

Best Practices in UWEX Service-Learning

Hurricane Relief Service Learning Trip 4-H Youth Development Programs

After Hurricane Katrina devastated the southern United States in August 2005, a group of Rock County 4-H teens expressed interest in a hands-on relief project for hurricane victims. They wanted to address the “I pledge...my hands to larger service...for my country” portion of the 4-H pledge by doing something meaningful for those affected by the hurricane. In response to their interest, a service-learning trip to Louisiana and Mississippi was planned for June, 2006.

On the three-day service project trip, a total of 31 youth in grades 8-13 participated in the experience. On the first day, the group planted over 1,000 pine and oak seedlings at a youth day camp facility in Louisiana. They traveled to the Mississippi Gulf Coast on the second day to assist homeowners in cleaning up debris, preparing property for rebuilding and painting a rebuilt home. The group was back at the youth camp in Louisiana on the last day to rebuild shelters and clean up the grounds. Daily interaction with local residents helped the Rock County youth learn about southern culture.

At the conclusion of the trip, the youth submitted journals in which they had written daily reflections. A sample of journal entries revealed how meaningful the trip was to the youth:

“I have grown so much after this trip because I don’t worry as much about material things; I worry for my friends and family. This trip has shown me that it is so much more rewarding to help other people in need than your self.” (11th grade participant)

“I learned not to judge someone until you get to know them because people are very amazing when you hear their stories of courage, strength and faith. This trip has made me more self-confident knowing that I made somebody smile in making their life a little easier.” (12th grade participant)

The focus on service-learning resulted in an experience that will have a significant, lasting impact on the youth. As a result of their participation in this trip, the youth plan to reconvene to plan service projects in their local communities.

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