



We Serve to Remember: 10 Lessons for Engaging Youth

As we approach the 10th anniversary of 9/11, we are challenged to explain the significance of the event to America's young people – many of whom have no first-hand memory of the occasion. YSA (a September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance partner) offers experience in engaging youth by suggesting the following ten lessons learned and related ideas for service-learning projects:

1. People came together to rebuild community.

Local Oral Histories

Interview local community members to collect and record oral histories about this day, based on their personal recollections. Prepare memory books to share the information you have collected.

Main Street

Meet with local business owners to learn about the history of “Main Street” in your community. Plan a “spiffin’ up” event, working together with the business owners and the Chamber of Commerce to clean up litter, remove graffiti, and plant fresh flower planter boxes along the street.

Commemorate and Honor

Plan a ceremony to commemorate the day and to honor the lives that were lost, in your community and around the nation. With the help of community leaders, design a memorial so that people can be reminded of the lessons of the day all year round.

2. We became more aware of difference and more committed to understanding diversity.

Cultural Heritage Fair

Learn about the history of immigration in your community or town. Organize a youth cultural heritage fair, inviting youth from different traditions within your community to share their culture and cuisine.

Community Accessibility

Research the history of the *Individuals with Disabilities Act* to understand the difficulties that the elderly and people with disabilities may have in accessing public areas. Work with the Parks Department to ensure that public parks are accessible to all, by constructing and installing ramps at strategic locations.

Talk the Talk

Create a translation service in your community for those who speak English as a second language. Help these members of your community translate and interpret their world. After you have identified those in need, start a language tutoring program to teach them lifelong skills.

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3. We grew to understand anew the importance of meeting basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter.

▪ Emergency Care Packets for the Homeless

Find out about homelessness in your community by contacting local homeless shelters and organizations. Solicit donations and create emergency care packets for a homeless assistance organization.

▪ Gleaning Vegetables

Explore the issue of hunger and its impact on many members of your community. Contact local farmers and ask if you and your friends can collect and remove left-over produce from their fields to donate to a local food bank.

▪ Are You Ready?

Use the internet and interview local experts to find out about plans that your community has in place for disaster preparedness and safety. Using this information, create and share a school or personal family emergency plan.

4. The event generated a renewed patriotism and commitment to democracy.

▪ Honoring Veterans

Meet with American war veterans in your community, and ask them about their experiences serving our country. Plan a special event to honor the veterans, and invite the community.

▪ National Guard

Learn about the history of the National Guard in your state. Coordinate personal care kits, collecting and packaging items to send to members of the National Guard from your state who are currently serving overseas.

▪ Show Your Support

Identify military families in your community and investigate their needs. Find a way to show your support for their service. You can get ideas for a service project at www.honorcards.org/service.

5. We were linked to and embraced by a global community.

▪ Network Around the Globe

Join an online international network designed to connect students worldwide in a learning exchange. You can learn more about joining together with international youth by visiting www.GYSD.org/exchange. Become a member of programs like *One World Youth Project*, *Sister Cities*, or *ePals*.

▪ Hunger Banquet

Research global poverty and world hunger, as well as hunger in your own community. Organize a “hunger banquet” to share with other youth and community members what you have learned.

▪ Make Your Voice Heard

Create a “Youth Voices Forum” that can be conducted via social media, or another online resource that will help you connect with service-driven youth around the world. Talk about the issues facing your communities and brainstorm ways to address these issues. Focus on how the Millennium Development Goals (see www.un.org/millenniumgoals/) could make a difference for youth all over the world.

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6. People supported one another with random acts of kindness and goodwill.

▪ Books on Tape

Practice your reading speaking skills by reading books onto tape for seniors, for the visually impaired, for students with special needs, or for preschoolers and young children.

▪ Senior "Prom"

Plan and coordinate a social afternoon for seniors at a local senior center, learning about the social and emotional elements of a healthy lifestyle for all ages.

▪ Cuddle Boxes

With help from your friends, family, or classmates, start a collection of stuffed animals and small toys for children's cuddle boxes. These can be decorated and given to children in local shelters to comfort and entertain them during their stay.

7. We emerged with a new fervor for and focus on a better future.

▪ Community Forum

Investigate a community problem in your city or town, and organize a community forum on that issue, making sure to include young people on your panel. Invite the media, and share the information with local government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community groups.

▪ Go Green

Learn about the environmental impact of energy use, and explore ways in which individuals and organizations can reduce their energy consumption. Conduct an energy audit of your school, community center, library or senior citizen center, and share ways to reduce energy use.

▪ Service Fair

Plan a service fair in your community, to help everyone come together around a selection of common causes. Consider a back-to-school drive to collect school supplies for military families, a blood drive, or a food drive for your local shelter. Plan to run multiple projects at once, and use the event to recruit volunteers for future projects.

8. Everyday acts of service can be heroic.

▪ Play On

As you learn to play an instrument or to sing, plan to share your musical talents with others by providing free lessons or a concert at a local school, community center, or senior center.

▪ It's All in the Game

Share your love of a sport by volunteering at a daycare center, organizing a sports activity for the children and teaching them the rules of the game.

▪ Be a Hero

Collaborate with your local fire department to educate and engage at-risk and disadvantaged youth about public safety and community service. Encourage these youth to meet real heroes from your community, and to share with others what they learn about fire and emergency safety.

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9. We remember the many who answered the call to serve that day, when we encourage others to serve our communities today.

■ Volunteer Opportunities Guide

Connect with your local volunteer center and find out what service opportunities are available for youth in your area. Work with them to create an online directory of youth opportunities such as the directories at www.opp-guide.com and www.stlouisvolunteer.com.

■ Pass it On

Teach younger students and youth about the importance of service. Together with your friends and classmates, find a group of younger kids and work with them to organize a service project.

■ Thank Our Troops and First Responders

Identify veterans, active duty service men and women, and first responders in your community and send them letters of support and encouragement.

10. Our community organizations helped us to survive and thrive.

■ Map it Out

With the help of your friends and classmates create an asset map of your community to identify your community's needs and strengths, and discover the resources your community has to address and respond to its own needs.

■ Adopt an Organization

Find an organization in your community that can use your support and commit to giving 70+ hours of service to support their operation.

■ Pass the Hat

Identify an issue that you see is a real problem in your community. Research which organizations or agencies are doing something to address that problem. Plan out and operate fundraisers for the organizations to help them continue to support your community.