

Port Discovery Kid-Powered Museum

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Our Service Project was with Port Discovery the New Kid-Powered Museum, sponsored by the Education and Student Service Division. This opportunity to volunteer in downtown Baltimore, provided our students a more global outreach than they usually enjoyed. Students served as mentors, tutors, and docents. They assisted other students from public and independent schools throughout Maryland, in the most effective use of the interactive educational exhibits. Best practices:

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project? "There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in."--Graham Green. The door opened for me to introduce a volunteer program to my students that would engage and inspire them to complete a service-learning project in an atmosphere that would be safe, fun-loving, and friendly. We were invited by the Port Discovery volunteer staff to help make visits to the museum meaningful for younger children. This experience positively impacted the Ashburton students as well as the children they served.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives? The application process to become docents, the implementation of the docent program, and the mentoring and tutoring programs, supported the outcomes of the language arts and science curriculums. Reading - learning about the opportunities provided at the museum. Writing (to inform) - completing the application process Writing (to persuade) - writing a 500-word essay titled "why I should be selected to volunteer". Writing to express personal ideas - focusing on experiences and observations. Science - they used critical thinking when assigned to areas of the museum where experiments in solving practical problems occurred, and (real life) use of the scientific method.

Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project? Students kept logs, journals, and personal schedules. After each volunteer session when we returned to school, we had formal and informal discussions about our work at the museum. We discussed how they could improve their work with students, what it felt like to be on the spot, and how to be well prepared. After the experience, student's submitted written reports.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? From the beginning of the project, those students who signed up to volunteer took a leadership role by completing all paper work needed, attending a personal interview, attending a three-hour orientation, and attending all three training sessions. Students bonded with the staff, children, and parents who worked and visited the museum. Students maintained their weekend schedule to volunteer as junior guides, library assistants, exhibit monitors, and greeters. Some students left with having volunteered up to 350 hours.

Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project? We worked with Port Discovery Museum which partnered with the Enoch Pratt Free Library system, which has a resource center in the museum and provided links with Maryland Public Television, which provided the museum with a television studio workshop.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? Preparation for this project consisted of meeting and planning with representatives of Port Discovery's Volunteer Program. An extensive application process had to be completed including the completion of the following: Student/Parent sign up to volunteer at Port Discovery sheet; Student/Parent sign up sheet to participate in orientation; Scheduling a tour of the Museum; Student volunteer recommendation forms had to be completed for each student volunteering; Applications had to be mailed on time to the volunteer department; Training schedules were assigned; Volunteers had to follow all uniform and grooming guidelines; Reflection questions had to be developed. The students held mock museum sessions to be sure that they understood and that they were comfortable with their roles.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? As a Port Discovery volunteer, students learned to help facilitate programs and exhibits, assist in developing exhibit programs, act as a resource person on the museum, and meet and greet visitors. They learned to be a part of the dedicated Port Discovery team committed to providing a fun environment to visitors of all ages. For themselves they were able to: Demonstrate their commitment to child well-being and community growth; Share their love, knowledge and expertise with others; Develop career-building skills and gain hands-on experience; Satisfy the high school service-learning requirement; Develop leadership abilities; Provide a valuable service to their community.

