



Hunger at Home and Beyond

Written by Liz Stimer, Genoa Middle School, Westerville City Schools — Westerville, Ohio

“ When I do one small thing, it can make a huge difference for someone else. Learning all of this makes me feel that I can make something good happen for other people. ”

— Alycia S., 7th grader at Genoa Middle School

What?

A few fast facts . . .

- ▶ A teacher and her students wanted to help raise awareness about the issue of hunger and poverty, both locally and globally.
- ▶ 105 seventh-graders
- ▶ Teacher: Liz Stimer
- ▶ Curriculum Area(s): Math, Language Arts, Health
- ▶ Community Partners: Westerville Caring and Sharing, Franklin School Employees Credit Union

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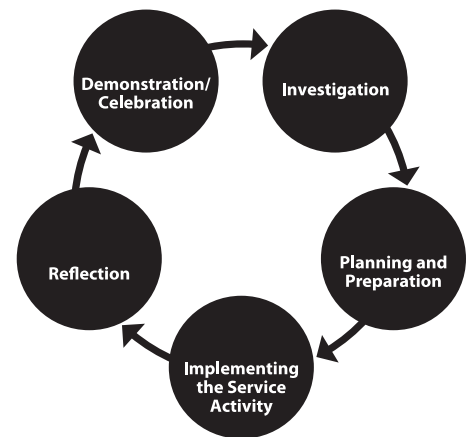


The Big Idea

Seventh grade math students at Genoa Middle School investigated hunger and poverty in the community, across the nation, and globally, so that they could educate other students and members of the community and transform a traditional food drive into a meaningful service-learning experience.

Investigation

Our school has held a competitive food drive for many years. Students are encouraged to bring in food to win a pizza party or similar award. When information about the 2009-2010 food drive was circulated, my **students expressed concern that the focus of our food drive was a competition.** They asked questions about the drive and wanted to know more about where the collected food was going to go and who would eat it. During an informal discussion, I shared with the students that 25% of the student population at our school qualifies for assistance through the local food pantry. **Students were struck by how many students in our school were in need and expressed an immense interest in learning more about hunger and poverty.**



They wanted to obtain more information and learn about the world around them. At that point, it was clear that **we needed to explore hunger at home**, right here in Westerville. Students had questions, and we needed to find the answers together. ▮

Rigor, Relevance and Relationships

Service-learning has demonstrated the potential to provide a curriculum that is rich in rigor, relevance and relationships—three elements of learning that play a crucial role in the school improvement process, according to Bill Daggett and his associates at the *International Center for Leadership in Education*. Consistent with these elements, research clearly shows that students who participate in high quality service-learning experiences become more engaged in learning, more committed to their communities, and more empowered to make positive life and career choices.

International Center for Leadership in Education, www.leadered.com

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Preparation

Realizing that one in four students at our school qualifies for assistance from the local food pantry, **I knew that this was a potentially sensitive and divisive topic for the students in my classes.** In fact, 25% of my students' families received food assistance from the **Westerville Area Resource Ministry (WARM)**, while others of my students were from upper-middle class households.

To help ease any emerging tension and ensure a positive and supportive environment, each of my classes created its own **class contract (that we called our "peace treaty"), which listed principles and ideas students felt were critical to uphold, such as confidentiality; respectful, active listening; and avoiding judgment.**

After setting the stage with the class contracts, we began to study **financial literacy** in order to better understand the challenges families face in making ends meet. The Franklin County School Employees Federal Credit Union visited my classes and taught students about **creating budgets, the principles of banking, credit and credit scores, writing checks,** etc.

Students then watched a **60 Minutes II** documentary called **"The Line"** to become **more aware of the issue of hunger in Southern Ohio.** Students were shocked by the proximity and scope of this issue, which generated immediate interest and ownership. One student mentioned a television show he had seen about the difficulty of living on minimum wage. It was part of a series called **30 Days.** I located a copy of the

RIGOR . . . *Students demonstrated their ability to use proportional reasoning, work with ratios, compute percents, analyze data and graphs, and work with integers. For example, when students created budgets, their ability to compute percents and work with integers was clearly demonstrated. Students analyzed statistics regarding hunger in the United States and determined the percentage of the population in each state that experienced food insecurity, poverty, unemployment, etc. -- Liz Stimer*

show, and we watched it together in class. The documentary chronicled a month in the lives of two individuals who, as an experiment, came to **Columbus, Ohio** to see if they could afford to live on minimum wage jobs.

The show discussed all of the issues and problems the couple faced and helped the students understand how challenging it is to make ends meet on a minimum wage salary.

To understand hunger on a global scale, students participated in a global hunger simulation. The hunger simulation was described in the Catholic Relief Services **Global Solidarity Week Resource Guide.** As they entered the room, students were divided into three groups—60% of the students were assigned to the **"Developing World" group** to represent the percentage of the world's people living in countries with emerging economies, but few resources. Another 30% of students were classified **"Developed World-Level 2"** to represent the number of people living in newly industrialized coun-

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tries. Finally, 10% of the students were assigned to the **“Developed World-Level 1” group** to represent the percentage of the world’s population living in wealthy nations, like the United States.

Students in the “Developing World” group received a single Cheerio, those in the “Developed World-Level 2” group received one M&M, and students in the “Developed World-Level 1” group received a full candy bar. This allowed the students to see the disparity of income and food around the world. As we began the simulation activity, I was very careful not to let the students in on what we were going to do. I simply divided them into the groups and began to pass out the food. I made a point not to discuss what I was doing and waited for student reaction.

“I have learned that a simple food drive can help families in need. One in six Americans goes without food, and we need to fix that. The simple things help the most. I am inspired to know that we can make a difference and stop hunger around the world.”

-- Grant H., 7th grader

When students who had a single Cheerio saw students receiving a full candy bar, they were irritated and upset. We had a serious conversation about how they felt, and it was incredibly powerful and set the climate for an in-depth study of hunger.

To apply their knowledge regarding financial education and budgeting, students formed groups and were given a family scenario. Each

group had a different scenario and worked to figure out how to “make ends meet.” Students worked with living expenses (rent, car insurance, child care, utilities, etc.). Groups planned nutritious meals for their families and went grocery shopping to see how much food and other necessities actually cost. Students completed the grocery shopping on a local grocery store’s online shopping site. **Students discovered that nutritious food is often more expensive.** They discussed the connection between obesity and poverty/hunger.

While working through the family scenarios, each group randomly drew a designated life event/situation to factor into the family budget. For example, “Your furnace went out. Pay repairman \$500.” **It was just when students felt like things were really working out with their budgets that they had to work through these challenges as a family.** This was very frustrating for the students. Many students felt like it was “unfair.” After investigating and working with the scenarios, the students wanted to continue to research and learn more about hunger in their community, throughout the state, across the nation, and globally.

Throughout the preparation and learning process, **students worked to plan ways to educate others and spread the word, which put them into leadership positions in the school regarding the issue of hunger/poverty**, as well as the upcoming food drive. ▶

A typical service-learning project includes five components:

Investigation: Teachers and students investigate the community/world problems that they might potentially address. Investigation typically involves some sort of research and mapping activity.

Planning and Preparation: Teachers, students, and community members plan the learning and service activities, and address the administrative issues needed for a successful project.

Action: The “heart” of the project . . . engaging in the meaningful service experience that will help students develop important knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and will benefit the community.

Reflection: Activities that help students understand the service-learning experience and think about its meaning and connection to them, their society, and what they have learned in school.

Demonstration/Celebration: The final experience when students, community participants and others publicly share what they have learned, celebrate the results of the service-learning project, and look ahead to the future.

Assessment is part of all activities to ensure that the learning and development that occur through service-learning can be measured, and to help diagnose student needs, provide feedback, and improve instruction.

K-12 Service-Learning Project Planning Toolkit. Created by RMC Research Corporation for Learn and Serve America’s National Service-Learning Clearinghouse

K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice

Meaningful Service: Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service.

Link to Curriculum: Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.

Reflection: Service-learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one's relationship to society.

Diversity: Service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.

Youth Voice: Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.

Partnerships: Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs.

Progress Monitoring: Service-learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability.

Duration and Intensity: Service-learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes.

Source: National Youth Leadership Council (www.nylc.org)

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Action

Students designed and created posters that were hung up around the school. The **posters were created to educate others about hunger and poverty**. We felt compelled to share the information we had gathered in order to help our school move beyond the traditional competitive food drive.

Next, **students supported and participated in the school food drive**. They also connected with the volunteer group **Westerville Caring and Sharing** and spent time **counting, organizing, and sorting the food** collected throughout the Westerville community. Volunteering with **Westerville Caring and**

RELEVANCE . . . *Volunteering with Westerville Caring and Sharing was a wonderful way to follow up the food drive and see the big picture. Students were able to see how the food collected at Genoa Middle School was part of the greater collection done throughout the community.*

-- Liz Stimer

Sharing was a wonderful way to follow up the food drive and see the big picture. Students were able to see how the food collected at Genoa Middle School was part of the greater collection done throughout the community. ▶

Reflection

Throughout the project, we reflected through whole class and small group discussions. Students also completed informal written reflections. Cameras were available, and pictures were taken throughout the entire process. **At the end of the project, students created a movie using all of the pictures to summarize our work and reflect on the process.** ▶

Celebration/Demonstration

As students prepared for the project and engaged in the various activities, they celebrated the impact of their efforts. This took the form of sharing ideas, viewing photos and video they were taking, and sharing written reflection pieces. The sorting/counting event with Westerville Caring and Sharing was really the culminating event and brought the food drive efforts together. Students were able to collaborate with other community members who were volunteering their time as well. They

were excited to share the project with others. **We created a video that brought everything together and celebrated our efforts as a team of young adults making a difference.** ▶

"When people come together they can make a HUGE difference.."

-- Byron L., 7th grader

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Assessment/Evaluation

Math and language arts objectives and skills were demonstrated throughout the entire project. **Students demonstrated their ability to use proportional reasoning, work with ratios, compute percents, analyze data and graphs, and work with integers.** For example, when students created budgets, their ability to compute percents and work with integers was clearly demonstrated. **Students analyzed statistics regarding hunger in the United States and determined the percentage of the population in each state that experienced food insecurity, poverty, unemployment, etc.** Specific math skills were clearly assessed through various activities throughout the project.

Curriculum Connections/Standards

Math: use the order of operations to simplify expressions with whole numbers, integers, fractions, and decimals; convert between fractions, decimals and percents; write and solve equations that represent a particular situation; simplify numerical expressions involving integers and use integers to solve and describe real-life problems; use formulas in problem-solving situations; read, create, and interpret a bar graph, a histogram, a circle graph, and a line graph; solve problems involving percents using proportional relationships, multiplication, percent of change, simple interest and mental math; and use customary measurements to solve real life problems.

Language Arts: summarize information; formulate research questions and conduct research using a variety

of sources; organize information; communicate findings orally, visually, and in writing or through media; master techniques of informal writing; and identify appropriate sources and gather relevant information from multiple sources. **Language arts skills were demonstrated when students engaged in research, organized information, and identified appropriate sources.** In addition, **learning and attitude changes were evident** when students completed informal written pieces and contributed to class discussions. Students were given frequent opportunities to reflect and share through class/small group discussions. The posters also demonstrated student learning. Students analyzed important facts/information and used the information when creating the posters. Informal self-assessments were incorporated to assess student progress and growth. **▶**

of sources; organize information; communicate findings orally, visually, and in writing or through media; master techniques of informal writing; and identify appropriate sources and gather relevant information from multiple sources. **▶**

"Students are always asking the question, 'When am I ever going to use this stuff?' Unfortunately, they often struggle to see the critical role that math plays in the world. It was wonderful to see my students make the connection and fully understand how math concepts connect to the real world. They saw the relevance and made phenomenal connections. I could ask any student in the room, 'When are you ever going to use this stuff?' and they quickly had an answer for me. It was incredible!"

-- Liz Stimer

So What? Results and impact . . .

- ▶ 1,957 service and learning hours contributed
- ▶ Collected and donated food for *Westerville Caring and Sharing Food Pantry*

Now What? A Call to Action:

Now that you have read about Liz's students and their efforts to help with "Hunger at Home and Beyond," what could you and your students do to make a difference? Just like Liz and her kids, there are people everywhere making a difference. Let us know what you and others in your community are doing by posting your information on . . . partnershipsmakeadifference.org

To learn more about how to help with hunger locally and globally, log on to . . .

Feeding America:
feedingamerica.org

In addition, you may find these sites helpful:

Children's Hunger Alliance:
childrenshungeralliance.org

Mid-Ohio Foodbank:
midohiofoodbank.org
Westerville Area Resource Ministry
warmwesterville.org

U.S. fund for UNICEF:
www.unicefusa.org

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21st Century Skills addressed and demonstrated by the *Hunger at Home and Beyond* service-learning project:

- ✔ Global Awareness
- ✔ Financial, Economic, Business, and Entrepreneurial Literacy
- ✔ Civic Literacy
- ✔ Health Literacy
- ✔ Creativity and Innovation
- ✔ Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- ✔ Information Literacy
- ✔ Media Literacy
- ✔ ICT (Information, Communications, and Technology) Literacy
- ✔ Flexibility and Adaptability
- ✔ Initiative and Self-Direction
- ✔ Social and Cross-Cultural Skills
- ✔ Productivity and Accountability
- ✔ Leadership and Responsibility

Source: *The Partnership for 21st Century Skills* (www.p21.org)

21st Century Skills

The *Partnership for 21st Century Skills* has identified the elements described in the sidebar on the left as the critical systems necessary to ensure 21st century readiness for every student. Though the *Hunger at Home and Beyond* service-learning project clearly demonstrates connections to many of the skills, the following outlines two skills in detail.

Financial, Economic, Business, and Entrepreneurial Literacy: Students learned about financial education and explored areas such as: creating budgets, analyzing credit scores, working with banks/financial institutions, and understanding credit cards/loans. Students created realistic budgets using various family scenarios and began thinking about how to make appropriate personal economic choices.

ICT (Information, Communications, and Technology) Literacy: Students used technology as a tool to research, organize, and communicate information. Laptops/computers were used to research content and create documents to educate others. For example, students used the Internet to shop for groceries (because we were unable to take a trip to the local grocery store). By shopping online with a local grocery store chain, students were able to plan meals and discover how much money would need to be spent on groceries for their “family.” In addition, pictures and video clips were taken throughout the project. Students used the pictures to create a video as a reflection/educational piece to celebrate the project. ▶

Impact: Kids Using Their “Best Stuff” to Make A Difference

Many students who wouldn’t normally consider themselves successful in the traditional classroom truly excelled with this project. Students became passionate about the cause and worked through the math and language arts skills with ease. Many students didn’t even realize they were learning critical math skills. **It was amazing to see students who are often quiet and shy in the typical classroom setting evolve into strong leaders and embrace the learning process.**

Students were definitely empowered. The entire project was based on student “voice.” We started the

project because students began to ask questions when they learned of the school food drive. **In addition, many activities and the overall path of the project were completely determined by students.** For example, one student suggested that we watch an episode of the television series **30 Days**. The episode dealt with living on minimum wage and was filmed in Columbus, OH. The student and I immediately worked together to find it. We were successful and watched it the very next day in class.

We began the project by looking at hunger and poverty in our school

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and community. From there, we looked at these issues across the state of Ohio, and then nationally. To go even further, we looked

Relationships . . . *The stage was set from the very beginning, and students immediately came together to work as a team. We established trust and respect for each other in new ways, which created a new sense of community. Students often found themselves working with new people and grew from the experience. In many cases, students got to know each other for the first time. We looked beyond our differences and found commonalities. Service-learning clearly brings people together.*

-- Liz Stimer

at hunger and poverty through a global lens. Students discussed what could be done to help at the school/community level all the way up to the global level. **As they created posters to educate others, students were careful to provide the "big picture." They wanted other students to understand that hunger and poverty not only impact our community, but the global society as well.**

Next Steps/Call to Action

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This was the first service-learning project for many of my students. **Many students caught the service-learning "bug."** As the year continued, students participated in other service-learning projects. In addition, many students are participating in a summer service-learning and leadership program. They simply can't get enough!

There are numerous things that young people or adults can do to help end hunger and poverty. Things can be done by individuals or in large groups. **Whether one works to educate others and spread the word, or decides to facilitate a neighborhood food drive, every little bit helps.** The possibilities are endless. The most important thing is that action is taken. Edmund Burke said, "Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little." ▶

Students were very proud that they were able to inform other students at our school about the impact of hunger and poverty on our community. **Their goal was to transform the competitive food drive by educating the student population through background and context. They wanted to switch the focus from winning a pizza party to donating food because of the true need in our community.** In addition, students were extremely proud of what was collected by the school and our community as a whole. Students were able to participate in a sorting/organizing night. They saw how much was collected throughout our entire community and

"I honestly didn't know that hunger was such a problem. We should all start to help and pitch in by just giving extra food or volunteering our time. You never know whose family you just helped."

-- Maddy T., 7th grader

worked to organize the food with other community volunteers. ▶

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Other Insights . . . Reflections of the Teacher

Service-learning has enabled my students to achieve at a higher level in many ways. In the traditional math classroom, students are often found working to solve individual problems to master specific concepts. **As they worked on the hunger project, students solved problems and worked through math concepts, but the learning occurred at a much higher level because the students were connected and invested in the process.** The students were not focused on simply memorizing the process or working through the steps without thinking. It was not about putting a check in the box or getting the work done as quickly as possible. The students were thoroughly engaged in the math while working with a real world issue. **The level of engagement really pushed the students to a higher level of understanding.**

"Magic" or "aha" moments occurred every day. As described earlier, students participated in a global hunger simulation. Students were divided into three groups—Developing World (60%), Developing World (Level 2—30%), and Developing World (Level 1—10%). The purpose was for students to see the

disparity of income and food around the world. During the activity, students became very vocal and upset. They felt it was unfair and wrong for some people to get full candy bars and others a single Cheerio™. Students shared thoughts and feelings through class discussion. **The activity brought to life the situation of hunger and food distribution in the world.** The looks on many faces were worth a thousand words. It was pure magic.

As a teacher, I loved every moment of the project! I felt extremely motivated and inspired. I found myself constantly talking about the project and sharing our work with anyone who would listen. The project brought my classes together in a new way. I could feel the excitement as I walked around the classroom. It was remarkable.

If I were to do this project again, I would like to extend it beyond the time period of the food drive. We started the project right before our school food drive began and it ended about a month later. I would like to revisit the work and continue the project as the year progresses. Hunger happens all year long, not just around Thanksgiving.

“ I firmly believe that service-learning is education in action. This project was a wonderful adventure that built a strong community, brought learning to life, and allowed us to make a difference in our world. It was a remarkable experience for all involved. ”

— Liz Stimer, Genoa Middle School