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EDUCATING FOR CITIZENSHIP: The Role of Service

Preparing Citizens Through Service

By Todd Clark

In recent years, growing numbers of American youth have demonstrated their willingness, even eagerness, to engage in service to solve some of the most critical social problems confronting our nation. With the groundwork laid by youth programs long active across the nation and recent backing from the National and Community Service Act of 1990, youth service has burgeoned. President Clinton's pledge to open up opportunities to utilize service to earn or pay back college loans will no doubt attract even more young people.

As programs proliferate, as we edge toward the goal of service as a common expectation of youth, it is vital that we consider carefully not only what service can do for society but what service can, will, and should do for American youth.

What *do* service experiences offer participating youth? Although we await firm data, many of us active in the field would stipulate that service helps young people develop self-esteem and empathy and enhances a participant's capacity to feel a positive part of his or her community. In addition, service can assist youth to develop skills important to success in the work force.

Most of us also would agree that structured opportunities for reflection increase the benefit of service to youth. The impact of reflection, of course, varies with its focus. Reflection focused on personal motivation can deepen self-awareness. Reflection directed to the value of

service to the person or community served is more likely to help youth develop skills in analysis and evaluation.

Linking service to the school curriculum is widely accepted as a means of enhancing the impact of service. When service calls for students to use concepts and skills first introduced in a core discipline—when service becomes, in effect, a community “lab”—the added element of practical application enriches student learning.

One question subject to considerable debate, however, is how service can best educate youth for active citizenship.

There are those who view all service as education for citizenship because it engenders self-esteem, empathy, and a sense of caring—qualities important in “good citizens.” Others maintain that engaging in service of genuine value to the community educates young people for citizenship. Then there are those—myself among them—who have concluded that service, though demonstrably valuable to youth and community, does not in and of itself constitute powerful education for citizenship. More is needed.

Opinions differ on what the “more” is. My own view grows out of our experiences at Constitutional Rights Foundation, where our history has been one of gradual evolution from volunteer service programs toward

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CURRENTS

Y O U T H S E R V I C E C A L I F O R N I A

October 1992 volume 3 number 1

CalServe helps in request for proposal process

By Liz West

With the announcement in May by the Commission on National and Community Service that California would be receiving more than \$3 million to support the expansion of service opportunities, the CalServe train has been rolling through the state at an ever quickening pace.

Among those who are helping to implement a wide range of service-learning and civic awareness programs are representatives from the State Departments of Education and Aging, the California Conservation Corps, Youth Service California, the California Campus Compact, and the Governor's Office of Child Development and Education. Together, they are the CalServe Working Group.

The funds awarded by the federal government for this statewide effort will be disbursed through a competitive Request for Proposal process conducted by the CalServe Working Group. Last June, two orientation meetings were held in

Sacramento and Los Angeles to apprise school, youth corps, and community-based organization

leaders throughout the state about funding of both in and out-of-school youth service programs.

These meetings were followed by eight Request for Proposal (RFP) Technical Assistance Workshops held in August and September throughout the state. From Eureka to San Diego, representatives of the CalServe Working Group assisted interested applicants in the CalServe competitive process, provided training in completing the CalServe application and in forming strong community partnerships that will add energy and momentum to the growing service movement in California. Each RFP workshop registered from 40 to 150 participants.

More than 3,500 RFP documents were mailed to interested parties who had participated in any of the more than 15 meetings and informational workshops given on CalServe over the past 18 months. There are two separate RFP documents for:

- 1) Applicants seeking funds available either through Subtitle B-1 (\$1.6 million targeted at K-12 students) or through Subtitle B-2 funds which amount to \$100,000 for higher education programs, as per the award received by California Campus Compact (see separate article on page 4); or
- 2) Applicants seeking funds under Subtitle C, which targets out-of-school youth involved in youth and conservation



corps programs throughout the state. There is \$1.4 million available through the Subtitle C portion.

In order to accommodate the wide range of program designs that are expected from this RFP process, two cycles of funding were created. The first cycle, for Subtitle C applicants only, had a submission deadline of September 15. The second funding cycle is in progress now. It is for both Subtitle B and C applications and the deadline for submission is November 1, 1992.

Among all three subtitles, the CalServe Working Group expects to fund between eight and 30 proposals. Collaborations among school districts, corps programs, and colleges and universities have been strongly encouraged in order to access funding from

more than one subtitle and to build a truly diverse and multifaceted community-based service-learning program.

Although funding from the Commission covers one year

only, the National and Community Service Act itself envisions a three-year funding cycle with a strong emphasis on

comprehensive program evaluation nationwide to justify additional funding beyond the three-year period. Subsequent funding for Years Two and Three are contingent upon continued appropriations from Congress. Practitioners in the field of youth service and experiential education are optimistic about the future of the Commission's efforts.

In California, and perhaps across the country, youth service advocates believe that the riots in Los Angeles represented a warning that has nationwide implications. Providing young people with new hope for a brighter future by creating more service-learning opportunities cannot be underestimated.

Liz West is Associate Governmental Program Analyst at the California Conservation Corps headquarters in Sacramento. For more information about CalServe, contact Bernadette Chi at (213) 487-5590 or Linda Forsyth at (916) 657-3115.

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