers came to classrooms and read picture books about hunger in the days before a family service project

of working at a community kitchen. Volunteers then helped the children make invitations on paper plates to take home to their parents. (The paper plates said, “Help us feed hungry people” and listed the date, time, and place of the family service project.) When the kids got excited, they got their parents motivated to attend, and more families came than what organizers had expected.

If you can, focus your recruitment efforts on the suggested age range of the project you’re doing. If you want to attract families with preschoolers, reach out to those families. If you want families who have high school students, find ways to recruit these families.

Link your project to working systems

Instead of starting from scratch, see how family service can fit with systems that are already working. For example, does your organization already have a parents’ night? Is there a way to include family service in that? A number of colleges and universities have discovered that parent weekends are a perfect opportunity to add a family service project. Or does your organization already offer service projects for kids to do? Is there a way to expand them to include families? Integrating family service into existing systems is a great way to minimize extra efforts and take advantage of what’s already working for you.

Create ways to get families talking

It’s important that your event begin conversations between parents and children about social issues and the value of giving and service. Before the event, consider having an assembly or gathering to discuss the issues, show videos, or have a speaker make a presentation about the difference that everyone’s participation will make. Consider setting out table tents with reflection questions written on them. Or make time during the event for small groups of families to talk about the issues you’re addressing. Consider having a guest speaker. If you’re making sandwiches for a homeless shelter, for example, a person who was formerly homeless or a shelter worker could be on hand to talk about how important your service project is and to answer anyone’s questions.

Discussion after the event is equally valuable. An easy way to get conversations started is by

having families evaluate the event. As families fill out the evaluation form, they typically discuss how the project went for them and what they enjoyed. You can also plan to celebrate the success of your event when it’s over, giving families the opportunity to reflect on what they accomplished. What did they like about the event? What could make it more powerful? Getting family members talking will cement their experience and often make it more likely that they’ll want to do more.

Use handouts

Families often find it helpful to receive a handout that gives them a list of resources—or gives them ideas of how else they can serve together as a family. Throughout this book, you’ll find ready-to-use handouts to photocopy (or print out from the CD-ROM) and distribute. You can also create your own. Consider handouts that describe the family service project, have a list of reflection questions, list additional volunteer opportunities, provide book suggestions, or give more in-depth information about a social issue or a specific charitable organization.

Some of the handouts in this book are intended to be distributed before the event. Others are used during the event, while some can be given at the end of the event. Make sure you have read the project guidelines and you know how to use the handouts in the most effective way possible. Plan ahead: Remember to make copies before your event so your handouts are ready to go.

Consider offering refreshments

Food is often a significant attraction for families and can make your event feel more festive. Ask for donations from families or from local businesses. If you decide to offer food, consider making it free of charge, or use funds raised from food sales to help pay for the event or as a donation to charity. You will need to decide whether you’ll offer snacks (such as cookies and bars, popcorn, scones) or a meal (submarine sandwiches, pizza, hot dogs, and so on). If your event occurs around dinner or lunch, offering more substantial fare can be a big draw for families. Whatever you decide, you’ll need to plan for obtaining the food, serving it, and cleaning up. Also, plan whether you intend families to eat before, during, or after the project.

Record your event

If possible, have a photographer and/or videographer come to the event. (Think of a high school student, parent, or other community member who might volunteer for this task.) Families enjoy seeing photos of their activities. Plan a slide show or video as part of your post-event celebration. Or you might email photos to the participants along with a thank you, or post photos in your newsletter or at your website.

Executing the Project

After you've done all the necessary preparations, the big day finally arrives: It's time to do the project or projects you've chosen. Follow these steps.

Set up your space

Before the event, set up your space so it's comfortable, organized, and welcoming to families. Set up tables and chairs so families have places to sit and do the project. Gather all your materials. Make sure you have garbage and recycling bins. If you need items such as projectors, computers, or laminators, make sure they're in working order. If you plan to offer refreshments, gather them beforehand. Also know where restrooms and exits are so that you can direct families to these places when needed.

Set up a sign-in table, so families can sign in with their names and email addresses. Afterward, you can send a thank-you note or photos from the event. Some organizations even create a website (or use part of their website) to post photos from their family service events.

Create a warm, caring atmosphere

Family members notice right away when they've entered a room where they are welcome. People greet them and say how glad they are to see them. They're directed to where they need to start. Greeters help create a warm, caring atmosphere, an essential component of a successful family service project. Think about what else you can do to make the atmosphere relaxed, comfortable, caring, and warm. Consider providing nametags.

Introduce the project

Welcome families and introduce them to the service project. For each project in this book, you can refer to the "Purpose" and the "Connecting Point" sections to guide you.

Feel free to also talk about the recipients. Let families know how much what they're doing matters. Some of the websites listed under the "Possible Recipients" sections have stories of individual recipients that you can print out and discuss. If you're working with a local organization, talk to your contact at that organization in advance for information you can share with the group.

Once you've introduced the project, give directions for doing it. Encourage families to ask for help when needed. (Do you want them to raise their hand or seek out certain volunteers?) Talk about what they do when they've finished the project, such as putting the completed lunch bags in a box at the front of the room. Explain what will happen after the event, such as a volunteer delivering all the donations to the organization by a certain time.

Do the steps

Have your families begin the project by going through the steps described in the "Doing the Project" section of each project. As they work, walk around the room and talk with people. Have your other volunteers do this as well. This makes it easier for families to ask questions, and it also creates a warm atmosphere. Some organizations station a volunteer at various workstations or tables so they're doing the projects side by side with the families. What's important is to figure out ways to be with families and help them feel like you're all working together. Be sure to debrief the project using the debriefing questions included in each project (see page 5).

Evaluating and Celebrating the Project

It is always a good idea to evaluate any family volunteer event. You may use evaluation to determine which projects were favorites and which events stimulated the most discussion within families and encouraged them to pursue other service opportunities. Evaluation results can also help inform your

next event. While debriefing helps families get the most out of projects, evaluating helps you improve your projects in the future.

A simple way to evaluate is to provide an evaluation questionnaire for participants to fill out. You could create your own form or use the one on page 12 of this book (and also on the CD-ROM). If you want to create a quick, short evaluation, consider asking three questions:

1. How would you rate your family's experience during this family service project? Circle one: Great. Okay. Disappointing.
2. What was the best part of this family service project?
3. What suggestions do you have to improve this family service project?

Alternatively, have a volunteer circulate among families and interview them toward the end of the event. This can be especially valuable if you have a lot of families who don't have high literacy skills or who speak English as a second language.

It's important to hear from everyone—from your youngest participants to your oldest ones. Family members are often more likely to take the time to fill out an evaluation if you give them a free coupon for ice cream, for example, or have them add a picture of a hand (or heart) to the wall with their name on it to show that they've made a difference. You could also email an evaluation form to participants later on, although your response rate will probably be much lower. Once families leave, it can be harder to get them to respond to emails and surveys.

It's also a good idea to evaluate the event with the volunteers from your organization. Ask questions such as:

- Did the event fulfill its goals and objectives? Why or why not?
- What worked?
- What needs fine-tuning?
- How well attended was the event?
- What was the feedback from participants?
- What can improve an event like this one for next time?

Celebrate your success

It's important to celebrate your successes and thank everyone who contributed. Consider holding an assembly or special service to announce the results of your family service project not long after the event. Try to celebrate within a few days to a month afterward, depending on your organization. For example, if you're in a school or business that meets daily during the workweek, you can usually celebrate within a few days or a few weeks. If your organization meets monthly or only a few times a month, then you can celebrate a bit later after the event.

Show slides of the event. Have the service recipients talk about its impact. Send photos to everyone who participated, along with a thank-you note for their help. Make a visual display, such as having family members write their names on paper hearts and displaying them on a wall with a sign that says, "Together, we can make a difference." Write a story for your organization's newsletter, website, or other outlet. Think about publicity opportunities in school district publications and in your local media.

The Morris County, New Jersey, chapter of Jack and Jill of America celebrates its annual family service project by posting the accomplishments at the organization's website. Every year, they do a family service project to help homeless shelters in Morris County, renovating children's rooms, donating furniture, providing children's books, and hosting parties for the shelter's child residents. This project has grown by developing a project for the family's teenagers who plan the menu, shop, cook, and serve breakfast once a month for the residents.

Family Service Project Evaluation Form

Name of family service project: _____ Today's date: _____

For each statement, please check one response:

	Yes, Absolutely	Somewhat	Not So Much	Not Applicable
1. The project was interesting.				
2. The project was well organized.				
3. The project engaged family members of all ages present.				
4. The project took the right amount of time.				
5. The handout was helpful.				
6. The leader knew a lot about the topic.				
7. The leader covered the project clearly.				
8. The leader responded well to questions.				
9. I feel like I made a difference through this project.				
10. I want to do another family service project.				

What did you like best about this project?

What could be improved?

Overall, how would you rate this family service project? (Check one box.)

Excellent Good Fair Poor

Thank you for your feedback! Your opinion will help make future family service projects even better.

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Enhancing Your Family Service Program

Once you get started doing family service projects, you'll wonder what else you can do. There are many possibilities, and you can create deeper, more meaningful events by expanding your perspective. Start by making any improvements that you identify through evaluations. Be receptive to suggestions from the families that volunteer, because they are the ones who can really improve your program.

Then, consider the following ideas:

Provide creative touches that capture people's attention

Creative touches make a difference. If you have a lot of young children, for example, consider adding paper "tablecloths" to the table. When the children get restless, have them draw pictures on the paper with washable markers or crayons. Or consider having a basket of plastic eggs with short messages inside. Each family service project in this book includes a "Bonus Ideas" section that can jump-start your creativity and get you thinking in new ways.

Create meaningful conversation starters for participants

Although every family service project in this book has reflection questions, you can go deeper than that. Create conversation starters that help family members get to know each other better—and also to get to know some of the other participants. You can put the conversation starters on individual pieces of paper and place them in a bowl in the middle of each table. Or you can make paper fortune tellers and have questions inside.

Consider asking questions, such as these:

- Where did you spend your childhood?
- What's your favorite book or magazine? Why?
- What gets you excited about life?
- Why is family service important to you?
- What is the most memorable trip you've ever taken?
- What do you wish you had more time to do?
- What is your favorite activity to do with your family?
- What has been one of the biggest surprises in your life so far?

- Are you a morning person or a night owl?
- What is the one social issue you're most concerned about? Why?
- What is your favorite music? Why?
- What do you like best about your job/school/volunteer activities? Why?
- What makes you laugh?
- How would the world change if every family got involved in family service?

Showcase your results

Find ways to showcase your results. Families like to see that what they do matters. Post the number of healthcare kits you made. Make a paper display on the wall of a gigantic sandwich (if you made sandwiches) and ask each person involved to add a colorful piece of cheese, tomato, or lettuce, to make a super-sized sandwich.

Many recipient organizations' websites feature stories, photos, or videos of recipients telling how much donations help them. These personal reflections help families feel more connected to the recipients—even if they've never met them.

Besides publicizing your success, recognize the families who are involved. Take photos and make a Family Service Hall of Fame wall: Create a wall of red construction paper hearts that says "100 Reasons We Do Family Service Projects" and then have each family write their reason on a heart and include a photo.

Recognize families' contributions outside your organization

As you get to know families, find out if they're doing family service at home. A number of them are. When you learn about what they're doing, recognize their efforts. For example, the Doing Good Together website (www.doinggoodtogether.org) features stories of what families are doing. Other organizations do the same, and if your organization has a website, so can you. You may also recognize family work through a newsletter, bulletin board or wall display, or by drawing attention to them at your service event.

What's important is to share stories. By telling stories, you not only recognize families doing good together, but you also inspire other families to become creative and think of ways they can help out.

For example, the Layton family of Payson, Utah, created a “jump-a-thon” for their neighborhood kids to get into the spirit of giving. Along with their four children, the Laytons—kids included—chose two organizations to receive the proceeds: the Utah Foster Care Foundation and the Make a Child Smile Foundation. The day after Thanksgiving, Mr. Layton rigged a tarp over the family’s large backyard trampoline (for fear it was going to rain). Starting at 7 a.m., 35 kids and three adults took turns jumping in the “jumping cave” for 12 hours. The participating jumpers had collected pledges in advance, and when the event was over, they had raised \$566.

Stories like these show that there are endless possibilities for doing service together as families. They also reveal the great ideas people can dream up by starting out with the question “What if . . . ?”

Introduce families to a wide range of social issues

Sadly, our world is filled with problems, pain, and great need. The family service projects in this book cover a wide range of social issues. You’ll find projects from easing poverty to helping people who are sick. Within each of these general categories is a plethora of specific social issues, such as cancer, endangered animals, support for troops, and more. As you plan your family service projects, keep these various social issues in mind and help expand people’s thinking about them by providing projects involving a wide range of issues.

Start a book club

Many people enjoy book clubs, but most book clubs are segregated by age and gender. What if you started a family service book club? You may want to have one that’s geared for families with young children and another that’s geared for

families with teenagers; you can dig into a lot of books and social issues through this format. All of the 101 family service projects in this book contain recommendations for a book for younger children and a book for teenagers. Consider creating book clubs based on these books. Or even do a one-time book club for which everyone reads one of the books.

Book clubs are a great way to look more deeply at social issues and tap into another side of family members. As participants discuss a book about a social issue, such as homelessness or cancer, not only do they learn more about the social issue, but they inevitably face these questions: What can we do about this? How can we tell others about this situation? How can we make a difference?

Notice what works

Build on your successes. Some projects draw more families than others. Find out why. Sometimes it’s the project. Sometimes it’s the timing. Once you learn why something is working, keep building on that. You don’t want to bore families by repeating things over and over, but you can create different adaptations on what works.

Keep positive

Working on social issues doesn’t need to feel heavy or morose. To stay upbeat, focus on how you’re making a difference. It’s true that your handmade cards will not cure a child of cancer, but they will lift a child’s spirits. Your sandwiches will not end hunger, but they will feed a number of people who will appreciate what you do.

Empower families to notice that our small actions count. When we do good together, we can help make our world a better place and make a difference in ways that truly matter.

1 Blanket the World

Purpose

Through blankets created by family volunteers, help provide security, warmth, and comfort to children who have been traumatized, are seriously ill, or are in need of care.

Possible Recipients

- Local options: a homeless shelter, a domestic-abuse shelter, a children's hospital, or a crisis nursery
- Other options: Project Linus (www.projectlinus.org) or Binky Patrol (www.binkypatrol.org)

Time Requirement

Planning time before the project: one to three hours. Gathering materials: one to two hours. Setup time on the day of your project: one to two hours. Project time: one to two hours.

People

This project is ideal for families with children between the ages of 5 and 18. Expect each family to make one blanket during the one-hour event.

Materials

- 2 pieces of fleece (1.5 yards each) for each family
- 1 pair of fabric scissors for each family
- 1 roll of masking tape for about every three families
- 1 tape measure, yardstick, or ruler for each family or two
- Optional: About 3 times as many copies of the "Make a Blanket for a Child in Need" handout (page 31) as the number of families you hope to attract

The fabric and fabric scissors are available at fabric stores such as Jo-Ann Fabrics & Crafts and Hancock Fabrics.

Connecting Point

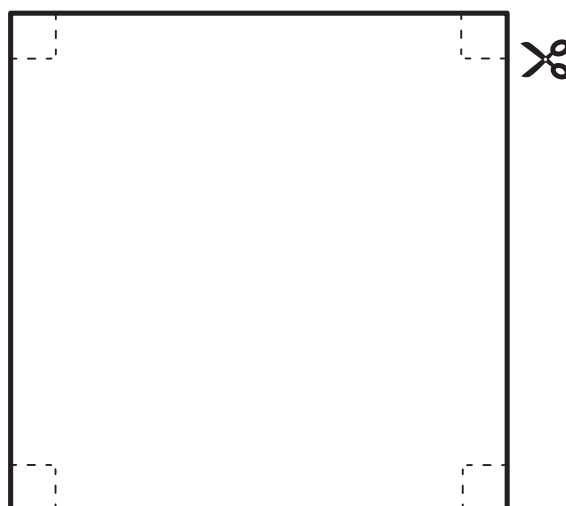
Ask participants to imagine a blanket or stuffed animal that means a lot to them. Explain that there are children who are scared, worried, insecure, sad, or lonely because their parents might be serving overseas, their home has been damaged, or they are sick. A new blanket would be a warm and comforting surprise to these children.

Doing the Project

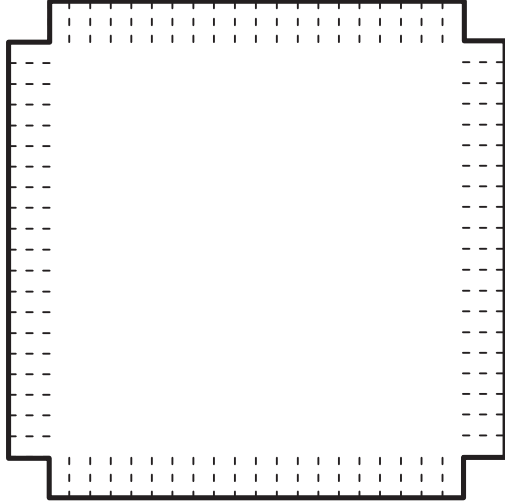
Before your event, publicize it by distributing the "Make a Blanket for a Child in Need" handout to families.

Make a sample blanket so you know how it's put together and to show as an example.

1. Place the two squares of fleece on top of each other back to back. This forms your blanket.
2. Trim the edges if the two fabric pieces aren't even with each other.
3. On one side of the blanket only, lay a strip of masking tape along all four edges, three inches in. The masking tape serves as a guide in cutting the corners and fringe.
4. Cut a 3" x 3" square from each corner outside the strips of masking tape. (Cut through both layers of the blanket.)



5. Cut parallel strips of fringe (about 1 inch wide each) into each of the four sides, stopping at the masking tape. Then remove the masking tape.



6. Tie each piece of top layer fringe to its corresponding bottom layer fringe. Tie a double knot so they're secure, but make sure the knots are not too tight against the body of the blanket or else the blanket forms a "bowl." Proceed around the entire blanket until all fringes are tied.

Debriefing the Project

- What was your experience in making the blanket?
- What was it like to make something for someone you've never met?
- Do you have a special blanket or stuffed animal? What else makes you feel safe and comforted?
- Why is it important to make blankets for children who are sick, sad, or afraid?
- What else can we do to help children?

Helpful Resources

- For children: *Geraldine's Blanket* by Holly Keller (Greenwillow Books, 1988), a story about how attached Geraldine becomes to her blanket.

- For teens: *Teen Knitting Club: Chill Out and Knit* by Jennifer Wenger, Carol Abrams, and Maureen Lasher (Artisan, 2004). This book discusses materials, stitches, and techniques, and includes helpful charts and illustrations to help you make everything from the basic hat to the poncho.

Bonus Ideas

- Ask attendees to come in their pajamas.
- Consider making blankets of different sizes. For families with younger kids, you can make smaller blankets and donate them to a maternity ward for newborns. (Project Linus and Binky Patrol also will distribute them to babies if you follow their guidelines.) For families with older kids, larger blankets can be fun to work on all together. You can find different sizes by searching at www.binkypatrol.org.
- If you have access to a computer or video player, watch a short story about Project Linus at www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16711082/.
- Consider tying a tag onto each blanket with a piece of ribbon. (Use squares of construction paper or colored cover stock paper.) On each tag, write something like, "This blanket was made especially for you by the families of _____ (name of school, organization, or business)." Have each person who works on the blanket sign his or her first name on the card.
- If you're organizing an event mainly for young children and their families (such as through a preschool), have volunteers prep the fabric ahead of time so families are only doing the tying, not the measuring and cutting. This requires more volunteer time upfront, but it makes it easier for families with young children to participate.
- Fleece fabric regularly goes on sale at fabric stores. Take advantage of those sales.
- Find more blanket patterns by going to the Project Linus website and clicking on "patterns/links."

Make a Blanket for a Child in Need

Using polar fleece fabric, children and parents will work together to create cozy blankets that will be donated to children in need. A number of organizations provide care and comfort to children who are seriously ill or otherwise in need through the gifts of handmade blankets created by volunteers like you. For more information, visit www.projectlinus.org or www.binkypatrol.org.

We'll all feel a sense of accomplishment as we cut fleece and tie knots to create beautiful, cozy masterpieces. Join us for this warm experience.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Place: _____

Please bring:

- Two pieces of polar fleece, each piece measuring 1.5 yards square. (Try to coordinate the two pieces of fabric, as they will be placed back to back to create both sides of the blanket. Many families buy one solid color piece and one matching patterned piece. We have found that children love to choose the fleece prints. It gets them involved and excited!) No sewing is involved. If you have more than one child, they can work together or create separate blankets.
- Fabric scissors (or rotary cutter), if you have them
- Masking tape
- Tape measure, yardstick, or ruler

Please RSVP by _____
(date)

to _____
(project coordinator)

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