

UPPER COLUMBIA ACADEMY'S H.O.P.E. TASKFORCE PROGRAM

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, morale at Upper Columbia Academy in Spangle, Washington, was low, enrollment was declining, and finances looked bleak. After studying the Spirit of Prophecy guidelines for education, conference and academy administrators made several major changes.

One of those changes occurred in the spring of 1993, when the UCA faculty voted unanimously to add community service to the curriculum. They took to heart the Spirit of Prophecy counsel that "Wherever possible, students should . . . do missionary work in the surrounding towns and villages. . . . If a missionary spirit is encouraged, even if it takes some hours from the program of regular study, much of Heaven's blessing will be given" (*Christian Service*, p. 65).

So that every student and faculty member could be involved in community service, the school suspended classes and other activities for six days each year. The school would provide necessary supplies and equipment and, if necessary, rent vans for transportation. But finding enough projects to provide 350-plus people with clearly defined job descriptions, lining up equipment and supplies, and arranging transportation and supervision took more time than anybody imagined.

To clean homes, yards, and cemeteries, paint an inner-city church's mothers' room, and provide craft activities for the mentally ill required more than enthusiasm. It would *cost money*.

The board provided a half-time salary (now three-fourths) and the necessary budget to purchase supplies and rent vans. Linnea Torkelsen, program director, lined up 18 projects for the first H.O.P.E. (Helping Other People Everywhere) Taskforce service day.

Nature of the Projects

The four-hour projects are as varied as life itself. One group may be mucking out a sheep barn while another is in formal attire and serving hors d'oeuvres at a charity fundraiser. Others are checking the inventory at the local food bank or taking Humane Society animals to a nursing home for the elderly to enjoy.

Sometimes, the people helped are close to the school, such as a neighbor or a member of the campus family, but not usually. UCA helps people directly and works with other organizations.

Occasionally, the projects involve overt witnessing, such as going door to door inviting people to attend evangelistic meetings or randomly passing out *Happiness Digest (Steps to Christ)* on street corners.

Because UCA considers community service as central to the school's mission and a vital part of the curriculum, participation is required. Students who miss the regularly scheduled service day have to make up the time.

Several days before the scheduled date, students are invited to sign up for projects that interest them. Currently, they have between 25 to 35 to choose from. Students who do not sign up (only about five percent) are assigned to a project.

Faculty Response

Six years have now gone by since H.O.P.E. Taskforce was initiated. Cheri Horning-Corder is currently Director of Community Service and Communications at UCA. An established program can sometimes lose its focus and passion, especially when the pioneering director turns the reins over to someone new and when some of the original faculty who voted for it are no longer on campus. Nevertheless, H.O.P.E. Taskforce contin-

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At the annual Celebration of Caring, UCA's saxophone quartet, along with nearly 40 other students from the academy, dress in tuxedos and banquet dresses to provide live music, serve elegant hors d'oeuvres, and gift wrap hundreds of purchases. A local upscale store allows local charities to sell tickets to this special event at the beginning of each Christmas shopping season.

ues to thrive. Why?

The faculty members believe in this program. "It changes the students and it changes our relationships with them," says biology teacher Gayle Haeger. "Some of school is books- and campus-directed, but when [students] get out in the community, they see that they really can make a difference in the world. And when we go out to do that together, I'm less of an authority figure and we're more of a team. It gives my relationships with them a whole new dimension."

"Most of the kids don't have a clue

what the world is really like," adds Gary Thayer, UCA chemistry teacher. "This gives them a chance to see the kind of struggles people go through. When they put together 4,000 Thanksgiving food baskets at the Salvation Army, they are astonished at how many people need that kind of help. When they help build houses for Habitat for Humanity, they say, 'Wow! This is just a tiny little house, yet someone will be really happy to live here.' It's good for them."

"This program has been a key factor in turning our school into the strong, dynamic academy it is today," says Principal Larry Marsh. "Morale is high, enrollment continues at record highs and finances are stable."

"We want to do more than give our students information. We want to shape their lifestyle into one of service. As we have sought to follow the Lord's counsel on this, He has blessed us."

Community Feedback

Predictably, the community reaction has been extremely positive.

"I wish the public schools would do something like this!" said the cemetery

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Colorful, animated UCA clowns perform music and frolic with developmentally disabled adults at a local community center.

historian after a H.O.P.E. crew had cleared an overgrown cemetery and won her heart. "This program is wonderful!"

In many cases, witnessing opportunities develop. "I don't care much for the different religions," says the owner/director of Cat Tales Zoological Center for Endangered Cats. "I'm pretty impressed

with the Adventists, though. I used to have a lot of volunteer groups coming through here, but these students are the only ones I'll let come anymore. I know they'll do what they say they'll do, and they'll work hard."

Just as there are students who don't like algebra, for example, and don't think

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"Handmade with love by students at Upper Columbia Academy" read the tags on the feet of 36 lambs sewn and stuffed by UCA students during three H.O.P.E. Taskforce days. The lambs were taken along on a mission trip to Africa, where students gave them to children at a Zimbabwe orphanage.

it should be included in the required curriculum, there are those who fuss about required community service. Most of them, however, respond very positively.

"It helped me feel better about myself and my future."

"It made me appreciate what I have."

"I never knew there were so many organizations out there that really care about people and are so willing to be involved."

"Doing community service has given me a chance to actually see the kinds of things that need to be done in the world. It's helped me want to make a difference in other people's lives and show them there are people who really do care."

"I want to do something like this at home . . . to get something started there."

Conclusion

Christian education is more than adding a Bible class to a student's schedule. H.O.P.E. Taskforce is the strongest reflection of UCA's philosophy that effective, complete Christian education

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A UCA student interacts with a child at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Families.

provides students with the witnessing opportunities and service experiences that will make sharing their faith and helping others a natural, permanent lifestyle. ☞

Torkelsen's book, Who Cares? Written by the original director of H.O.P.E. Taskforce and based on UCA's community-service experiences, it's full of creative service ideas for individuals or groups. To order, call AdventSource at (800) 328-0525; or write to 5040 Prescott Ave., Lincoln, NE 68506; (402) 486-2572 (fax).

If you're interested in learning more about H.O.P.E. Taskforce service, or getting your students involved, read Linnea

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Other Opportunities for Witnessing and Service at UCA

Besides the H.O.P.E. Taskforce program, students have other opportunities for witnessing and service:

- A group goes into Spokane to feed the hungry every Tuesday night.
- Numerous weekly small-group Bible studies meet in faculty homes or in the dorms and community, many with student leaders.
- The Christmas party traditionally hosts as many as 80 disadvantaged children who are paired with students who provide gifts and companionship for the evening.
- "Preaching groups" visit area churches, where several students each take a portion of the sermon.
- This past year, one-third of the student body participated in a mission trip.
- Beginning this year, UCA has introduced innovative junior/senior Bible class options, including a practical one called "Sharing Your Faith."

With all of these programs combined, UCA students and staff donate more than 12,000 hours every year to community service.

UCA students collect a variety of items for the Spokane Food Bank from customers' donations at a local supermarket.