

Service learning within the walls of an orphanage essays example

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



(Name Last name)

There are hardly any academic or popular sources today, which encourage a student to memorize textbooks from cover to cover exclusively. It seems that the prevailing part of modern Western society started following a major trend, in which one would not only approve of, but rather advocate for the kind of learning, which happens outside of a classroom. Rightfully so, participating in real-life experiences transforms one's personality and trains one to confront challenges with courage. Kaye, the author of the book "The complete guide to service learning" masterfully points out that there is a better way of learning through experience, and it is 'service learning.' Service learning is in many ways synonymous with volunteer or social work. However, its primary focus, according to Kaye (2004), is on learning, rather than on blind following of instructions. Service learning comes with the theoretical preparation, active experience of serving your community, thoughtful reflection upon the experience and further demonstration of the skills and lessons learned. It is a powerful tool in learning the importance of humanistic values, strengthening local community, and deepening one's knowledge about social and personal constraints within which the local community has to function.

For my service learning project I decided to contribute to the local orphanage called "Dane." It is a place for children who have no parental supervision (either due to the death of both parents or rejection in parental care). It is a rather small building; however, the staff takes care of 52 children who are not of legal age yet. The mission of the organization therefore is to take care of children in terms of their physical, social and emotional wellbeing until

they are old enough (have reached 18 years old) to become a fully-functional member of the society. The staff also believes in a personal approach to every child even though it becomes a challenge at times to attend to every child with equal attention.

Annually, the orphanage extends an invitation to all who want to help children with general tutoring, English language tutoring, or playing sports. Together with a group of other students, I volunteered to teach English. In this way, we agreed for the 1st type of service learning, the ‘ direct’ service (Kaye, 2004). We would directly interact with the children who have had a different life experience from our own. We agreed to come with prepared activities once a week. Most of us had some previous training or experience in teaching English. However, none of us has ever worked with children with special needs. One of the local supervisors has briefly explained what situation the children are in, which gave us a stereotyped picture of children actively asking for attention, being curious but also reserved around newcomers. Our task in that case was to simply open the ground for communication with the outside world, to offer care and an open ear with the English lesson being the common ground for interaction.

Kaye describes children with “ special needs” as those who “ require care or intervention outside of the norm” (2004). After brainstorming on what a “ norm” is, we realized that the children must really lack down-to-earth, kinesthetic experience. A child from a normal family has a closer physical relationship with his parents, as compared to an orphaned child, who cannot have a supervisor available solely for him all day long. After all, there is nothing like a human touch. Also, understanding that the children are not

used to tight discipline and strict social norms, we realized that we would not be able to keep the children interested if we had to keep them sitting for entire hour. Therefore, we decided that our lessons had to be lively, as well as allow for close interaction in order to have integrated learning for both them and us. Throughout the weeks, activities varied from card games with colors and objects, to fill-out charts, which required to mingle with other kids and ask questions about them, to vocabulary games with the ball. With time we also realized that we could use some stories from the Bible to help students strengthen their understanding of morality and positive social behavior. One activity, which I remembered the most, and which probably had the biggest impact on us and the children, was planting flowers into the pots. The children had a chance to take care of the plant and observe it in all stages, thus taking a lesson in responsibility. Of course, the flower-planting activity was not an English-related lesson per se, but it was a great lesson in bonding and care. Some flowers did not survive, unfortunately, but it was a chance for some children to see that they could help something else grow and that they were not a useless chain of the society. This was a true example of a collaborative effort of all our team.

Service learning indeed made me rethink the value of collaboration and the importance of human interaction. A simple human touch can do so much for another person. I was also deeply struck at the level of loneliness, which some children showed more openly than others. Some of them acted rude and misbehaved, and the lesson plans have been disrupted sometimes. However, this is only proportionate to the level of care and attention that these children need. Even though reciprocity between us all was implied,

both of us, the children and the student volunteers, received a life-long lesson, which we all will keep in our hearts. Most importantly, it was a chance for me to see that helping less-fortunate people is not shameful and lowly. It is a courageous act, as well as a responsible task to try to understand another person's life and to make a positive impact on it. If one takes a look at the bigger picture, the experience meant helping your local community with the hope that these children will successfully integrate into the social system and will have easier time adapting to it. There is also hope that in twenty years this same community will be more engaged in giving back to their members, as giving and receiving is the only way for us to preserve our humanity.

References

Kaye, C. B. (2004). The complete guide to service learning. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.