Water Education through Service Learning

Practitioner Fact Sheet #4

Water is a natural resource that supports the health and well-being of all living things, but only one percent of water on our planet is in a form that humans can use. Parents, educators, and communities have a responsibility to educate our children on ways to protect this limited resource. Through service learning opportunities, young people can broaden their level of caring beyond themselves to help their immediate and global communities. Service learning can not only lead to protecting and enhancing water resources, but can also promote civic engagement, acceptance of individual differences, academic achievement, and even reduce some risky behaviors among youth (Anderson, 1998). Below are five key components of water-related service learning.

KEY FACTS
This section will focus on the areas of study that are relevant as they pertain to the Texas 4-H Golf Challenge. Each focus area is given equal emphasis and is tied to program areas taught in different 4-H curriculum to ensure the program is educational and fun for the kids.

1. **Investigation is the first step to determine the impact, scope, and source of the problem** – Encourage and assist young people in their search for water issues that might exist in their communities. If necessary, visit with local officials or residents to help identify issues that might be affecting rivers, streams, lakes, drinking water sources, etc.

2. **Preparation is key to a successful service project** – Young people should work with adults and community partners to develop a plan on how to address water related issues. A plan might include developing a common vision, identifying necessary resources, creating a project budget, and recruiting other individuals to assist.

3. **Putting the plan into action is where the rubber meets the road** – The plan is put into action to carry out the service project. Adults should provide guidance while allowing young people to learn by doing.

4. **Incorporate demonstrations and celebrations to effectively conclude the experience** – Youth should present their project successes to a public audience. The audience should include those in the community who are influential decision makers as well as those who might use the resource. Adults should help youth celebrate their accomplishments in some meaningful manner.

5. **Reflection is integral to understanding what has been accomplished** – Youth will need to take part in an activity that allows them to reflect and discuss the impact they have made on promoting, protecting or enhancing water resources. Just as important, youth should discuss about the issue of water or their own water conservation attitudes or behaviors. If the plan involves continuing the service project into the future, discussion should take place on how efforts can be improved.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS**
Parents should be supportive of young people as they seek to demonstrate their commitment to their future and their community through service learning. Parental support can come in the form of mentoring, connecting children with other adults, providing transportation, and encouragement. Adults should allow youth to learn, discover, and do for themselves, even if it means making mistakes along the way. The purpose of service learning is to engage participants, learn to identify and address issues, and reflect on the impact made in the community and to themselves. In the case of water service learning, youth will not only enhance their knowledge of local water issues, but also spend quality time in the great outdoors. Doing so has many positive physical, emotional, and psychological benefits (Charles, 2010).

**REFERENCES**


**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**
Derrick Bruton is an Extension Program Specialist for 4-H and Youth Development with Texas AgriLife Extension Service.