

## Chapter 3: Community Service Program activities

The first step in understanding the work involved in establishing a Community Service Program is to identify the range of activities students may already be engaged in, both at school and in their own time. Most schools run a range of student activities that may be considered appropriate for community service. Examples include events to raise money for community groups, local environmental initiatives and community focused projects. Many students are actively involved in their community in a volunteering capacity. By identifying the range of activities that students are already engaged in, schools may find that planning and coordination involved in implementing a Community Service Program is substantially reduced.



The range of activities students can engage in can be described as either parent and student-organised (*Option 1*) or school-organised (*Option 2*). Both options still require schools to monitor and record student participation.

Similarly, both options will require consideration regarding student safety and welfare. For many schools, their Community Service Program is likely to be made up of a combination of both options. This chapter explores the opportunities and challenges in both sets of activities.

“I liked the teaching the most, because old people can be the same as us, they just need help”.

Student, metropolitan high school

### Option 1: School-endorsed, parent organised and managed activities

#### What are they?

*Option 1* activities are service activities organised and managed by parents of individual students and conducted in students’ own time. These are typically service activities to which students have an ongoing commitment, eg membership of a Surf Lifesaving club or the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

#### Opportunities

- Students may already be involved in volunteering or be doing work for community groups. Through the Community Service Program they can be credited for their work.
- *Option 1* activities allow students the choice to be engaged with issues they feel strongly about.
- The activities take place after school hours and therefore do not impact on other Learning Area activities or timetabling.

#### Challenges

- Schools are still required to consider the risk management implications of *Option 1* activities. For more information, please refer to the *Community Service Program: Procedures and Guidelines* which can be found at [www.policies.det.wa.edu.au/](http://www.policies.det.wa.edu.au/)

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- Schools are still required to verify student participation in *Option 1* activities. This may require different strategies to monitor participation.

## Option 2: School-organised activities

### What are they?

*Option 2* activities are service activities that are organised and managed by the school and conducted during or after school hours. Schools can organise school-oriented and/or community-oriented activities. Both types of activities may be integrated into a Learning Area and both types may include Council-endorsed Programs that have a community service component. Please refer to the Curriculum Council website for more information: [www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/](http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/).

*One of the pilot schools decided to implement a school-organised program during school hours because they felt the school should take an active role in organising students' community service activities and introduce them to the 'world of community service'. The school reasoned that in Year 11, students are more mature and with the experience they have had in Year 10, they can complete the balance of their 20 hours more independently.*

### School-oriented activities

School-oriented activities are usually held on the school site and may include students:

- taking leadership or mentoring roles
- undertaking projects to improve or beautify the school environment
- providing help during school-based events.

### Opportunities

School-oriented activities offer a range of benefits:

- Since they usually take place at school, they do not require the special risk management procedures and documentation that apply to activities off the school site.
- No transport arrangements need to be made, which results in a cost and time-efficient program.
- In most cases, students will be engaged in service which directly benefits the school community. This saves the coordinator from liaising with a number of external agencies.
- If integrated into a Learning Area, the activities can be relatively short and more frequent, taking place over a term or semester. This results in entire classes of students completing a number of hours over the course of a term or semester.

### Challenges

- The school is a small community in its own right and although there are a range of activities in which students can engage, the number is not exhaustive and may not meet students' interests and needs in the long term.
- Focusing on school-oriented activities limits students' exposure to wider community issues and their experiences of working with and learning from community members.

*Several pilot schools have worked with the School Volunteer Program - Computer Links in which students tutor community members on computer basics. All found the fact that it involved many students and took place on school site a major advantage. Based on this experience, one of the pilot schools decided to explore opportunities for its students to do community service in their Education Support Centre and adjoining primary school.*

## **Community-oriented activities**

Activities which are organised by the school and have a community focus, benefit the local or wider community. These activities sometimes take place on the school site but in most cases students will be working in the local community.

Examples of community-oriented activities on the school site include:

- fundraising for community organisations
- students tutoring community members in basic computer skills.

Examples of community-oriented activities off the school site include:

- helping with a range of services for the aged and disabled
- supporting learners in nearby primary schools
- assisting in environmental projects
- service for non-profit organisations
- participating in citizenship activities or events such as Clean Up Australia Day and Anzac Day ceremonies.

## *Opportunities*

- The community offers a wide range of service opportunities in which students may be highly interested or feel strongly about.
- Giving service in the community widens students' horizons and offers them valuable learning experiences and information about possible career choices.
- Once students work with an organisation, they may decide to continue their contributions to the organisation in their own time after they have completed their 20 hours.

## *Challenges*

- Community-oriented activities may increase the coordinator's workload as most agencies can only cater for a small group of students which means the coordinator needs to establish relationships with a number of agencies.
- Careful checking of placements is needed to ensure the safety and welfare of students. For more information, please refer to the requirements for a service activity management plan in the *Community Service Program: Procedures and Guidelines* which can be found at [www.policies.det.wa.edu.au/](http://www.policies.det.wa.edu.au/)
- Preparation of service management plans for off-site activities can be time consuming, especially in the first instance. Although working with a broad range of agencies enhances the likelihood of students finding their area of interest, it also means the school needs to ensure students' safety in each agency.
- Transport arrangements will be necessary and will have time and cost implications.

## **Things to consider**

### **Start small and build gradually**

One of the most important lessons learned during the pilot was to begin small and build strongly. This could involve:

- organising school-based activities which allow your students to learn essential skills in a familiar environment
- building on community service activities that currently exist in the school.

This gives the coordinator time to learn, explore the possibilities, and set long term goals which will benefit the students, community and school.

### **Small groups or large groups of students?**

The nature of the school-organised *Option 2* activities will determine the number of students engaged in community service simultaneously.

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## *School-oriented Option 2 activities*

These often involve large groups of students. When embedded into the curriculum, entire classes can undertake community service activities during a (double) period. If extra-curricular activities (sports carnival, fund raiser) take place, students could be doing their service for a few hours after school.

## *Community-oriented Option 2 activities*

Community-oriented *Option 2* activities can include events like Clean Up Australia Day, which allow for large groups of students to do their community service simultaneously. Usually *Option 2* activities only cater for groups of about five students per agency as most community groups can only provide meaningful activities for small numbers of students.

### **Rotating students**

*In dealing with multiple agencies to organise activities, some pilot school coordinators found clever ways of reducing their workload. They divided the Year 10 cohort into two or three groups and each group did their service over the course of one term. The coordinators used the same five or six agencies each term and the students rotated through these agencies. After a student completed the 20 hours, another student took over and continued the activity for another 20 hours.*

*This strategy has multiple benefits:*

- (i) The coordinator only has to liaise with a limited number of agencies.*
- (ii) The coordinator and the agency can build a long-term relationship.*
- (iii) The agency does not get inundated with students and is assured of continuous commitment.*
- (iv) The risk management plans can be reused after altering the student information section.*

### **Make use of opportunities**

Students' chances of building up their hours can be increased by tapping into opportunities for parent-organised as well as school-organised, school-oriented and community-oriented activities as they arise. The more opportunities offered to students, the more chances students have to complete their 20 hours.

### **Start with your most enthusiastic students**

Consider placing the students who are most keen on being involved first. This group can serve as a promotion and induction team for other students. This strategy also strengthens the relationship with community agencies as they ease into the program by working with motivated students.

### **During or outside of school hours?**

The reality is that many students need the support and guidance of the school to facilitate their service activities. Both school-oriented and community-oriented activities can take place during or after school hours and schools are in the best position to decide which would best suit their students' interests.

### *When?*

Depending on the activity, its location, and the flexibility of the time-table there are several choices for timetabling activities during school hours:

- Activities at school will usually fit into a single or double period and are relatively easy to integrate into the timetable.
- Activities in the community will, depending on the location and transport, take at least a morning or afternoon. If students either travel from home to the agency in the morning, or home from the agency in the afternoon, then the time spent travelling *during* school hours decreases.
- Alternatively, students can do their service for a number of full days over the course of 2 years to complete their 20 hours. The advantage is that students don't lose travelling time between school and the agency, as they can go directly from home to the agency and back.

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- Introducing a community service week is another possible model. A community-oriented program concentrated within one week would put a lot of pressure on agencies and coordinators would find it difficult to find suitable and sufficient placements for students and to organise the logistics.

*One of the pilot schools that allocated one afternoon per week to the Community Service Program decided to allow the students to do community service for up to four full days in 2007. The students will be out on the day that suits their agency best and complete their community service hours over the course of four weeks. The coordinator explained that:*

*"Instead of having a prescribed time it will be a whole day, because we found that we just had people tied up in the transport, and it wasn't really effectively working. And the kids were getting, two or two-and-a-half hours in that period, which is not really that effective over the course of a week... Because the school is highly regimented and managed by timetables, the rest of the world obviously isn't and we need to acknowledge that and fit in with the agencies."*

### **Year 10 and/or 11?**

It is suggested that students complete their 20 hours of service during Years 10 and 11. However, schools have the flexibility to organise their program to suit their particular context and needs. Thus a school could decide to organise their Community Service Program so that students complete the 20 hours service in Year 10. Alternatively, the hours could be spread across Year 10 and 11 and even Year 12, for students who are unable to, or don't fulfil, the requirement in Years 10 and 11.

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