

The Civic Education Project

CATALYST

CEP Alumni Newsletter
2010 Volume 2
The Initiative Issue

The Start of Something Good

Making a bigger impact on an issue you care about

After learning all about how to make a small, everyday impact in our last issue of Catalyst, you're ready to move onto a bigger project. Perhaps there's a problem in your community you want to tackle or you have an idea for an initiative you think might make a difference – like starting a dance class at a school that doesn't have any arts programs, or creating a zero-violence neighborhood. It sounds scary, but it is possible to make a sizeable impact on an issue you care about without dedicating your entire life to it. You don't have to say goodbye to your friends and family and free time to go beyond the ordinary, daily steps towards something more far-reaching. This issue will show you how to do just that, by providing how tos, examples and resources for taking action.

The typical way that service is championed on TV and in magazines can be deceiving. You don't have to hold yourself to "traditional" models of service – such as soup kitchen or homeless shelter work – or travel to a foreign land to make a visible impact. In fact, it's usually easier and more efficient to help out right where you are, doing something that you love.

That sounds like a tall order, and sometimes it can be when you're dealing with a largely apathetic public. Recent college graduate Brian Bordainick, who was sent by Teach for America to work in a New Orleans high school that had been devastated by Hurricane Katrina and never rebuilt, realized this remarkably quickly. Faced with a school and community disjointed and devastated in the wake of the storm, he set the nearly impossible goal



of raising \$1.85 million to build a state of the art football field and track intended to bring the community together and start the process of rebuilding. Yet Bordainick, by choosing something he was passionate about, utilizing all of his possible connections, and creating a unique and innovative website to raise money, has been immensely successful – they've already raised nearly \$1.3 million. Read more about his cause, 9th Ward Field of Dreams, at www.9thwardfieldofdreams.com

Or take twelve year old Craig Kielburger, who, after reading an article about the murder of Iqbal, another twelve year old boy in Pakistan, started Free the Children to eradicate child labor around the world. In the convening 15 years, Craig has brought over 350,000 youth to the cause, lobbied and met with world leaders, built 500 schools in 45 countries around the world, and expanded the organization to include a variety of economic and educational initiatives, all through the power of youth. To learn more about Kielburger or Free the Children, visit www.freethechildren.com

CEP is sure that with a little bit of determination, creativity, and inspiration, which this issue seeks to help you with, you will be able to make a significant impact on your cause, whatever it is.

“With a little bit of determination, creativity, and inspiration, you will be able to make a significant impact on your cause, whatever it is.”

CivicWeekend

May 2010:

With newly found green thumbs, participants get their hands dirty, planting and weeding produce at an urban farm.

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A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH ^{to} COMMUNITY PROBLEM SOLVING

how to
guide

Setting out to attack any problem effectively can be overwhelming. Will any one person ever be able to eliminate homelessness, or solve global warming? The answer is probably no, and looking at problems so broadly can be extremely discouraging. It's important to remember that taking things one step at a time to make achievable progress on an issue you care about is usually the way to go. Here are some steps – straight from the CLI curriculum – to help you out with that.

1



Choose your topic.

This one is easy: Look around your school or neighborhood – what seems neglected or needs improvement? Talk to members of your community – what do they say is the most urgent problem? Most importantly, what do *you* feel most passionate about? What do *you* find most troubling? The hard part won't be choosing a problem – it will be choosing only one problem at a time. Break bigger issues down into lots of smaller ones. You want something bite-sized and reasonable to focus on.

2



Do your research.

Learn everything you can about the history of the problem in this and other communities, perspectives on the causes and effects of the problem, solutions that have been tried previously, perspectives on their effectiveness, etc.

3



Identify and organize stakeholders.

What do we mean by stakeholders? People who are invested in the issue – politicians, community members, mothers, fathers, teachers, local businesses – it could be anyone! Then reach out and organize all these people: The more people you have on your team who will support your work, the better, and the more power you will have to make a difference.

4



Investigate the community's assets.

What are the strengths of the community? Who are the leaders? Identify assets that the community or individual parties have that can be drawn upon to help you address your issue. Think outside of the box – consider not only individuals and organizations, but physical or geographical resources as well.

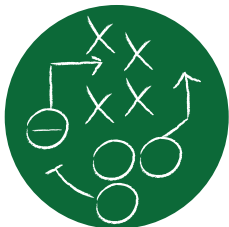
5



Brainstorm solutions, and pick one.

Look for solutions that involve multiple stakeholders, meet common interests, and utilize the community's assets. Assess and evaluate each of these potential solutions. What are the potential obstacles? Is each realistic for you to accomplish? Then, pick the potential solution that best meets your effectiveness and feasibility tests. Set a clear goal for what you will accomplish with your proposed solution, and make sure it is SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-Oriented, and Time-Defined.

6



Create an action plan.

Create a detailed, realistic action plan for implementing your proposed solution. One important piece of advice: for each step in the plan, also identify what might go wrong, how to prevent it from going wrong, and what will happen if it does go wrong.

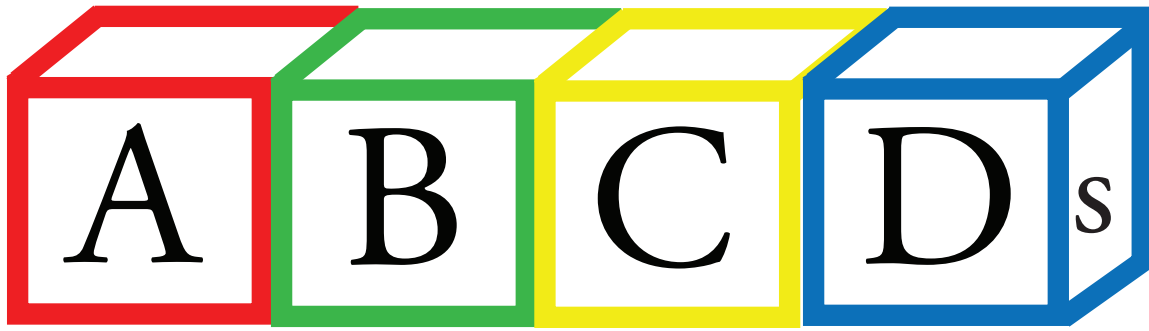
7



Make it happen!

Remember, most problems are hard to solve. Some problems can't be solved. But the more creative, diligent, and resilient you are, the more likely you are to succeed. Don't let yourself get discouraged. And have fun!

We Know Our



How to practice asset-based community development

You may have learned these ABCDs in your last CEP program, but here's a refresher on some pitfalls to avoid when engaging in service, and some ABCD basics so you can keep developing your community from the inside out.

First, remember that while you have a wealth of skills and assets, you should resist the temptation to think of yourself as a “white knight” coming in to tackle all of the community's problems. Instead, look to the community members themselves to identify problems and solutions, and aim to work in solidarity with them. Second, as you're reflecting on your experiences, challenge yourself to think critically and avoid making generalizations. For instance, if you're working in an urban school with a predominantly minority population, instead of asking yourself why the students are so rowdy, ask yourself why many poorer schools are composed mostly of minority students. Asking critical questions will help you ensure you are addressing the root causes of issues and not just their symptoms.

In order to avoid these pitfalls, practice the ABCD framework to harness the collaborative power of the people in a community. As you may know, asset-based community development, the brainchild of two Northwestern University professors, is an approach to sustainable development that identifies and builds upon the strengths of a community to bring about positive social change.

A grassroots method of civic engagement, ABCD can be practiced at any level: by an established community leader or a socially-minded youth like yourself! ABCD is based on the philosophy that it is more positive and empowering to utilize the strengths already present in your community that you may never have thought about, instead of focusing on the deficiencies and resources that your community lacks. You will probably be surprised at the diverse skills and talents you find. This type of development, since it begins internally from within, creates a self-reliant community.

For example, KaBOOM! builds communities through building playgrounds. With its mission of creating a great place to play within walking distance of every child in America, KaBOOM! mobilizes community members to make positive change. Individuals bring their skills together to collaboratively build a playspace, and this win leads to greater and greater community-building acts. The benefit is twofold: the increased well-being to the children for having a place to play, and the empowerment of the community members for succeeding collectively in achieving their goal.

Want to learn more about how to utilize ABCD in your community? Visit <http://www.abcdinstitute.org/>

For more on the pitfalls of service, see: “Community Service Learning: The Promise and the Problem,” <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1319139?seq=1>

Spotlight on Service

Want to make change, but lack the funds? DoSomething grants give money to help you get your idea off the ground.

A youth empowerment organization that calls America's youth to action, DoSomething.org encourages teenagers to pursue social action initiatives they are passionate about. The organization supports involvement in a variety of issues, from animal welfare, to health and fitness, to violence and bullying.

By offering nearly \$2 million in grants and other web-based resources, as well as a host of other programs including DoSomething Volunteer Clubs and Social Action Bootcamps, the organization engages youth through multiple platforms. DoSomething.org offers two types of grants: for start-up projects (Seed) and for continued development (Growth). All of its programming is very interactive, and supports dialogue among teens to spark ideas, as well as between teens and community organizations, political groups, etc.

The website provides a wealth of useful tools for navigating the waters of public service, even if you only have a couple of hours to commit, or need to stay around the neighborhood. At the heart of the organization is the idea that volunteering should be fun because you're taking part in a cause you believe in.

Check out DoSomething.org now and let the ideas flow!



Founded: 1993

Philosophy: Powering offline action

Featured Causes:

- > Animal Welfare
- > Disaster Response And Relief
- > Discrimination
- > Health And Fitness
- > HIV And Sexuality

Alumni Profile



Aria
Fiat

A student at Northwestern University's School of Education and Social Policy, Aria Fiat is a seasoned veteran when it comes to incorporating the many lessons she learned by attending CLI and CivicWeek into her life. As a college student, she "delves much deeper into the subjects that [are] touched upon in CLI, while pairing classroom experience with real world volunteering and internships." One of these subjects is Asset-Based Community Development, which she first learned about in CLI and has since become a mantra for Aria. It is a "hopeful yet realistic outlook" that helps her to "look at people and communities as 'half-full' as opposed to 'half-empty.'" To learn more about Asset-Based Community Development, see page 3.

In 2008, Aria co-founded Supplies for Dreams (www.suppliesfordreams.org), a non-profit that provides basic school supplies and mentoring services to children in the Chicago Public School system. Supplies for

Dreams was borne out of CLI in many ways: not only did CLI provide "essential experience working with people in the non-profit sector" and "expo[sure] to a wider scope of solutions that had been implemented to combat one target issue," but Supplies for Dreams started as an action plan Aria made during CLI. Her tips for other youth interested in starting their own initiative? "The most important thing is to be dedicated and driven, and have faith in what you are working towards. You will undoubtedly encounter many roadblocks, as well as people who will try to push you down or tell you what you're trying to do won't work. Bureaucracy is the worst, and it's everywhere," Fiat says. All you have to do is "remember what you are working towards and why you wanted to do something in the first place – everything will be worth it when you have made a difference in someone's life. You will be able to get through almost any roadblocks you encounter."

How we know her **Civic Leadership Institute: Chicago 2008**

CivicWeek Chicago: Education & Youth Development 2009

Need Funds for your Idea?

Check out our Scholarship and Grant Resource Guide

We have compiled a small sampling of opportunities and resources you can take advantage of to bring your ideas to life. Many organizations recognize youth leaders – that could be you!

President's Volunteer Scholarship Award

Individuals, families and groups receive recognition for completing a certain number of volunteer hours in a one-year period. There are gold, silver and bronze level awards, and the accolades come straight from President Obama!

> <http://www.presidentialserviceawards.gov/>

Prudential Spirit of Community Awards

Awarded to youth in grades 5-12 who have demonstrated commitment and leadership in community service. A lucky 102 win an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington DC to explore the capitol city and share experiences and ideas with the other honorees.

> <http://spirit.prudential.com/view/page/soc>

Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes

Awarded annually to 25 young people ages 8-18 nationwide. Half go to youth who have taken the initiative to make a positive difference in their communities, and the other half go to youth dedicated to eco-sustainability.

> <http://www.barronprize.org>

Youth Service America Grants

YSA has partnered with a variety of organizations to create diverse grant offerings, which target youth with a variety of interests, from service-learning to social entrepreneurship to environmentalism and more.

> <http://www.ysa.org/grants>

Education Research Center of America Community Contribution Scholarship

This one's for the real self-starters, high-schoolers who have developed a unique project on their own. Twenty-five winners receive a \$1,000 scholarship.

> <http://www.studentresearch.org/public/application.html>

Discover Card Scholarship Program

Discover Card awards up to 10 scholarships worth up to \$40,000 each. The scholarship is open to high school freshmen, sophomores and juniors who can demonstrate a commitment to community service and have faced a significant challenge.

> <http://www.discoverfinancial.com/community/scholarship.shtml>

Ecybermission

This competition combines elements of math, science and technology applied to real-world issues for students in grades 6-9 with an in interest in community service. Students in the same region work in teams of 3-4 with an advisor on a specific mission.

> <https://ecybermission.com>

Teen Ink Community Service Award

What do you do to make your community a better place? How has volunteering changed you and the way you view the world? Write an essay describing your experiences and be recognized for all that you do! Winners receive money for their favorite cause and a special Teen Ink prize.

> <http://www.teenink.com/Contests/CommunityC.php>

Want more ideas? Visit www.idealists.org

CEP Updates

CivicWeek in Review: What We Did Over Spring Break...

Chicago



We tutored some tykes.

New York



We beautified some parks.

Washington DC



We spread some Street Sense.

This spring's CivicWeek programs went off without a hitch, with over 75 high school students from across the nation exploring social issues in Chicago, New York and Washington DC. The themes of the five programs, from Law & Social Justice to Public Health to Youth & Education, allowed students to explore in-depth the issues that interested them. Students visited a diverse range of sites across each city, including Congressional offices, community non-profits, advocacy agencies, health clinics and urban schools. While not out exploring the city, students had the opportunity to reflect together on their experiences each night, with open discussion and educational activities facilitated by each site's leaders.

The programs received a wealth of positive feedback from participants and often seemed to drastically change their viewpoints on civic engagement and service. "Immersing ourselves in the communities that we visited helped strengthen the experiences, added to the lessons taught and definitely changed me as a person," said one participant. There are still opportunities to have a life-changing CEP experience this summer. Visit <http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/cep/> to learn more.

CivicWeekend: A Taste of Service in the City

This fall and spring, CEP partnered with the West Suburban Consortium for Academic Excellence (WSCAE) on two CivicWeekend programs for seventh and eighth grade students from the Chicagoland area. The two groups gathered for immersive, social action-packed weekends, one on November 13-14 and one on April 30-May 1. Split into small groups, students in each program participated in direct service projects with homelessness, youth and urban farming sites in various Chicago neighborhoods. In true CEP fashion, participants paired their service experiences with workshops and discussions in the evenings. One activity particularly resonated with both groups of students. Homeless and formerly homeless members of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, a political and advocacy group targeting affordable housing in Illinois, shared their diverse experiences with living in poverty. Words of wisdom from one of the panelists: "the best way to make an impact is through something that you love. Find what you love, do what you love."



CivicWeekend participants master the fine art of team-building in between service projects.

The Civic Education Project combines traditional education and community service to promote civic responsibility among young people, giving them the knowledge, experience, and leadership skills they need to make a positive impact on society.

This edition of *Catalyst* was written and produced by Jasmine Jennings, Amanda Laabs and Jessica Zhao, CEP Public Relations Aides; edited by Katrina Weimholt.

We're At It Again This Summer

The Civic Leadership Institute and Taking Action will be running full force in Baltimore, Chicago and San Francisco this summer. There's still time to join us! Visit <http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/cep/>

Join the Network

Like our Facebook page to stay connected with CEP and with other alumni:

www.facebook.com/CivicEducationProject