

Enhanced Practice: Community Service

Overview

A strength-based approach to mentoring includes intentional practices to foster the development of the 5 C's of PYD (Lerner). As discussed in Module 3 of the Mentor Pre-Match Training, the 5 C's are qualities that promote positive outcomes and include competence, caring, character, connection, and confidence. The suggestion of a 6th C, contribution, is said to emerge as these qualities develop. It is also possible that the experience of contribution may foster the development of the other qualities. With this in mind, match support can facilitate the participation of the mentor and the mentee in at least one community service event within the first year of their match. This resource details the implementation of community service as an enhanced practice. Be sure to review the resource on [Community Events](#) activities as well.

Key Components

The benefits of volunteering are well-documented for both children and adults. Exposing children and youth to the experience of contributing to the wellness of their community and its citizens can foster their sense of connection and competence. A community service activity can be through an individually planned opportunity or through a group event. Most important is that the experience connects to an interest or asset of the child, is something that has meaning for them, and is something they've been involved in selecting as an activity.

Some examples of service events include community clean-up days, "greening" events such as tree planting, community gardens, organized food bank events such as gleaning, book drives, or simply playing checkers at a senior center. Planning for these opportunities should include the following points:

- Experiences that relate to the child's interests and aspirations,
- Shared decision making in selecting the activities in which they will participate,
- Exposure to people, places, and activities that are new to the child,
- Opportunity to interact with other people in the community, and;
- Reflection about the activity with each other and with match support.

Finding Community Service Opportunities

Discovering service opportunities in your community will take some focused attention. Programs will need to do some homework so they can advise matches and support them in having a positive experience. For example, activities will need to be age-appropriate and take place somewhere that is suitable for a child. It may sound like fun to volunteer at an animal shelter (especially if the youth is interested in being a veterinarian), but many shelters have liability limits about age and what a youth is allowed to do and it may not be the best fit. Staff will also want to make sure that the match has clear expectations about what they'll be able to do when they volunteer. Develop a list of options that includes any special considerations and have them at hand to discuss with the match.

Some helpful groups in discovering service activities include:

- AmeriCorps programs- these are national service programs and often host service projects. To learn more about which programs are operating in your state, contact your [State Commission](#) for service. This office is tasked with supporting community service programs throughout the state and can link you with the programs near you.
- [Points of Light Foundation](#) – The Points of Light Foundation works to be a liaison between volunteers of all ages, nonprofits, and businesses by matching volunteers with compatible one-time and recurring volunteer opportunities to meet the most critical needs of the community, essentially making volunteering easy.
- Organizations and institutions that promote an ethic of service such as universities, the faith community, and community food banks.

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Role of Match Support

- ✓ **Initial match meeting:** Introduce the concept of participating in community events and a community service activity and discuss some of the options that might be considered. Make the connection to the interests and assets being discussed. Encourage the match to jot down some ideas. Keep in mind that people might have a different understanding of 'community service' than the one you're suggesting. This is the same term used in criminal justice systems for restitution sentencing and might have a negative association.
- ✓ **Share information and suggestions:** Having a reference for ideas and opportunities will be helpful to the match as they plan their community service. Keep a calendar of community service events and opportunities updated and on hand so you can easily provide specific suggestions. Remember to provide the information well in advance for planning. Share links to community calendars and local newspapers with mentors and encourage them to discuss the opportunities with their mentee.
- ✓ **Facilitate reflection and planning:** Match support is tasked with facilitating a deeper experience by inviting mentor, match, and parent to reflect about the event they attended. Ask questions such as: What other people did you see there? Did you talk with anyone? What did you/your mentee enjoy about the event? How did you feel while you were serving? These questions allow the mentor and the child to consider their experience and can inform what types of activities they will select in the future.
- ✓ **Provide encouragement and reminders:** It is match support that will ultimately be responsible for guiding this enhanced practice in the match experience. Conduct periodic audits to determine which matches have been engaged in community service events and which ones you'll want to follow-up with and provide suggestions so nobody misses this opportunity.
- ✓ **Keep it simple:** Having the opportunity to express kindness and to help another person doesn't have to be complicated. Writing notes to people who are housebound or shoveling their walk makes a difference.

Additional Resources

[The ripple effect: When mentors and mentees volunteer together](#) (Goddard, J.)

This resource developed at Education Northwest provides information about the benefits of volunteering for mentor matches and shares practical ideas for supporting matches in selecting service projects that they can enjoy together.

[Youth Service America Knowledge Center](#)

The YSA Knowledge Center (Youth Service America) offers youth, educators, community organizations, and families the resources and trainings to help all young people find their voice, take action, and make an impact on vital community issues.