

Practical Tips Creating a Culture of Student Service

RECRUITING

- Take advantage of the fact that most high school students need community service hours for some of their classes at school. When you talk about service opportunities, remind them that their time volunteering at a service or event can count toward that.
- Provide community service verification forms up front. We have a pre-made form for KidsGames and regular services that verifies a student's volunteer hours. We make sure students and their parents know these are available.
- Look into local volunteer organizations like [Lion's Heart](#). These organizations exist to help teens connect with opportunities to volunteer. Many students are trying to beef up their college applications with volunteer hours. We partner with Lion's Heart for many of our large events. These students often have little-to-no religious or faith background, but who says they can't help us with parking or running a concession booth? It's a great way to do some sneaky student evangelism while also filling a legitimate need. It also allows us to put our more spiritually mature students into more key roles.
- Utilize your junior high and high school small group leaders. Most holidays or events where we have students serving (things like Easter or Christmas events), our student small group leaders are expected to be leading the charge and recruiting their small group to come along with them.
- Recruit directly from student small groups. Once or twice a year, myself and our children's staff are dialoguing in a more "official" way with student small group leaders about who in their group might be a good fit for kids ministry. More than that, we're challenging them to think about each student in their group, what that student is good at, and how that might fit into serving somewhere at our church (even outside of kids ministry). We often even visit small groups ourselves to talk about it. Our desire is to see every student plugged in somewhere they can use and develop the talents God has given them.

SOCIAL MEDIA

- Constant Instagram content from kids ministry and events is a must. That is where all our students are. We want to display the highlights of our events and services for families to see; but we're also mindful of the fact that there are a lot of students watching. We want to highlight our students who serve in our feed and our stories in a way that creates major FOMO (fear of missing out) for other students.
- Social media shout-outs and comments are a must. Engage with your students on their social media, tag them in things when appropriate. Whether we like it or not, social media is where they're living their lives. Get in the game. Thank and highlight student volunteers on social media often.

PARENT COMMUNICATION

- Don't just talk with students about serving—talk with their parents. Make sure parents know about every service opportunity their student has. The parent is often the ultimate decision-maker and ride-giver, so get their buy-in. Emails and Facebook are great and the mass communication is necessary; but the more you can have personal conversations with parents about getting their students involved as a way to help their kid's faith grow, the more of a return you'll see.
- Catch a student doing something well, and then send their parent a quick text or photo/video. Something as simple as a photo of their student serving along with "You would be so proud of Logan today! He has such a great servant attitude!" goes a long way. Not only are you helping with the parent-student relationship, but you're pretty much guaranteeing that the parent will support the next time you want their student to serve. It also guarantees that they're probably going to share that photo/text with a few of their friends, who in turn are going to want their student to serve as well. Word of mouth is a powerful thing, and people who are proud of their kids share it with the world on a regular basis. Use that to your advantage.

EXPECTATIONS

- Expect more from your students than most people think is realistic. They will rise to meet it. Don't be afraid to set the bar high and to tell them that you are. Give them clear, direct encouragement to smash people's expectations for student behavior and maturity. Make sure to tie that vision to the idea that when they behave in a way people aren't expecting from a student, they're demonstrating just how powerful God's influence on their life and our church is.
- Set the expectation of student service with your student pastors from day one. It is literally in both our junior high and high school director job descriptions that they are involved in leading their students in serving in our kids ministries. It's part of their job to lead their volunteers and students that way, not just a nice bonus effort. When we do large kids events, our children's staff is running the event, and our student staff is running the volunteers (which makes a lot of sense, since it's mostly their students). It's a team effort. We also encourage our student staff to make regular appearances on the weekends, just to encourage their students and support them in the work they're doing.
- Help your students, parents and student volunteers understand that the reason you want them to volunteer in kids ministry isn't because of what you want from them, it's because of what you want for them. Help them see the value that serving has as a faith catalyst in their own lives.
- Don't overlook your youngest volunteers—your junior highers! They may not be capable of too much right now, but if you spend the time investing in their development, in a few years they'll be your star players. Set high

expectations for them as well, treat them like they're important, and be willing to be patient with them. If you write them off when they're in 7th grade and want to help, they're going to write *you* off when they're in 10th grade and now you want them to help.

THANK YOU'S AND COMMUNICATION

- Thank your student volunteers well and often. It's worth a portion of your budget to buy coffee and frozen yogurt gift cards, take students to lunch, and pass out free t-shirts or other gear. Students often get overlooked because many times they're serving in smaller roles. Your program is only ever going to be as good as the people who serve in it—so make sure the best people feel appreciated and valued.
- Students read and respond to text messages. Emails don't work, and good luck getting them to pick up a phone call. Get comfortable doing a lot of your communication over text. Keep in mind that group text messages are fine for some things, but teenagers often consider a group text impersonal and even ignore those. Our children's ministry staff does a lot of copying and pasting the same text over and over to send to our student volunteers so it feels more personal. Students engage with those much more frequently. If you have to send an email, it's wise to also send a text to students, letting them know that you sent it and why it would be in their best interest to take a look.