

COMMUNITY  
PARTNER  
GUIDE



MISERICORDIA  
UNIVERSITY®



# WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING?

Service-learning is a structured learning experience that provides students with the opportunity to meet academic objectives through provision of community service. Students work with community partners to develop and implement projects to meet the needs of the organization, develop their own skills and learning, and reflect on the value of the experience from a community and interpersonal perspective.

Misericordia University has been committed to giving back to our local friends and neighbors since its inception in 1924. Strongly connected to our four charisms of mercy, service, justice, and

hospitality, service-learning is a catalyst that fosters lifelong civic engagement and development of ethical values, with the hoped for outcome of building stronger communities.

Through strong community partnerships, dedicated staff and faculty, and the hard work and enthusiasm of our students, Misericordia service-learning has made a lasting impact on our local community and beyond.

The purpose of the community partner service-learning guide is to assist you in planning and executing a successful service-learning project in partnership with Misericordia University that provides real value to your organization, while simultaneously providing a vehicle for our students to develop their academic knowledge, 21st century skills, and a broader sense of social responsibility and community awareness.

*“As a result of my experience at Ruth’s Place, I continue to volunteer and make new friends, learn more, and change the lives of not only the women who live at the shelter but also the people I take with me to volunteer. Service-learning provided me with a way to understand the concepts sociology provided me. I strongly believe that being enrolled into a class with service-learning as part of the curriculum is the best way to learn.”*

Source: Nicole O’Connor  
Nursing Student





## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN SERVICE-LEARNING?

### FOR STUDENTS

- Enriched learning experience
- Opportunity to apply academic knowledge to a real-life setting
- Develop a greater awareness of issues facing the local community
- Develop social responsibility and concern for the community
- Enhance leadership ability
- Develop critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills
- Explore possible career interests and develop professional networks

### FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- Build capacity of current services or develop new ones
- Increase the number of clients served
- Utilize specialist academic knowledge and skills at no cost

- Establish new connections and networks
- Inject new energy, enthusiasm, and perspectives into the organization
- Identify potential volunteers and future employees
- Create greater awareness of your services among the University community

### FOR FACULTY

- Opportunity to engage in a different teaching methodology
- Expand learning beyond the classroom
- Facilitate development of critical thinking, leadership, problem solving, and communication skills
- Demonstrate commitment to the community
- Provide an enriched learning experience for students



# MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR PROJECT

Service-learning projects typically fall into one of three categories:

- **Direct service:** Students interact directly with clients from your organization
- **Indirect service:** Service is not provided directly to individuals but the service benefits the community/organization
- **Advocacy:** Students create an awareness of a community issue or cause

To gain the most value from your partnership with Misericordia service-learning it is important to do a thorough needs assessment of your organization to discover where students could have the most impact.

- Where might students be able to contribute to the services you provide?
- How might students be able to develop new programs or services for your clients?
- What projects or ideas would you love to get started, but have not had the time?
- How might your organization utilize the academic knowledge or expertise of the students?
- What areas of your strategic plan might students be able to contribute to?
- How might students advocate for your organization or mission?
- How could the project or services be continued after the students complete their service-learning course?



**COURSE:**  
**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**  
**COMMUNITY PARTNER:**  
**KIDS CAFÉ**  
**SERVICE TYPE:**  
**DIRECT SERVICE**

OT students designed and presented programming on fitness and anti-bullying for the children who participate in the Kids Café afterschool program. The afterschool program is held at Dodson Elementary and Heights Elementary in the Wilkes-Barre Area School District. Over 200 children participate in the program daily. Forty-seven OT students were split into groups and worked with children in kindergarten through sixth grade.

# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

## FACULTY

- To develop a course syllabus and learning objectives that integrate service-learning
- To work with the Office of Service-Learning to form a mutually beneficial partnership with a community partner
- To develop a service-learning project that meets both learning and service objectives in partnership with community partner
- To prepare students with academic knowledge and skills required to successfully complete service
- To communicate with community partner and Office of Service-Learning regarding any issues that arise
- To facilitate reflection of student learning and service-learning experience

## STUDENTS

- To actively engage with service-learning
- To inform the community partner if they are going to be late or miss an arranged session
- To abide by community partner protocols and procedures
- To dress appropriately and adhere to dress code
- To behave in a respectful and professional manner at all times
- To ensure they are fully informed of any safety procedures
- To ask questions and maximize their learning experience

## COMMUNITY PARTNER

- To develop a service-learning project that meets both learning and service objectives in partnership with faculty
- To provide supervision for students while at the community partner site
- To provide an orientation to the organization and safety briefing for students
- To provide any necessary training for students to successfully complete the project
- To communicate with faculty and the Office of Service-Learning regarding any issues that arise
- To complete an evaluation on completion of the project

## OFFICE OF SERVICE-LEARNING

- To facilitate development of partnership between community organization and faculty
- To assist faculty and community partner with developing service-learning project and objectives
- To assist faculty with planning and logistics
- Provide in-class orientation to service-learning for students
- Coordinate evaluation of service-learning experience

## BECOMING A COMMUNITY PARTNER

The first step to registering as a Community Partner is to create an **organizational profile** on the Service-Learning Community Partner Database. You can add your organization's contact information and website, mission statement, populations served, and services offered. You can also add information on service-learning project ideas, current volunteer needs, which courses you might be interested in partnering with, and any special requirements for volunteers at your organization.

This profile is then searchable by faculty and students looking for a potential

community partner for service-learning. You can also add your interest in internships, work study students or practicum/clinical placements.

To create your profile, visit [www.misericordia.edu](http://www.misericordia.edu) > Academics > Office of Service-Learning > Community Partners and click on 'Getting started'. You will receive a login and password for your profile, and will be able to update the information and add project ideas at any time. The Office of Service-Learning is happy to assist you with creating and managing your profile.



## TIMELINE

### PLANNING & PREPARATION

- Faculty choosing to offer service-learning as part of their course are required to submit their learning objectives and community partner requirements to the Office of Service-Learning at least three months before the start of their course.
- Based on the learning objectives, faculty and service-learning staff review the community partner database and reach out to potential community partners to discuss possible project ideas that will meet both the learning objectives of the course and a real need for the community partner.
- Two months prior to the start of any service-learning activities, a site visit and risk assessment needs to be completed by faculty or service-learning staff. In cases where the students will not need to visit their community partner's physical site to complete their service, a site visit may not be required.

### SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE

- Once the service-learning course has started, students will begin working toward their service project. Depending on the nature of the project, this may include an orientation to the community partner, an on-site orientation and safety briefing, visits to the project site, or



on-campus project work. Students will typically work towards the service project for the entire semester.

- Once the service element of the course has been completed, students will engage in reflection activities to reflect on their experiences, learning, challenges, and growth as a result of service-learning.

### EVALUATION

- Community partners, faculty, and students are asked to complete an evaluation to highlight successes, challenges, and areas for improvement.
- After a successful experience students may wish to continue their involvement on a voluntary basis with the community partner.





## PLANNING YOUR PROJECT

Project planning is a collaboration between faculty, community partner, and students. The aim is to design a project that will meet the learning objectives of the course, address a community need, and also take into consideration the capabilities and schedules of the students.



### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How many students and for what period of time will you need them?
- Do you have staff capacity to supervise and oversee the students?
- What training might students need?
- Will students require background checks?
- What resources will you or the students need?
- Will any preparation be required? Who will be responsible for this?
- Will staff require any briefing or training to work with the students?
- Will the project be flexible to accommodate student schedules? Will it be completed in one semester or require longer?



## SITE VISIT AND RISK ASSESSMENT

A minimum of two months prior to the start of any service-learning activities, a site visit and risk assessment needs to be completed by faculty or service-learning staff. In cases where the students will not need to visit their community partner's physical site to complete their service, a site visit may not be required.

The site visit provides opportunity to discuss student safety, on-site orientation, safety briefing requirements, and address any potential issues that could arise.

## LIABILITY

Prior to participation in any service-learning activity, students may be required to sign an assumption of risk and liability waiver form by Misericordia. Please provide your faculty member with copies of liability waivers, confidentiality agreements, or other paperwork your organization requires students to sign prior to beginning. You can also upload copies of any required paperwork to your Community Partner Database Profile.

### **COURSE:**

**HEALTH CARE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT**

### **COMMUNITY PARTNER:**

**COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR SIGHT; LACKAWANNA BLIND ASSOCIATION**

### **SERVICE TYPE:**

**INDIRECT SERVICE**

Students in HCM analyzed the environment of the health care organization, including the market, competition, and industry infrastructure, and based on the analysis, developed a business plan, including a plan for implementation. They identified possible strategies and recommendations for responding to areas requiring strategic attention.

The students also developed an actionable plan and identified specific goals and objectives relating to the organization's financial, technological, infrastructure, and market strategies.



There are four key parts to your role in ensuring a successful experience for the students:

- **Orientation**
- **Training**
- **Supervision**
- **Reflection**

## ORIENTATIONS

Many of the students may not have heard of your organization before and be unfamiliar with the work that you do. Introducing and orienting the students to your organization at the beginning of the project is an important step in ensuring service-learning is successful.

Depending on the project design, orientation to your organization may take a number of forms. You may decide to visit the students in class to talk about your organization, the clients that you work with, and the services you provide. This is a great way to ensure students are fully informed about your organization and gives them the opportunity to ask questions ahead of starting their service.

If students are going to be working at your site, it is important to plan an on-site orientation and safety briefing. This is essential to ensure students know what is expected of them, where to go for help, and what to do in an emergency. Faculty or service-learning staff can address this with you during the site visit to guide your orientation planning.

## ON-SITE ORIENTATION PLANNING CHECKLIST

- How will students find the location? Is there adequate parking?
- Where should students report to on arrival? Who will be there to meet them?
- Do students need to sign in and out of your facility?
- Where will students be working? Will they be able to secure their personal belongings?
- Will you give them a tour of the facility?
- Which staff members do you need to introduce students to? Who will be their supervisor?
- Where are the breakroom and restroom facilities located?
- Where are the emergency exits? Will you conduct an evacuation drill?
- Are there any areas that are off-limits to students?
- What safety protocols are in place that students need to be aware of?
- How can students get in contact with you if they are going to be late or unable to attend?
- Where can students access the resources they need for their service?
- Will students be allowed to take photographs/video?
- What are your expectations of the students? How will you communicate this to them?

## TRAINING

In order for students to be able to complete their service successfully, they may need specific training from your organization, such as training on the specific issues or clients you work with, background information on the area, history of the organization, and any specifics on the project and how it will fit into your larger mission or program delivery. They may also need training on tasks and procedures that they will be completing throughout their service.

### CHILD ABUSE MANDATED REPORTER STATUS

Students coming into direct contact with children during the course of their service-learning may be considered mandated child abuse reporters under Pennsylvania Child Protection Law. Students that meet the following criteria during the course of their service are considered mandated reporters:

*“An individual paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of the individual's role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, is a person responsible for the child's welfare or has direct contact with children.”*

Source: [www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov](http://www.keepkidssafe.pa.gov)

It is important to decide with faculty and the Office of Service-Learning whether students meet this definition, and if so, what training should be provided to them.



### COURSE: SOCIAL WORK

### COMMUNITY PARTNER: DINNERS FOR KIDS

### SERVICE TYPE: INDIRECT

Social Work students partnered with the Dinners for Kids program on a project titled "Baskets of Hope and Bags of Joy." The students gathered nonperishable items by placing boxes at various sites on campus to collect the donated goods. The items collected were placed in gift baskets and delivered to identified Dinners for Kids families. Students also worked with Dinners for Kids on the assessment of needs in the community.



# SUPERVISION

**It is a requirement that students be supervised at all times while at your facility.** Students will need to know who their direct supervisor is, to whom they can turn for questions or advice, and how to contact their supervisor in the event of an emergency. Supervision should also include feedback on the student’s progress, suggestions on how to improve, and help to clarify how the

**COURSE:**  
**UNIVERSITY WRITING SEMINAR**  
**COMMUNITY PARTNER:**  
**MCGLYNN LEARNING CENTER;**  
**RUTH’S PLACE**  
**SERVICE TYPE:**  
**DIRECT, ADVOCACY**

Students participated in a variety of service-learning experiences over the course of the semester. Each student spent time tutoring students at the McGlynn and Mineral Springs Learning Centers. The centers provide services for the children who live in subsidized housing units. Our students worked one-on-one as tutors for the children. Students in this course also partnered with Ruth’s Place emergency homeless shelter for women for their “Walk for Hope” to advocate for the homeless.

student’s work is fitting into the larger mission of the organization and the impact their service is having.

## SETTING EXPECTATIONS

While faculty and the Office of Service-Learning will do their best to brief the students on what is expected of them and appropriate professional behavior, it is important to reinforce these expectations. For some students this may be their first experience working with a community partner.

Let the students know what you expect of them with regard to appropriate behavior when working with clients, calling ahead if they are running late or unable to attend, and any other expectations as appropriate.

Should you experience any issues with a student that you are unable to resolve with them directly, please reach out to faculty or the Office of Service-Learning for assistance.





## REFLECTION

A key component of service-learning is reflection. Students will reflect back on their experiences to draw meaningful connections between the course content, the service-learning experience, and what they have learned as a result. Reflection may take the form of an essay, journal, class discussion, or other activity.

To help facilitate this process, you may want to ask questions and speak informally to students about their learning and experiences during their service, and discuss how their experiences relate to the larger vision of the organization. You may also want to speak with faculty to find out if there are other more structured ways you could contribute to the student reflection process.

## STUDENT REFLECTIONS

*“Seeing percentages of the community that are in need really opened my eyes and inspired me to do something about it. I want to do what I can for those people.”*

*“Even the simplest of service provided by volunteering with students can have a significant impact on the health of the public.”*

*“Made me appreciate what I have more than I did before.”*

*“It made me realize how much help some people really need. I’ve lived in Dallas, PA my whole life and never knew that the McGlynn Center or Ruth’s Place existed. It made me understand the issues in my community on a deeper level.”*

*“It has helped me realize the gap in social status within the Wilkes-Barre area and that our help is needed wherever we can be of service.”*

# COMMUNITY PARTNER FEEDBACK

On completion of the service-learning project, community partners are asked to submit an evaluation by the Office of Service-Learning to help identify successes and areas for improvement. Below are just some of the examples of feedback we have received from community partners:

- “We truly benefit from the students and their interaction with the students. The youthfulness of the students brings an energy into all of our classrooms.”
- “We are planning a board retreat/ follow up session to discuss and prioritize recommendations both from the students' work and previous brainstorming sessions with our leadership. With sustainability as a pressing issue for our all-volunteer organization, MU's report helps direct us in the decisions we make short and long term. The outside view looking in is greatly appreciated.”
- “I have actually employed several students that I have met through this program.”
- “Our members of the Active Adult Center love to have students visit the center. They are eager to speak to the students, share experiences, struggles, etc. They also are very receptive to the students doing screenings and presentations that directly affect them at this stage of their lives.”
- “Like most non-profits, WVCA does not have the staff to meet every need, especially the monthly disinfecting of equipment for children.”

# CONTINUED INVOLVEMENT

Service-learning is just one of a number of ways your organization can partner with Misericordia.



Many students choose to continue their involvement with their community partner after the conclusion of their service-learning course as a volunteer, intern, or on a clinical/fieldwork placement. Many students are also inspired to seek out new opportunities at other community partners.

The Office of Service-Learning is happy to connect you to the right department at Misericordia to assist you in continuing to work with your current service-learning students or to reach out to new ones.





## UNIVERSITY CALENDAR

Service-learning projects typically fall within either the Fall or Spring semesters, taking into account student schedules and exam periods. The following gives an overview of Misericordia's semester schedules. Please speak with your faculty member or the Office of Service-Learning for the dates for the current academic year.

### FALL SEMESTER

- Fall Semester begins late August
- Fall Recess begins mid-October for one week
- Recessed for Thanksgiving from Wednesday before through to Monday after
- Exams begin early/mid-December
- Fall Semester ends mid-December

### SPRING SEMESTER

- Spring Semester begins mid-January
- Spring Recess begins early March for one week
- Recessed for Easter from Thursday before through to Tuesday after
- Exams begin early May
- Spring Semester ends mid-May

## OFFICE OF SERVICE-LEARNING CONTACTS

For more information on service-learning at Misericordia please contact:

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