YVC’s fundamental goals include engaging youth in challenging, rewarding and educational service that promotes a greater understanding and appreciation for diversity and inspires a lifetime ethic of service. Service-learning plays an important role in achieving these objectives and YVC project planners should utilize service-learning as part of a larger effort to ensure high-quality service experiences for youth.

Service-Learning is a form of experiential education that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as participants address real community needs while gaining a deeper understanding of the issues being addressed and developing new skills. There are two basic types of service-learning: school-based and community-based. Here is how they work at YVC.

School-based projects tend to engage the same group of youth over an entire semester or school-year. Service-learning is implemented as a teaching strategy, closely tied to curricular objectives and state education standards. The extended duration of this context allows for thorough investigation of the issues and application of diverse learning opportunities, service strategies and evaluation. The school-based method works best for YVC In School projects with more consistent teams of youth.

In a community-based context, service-learning tends to focus more on the issue being addressed, with projects and activities typically taking place at the nonprofit agency being served. This type of service-learning involves planning activities to illustrate for youth the importance of their service so they leave with a deeper understanding of the need and the impact of their contribution. Community-based service-learning is ideal for YVC’s Saturday, After School and Summer projects.

To maximize service-learning’s potential, both types must integrate core elements of effective service-learning, such as giving youth meaningful leadership roles, establishing learning goals, utilizing reflection throughout the process, ensuring the service meets real community needs, and as with any form of youth development, the longer the youth participate, the greater the benefit to them.

Benefits of Service-Learning

For youth:

- Offers new perspectives, knowledge and skills relating to a wide variety of issues
- A great lesson or reflection activity can make even the most mundane project meaningful
- Youth feel more connected and positive about their school, community, and society
- Helps deter risky behavior
- Allows for career exploration
- Enhances academic achievement and odds of graduating
- Fosters an appreciation for diversity
- Engages youth in active learning that demonstrates the relevance of what they are studying
• Increases awareness of community issues
• Improves interpersonal, teamwork and leadership skills
• Develops civic responsibility, self-efficacy and a lifetime ethic of service
• Reveals youth as valued community resources
• Teaching and learning are energized as coursework comes alive in the real world
• Fosters a sense of caring for others

For the community:
• Raises awareness of community needs and the agencies addressing those needs among project participants and all of their contacts
• Keeps youth safe and engaged in healthy activities during risky out-of-school time
• Builds positive relationships between adults and youth
• Youth are more likely to do well in school, graduate, vote, and become active citizens with a desire and ability to support their community.
• Provides a steady stream of engaged volunteers to boost an organization’s capacity

Best Practices for YVC Service-Learning
• Follow the IPARD/C stages of service-learning to guide the process (Investigation, Preparation and Planning, Action, Reflection, Demonstration and Celebration).
• Utilize the eight Standards of Service-Learning to ensure quality (Meaningful Service, Link to Curriculum, Reflection, Diversity, Youth Voice, Partnerships, Progress Monitoring, Duration and Intensity).
• Collaborate with a variety of local education providers, from private schools to group homes, to integrate service-learning into their curriculums and offer training to help them get started.
• Frequently evaluate the process, involving the opinions of youth, nonprofit agency partners, teachers, and other project participants every step of the way.
• Keep youth interested by planning a wide variety of service and reflection activities.
• Share the work load among project participants to increase buy-in and collaboration.
• Find and get involved in your local service-learning network. If none exists, start one!