

REALITY COLUMBUS: YOUTH BEYOND THE FREEWAY



PURPOSE:

The purpose of the Reality Columbus: Youth Beyond the Freeway program is to educate students on the issues of local poverty, homelessness and hunger while demonstrating the value of advocating for change through community service and legislative advocacy on local, state and federal poverty initiatives. It serves 5th grade through graduate school students. (fee)

HISTORY:

This program is an outgrowth of the nationally recognized Reality Columbus: Beyond the Freeway program that was originally developed for adults. Teachers, leaders in the community and human service providers had such positive experiences with the adult curriculum that **FIRSTLINK** received many requests to modify the program to meet the needs of youth. The newly developed Youth Beyond the Freeway curriculum encourages youth leadership by exposing them to community service through enhanced school curriculum. Educators utilize the Youth Beyond the Freeway as a part of their classroom. Service learning is a strategy that seeks to promote student learning through experiences with volunteerism or community service.

“I learned so much during our trip. It really put things into perspective. I am going to use my knowledge now to help the problems instead of just ignoring them.”-Jeanette-Hilliard Davidson High School

Reality Columbus: Youth Beyond the Freeway is now entering its eighth year and has influenced the manner in which thousands of central Ohio youth view the issues of poverty, hunger and homelessness. Additionally, these youth have given countless hours of service in addressing the needs of their community. Given this success the Points of Light Foundation has identified Youth Beyond the Freeway as a national “best practices” model for volunteer centers.

DESCRIPTION:

Reality Columbus: Youth Beyond the Freeway represents service learning in its purest form, containing the essential elements of preparation, curricular integration, service activity and reflection. A typical Youth Beyond the Freeway experience begins in the classroom with students reading and performing exercises to help them gain insight to local poverty issues. **FIRSTLINK** provides the written curriculum to teachers for use in the classroom. This curriculum not only contains substantive information on the issues but also engages youth in hands-on experiences. Budget exercises, writing assignments and poverty-simulation activities comprise much of the wrap-around curriculum in conjunction with tasks related to reflective thought.

The educational process continues as students embark on the tour portion of the program. **FIRSTLINK** provides a pre-tour orientation to prepare the students and discuss their understanding of homelessness, hunger and poverty. **FIRSTLINK** arranges tour sites with local organizations that deal in the issues of poverty, homelessness, housing and hunger. Homeless shelters, food pantries, community kitchens, foodbank, settlement houses, nonprofit housing development sites and other human service entities are utilized to illustrate the issues found in the wrap-around curriculum. Tour participants are not only able to visit the actual sites where services are provided but also receive information from service providers, policy experts and service consumers.

Youth Beyond the Freeway has evolved into a comprehensive program that allows educators to utilize the tour in a fashion that best suits the needs of their students.

“Thank you so much for the experience especially the hospitality center! It was fun playing with the children there. I enjoyed watching them play with the bubbles (especially the little girl). I think they were glad we came.”
Jack- Maryland Avenue Elementary, Bexley

Resource for purchase:

- YBTF Action Kit – This Action Kit is a step by step instructional guide for communities to develop community service and educational activities that focus on issues of poverty, hunger and homelessness. You can design a Youth Beyond the Freeway program that will expose young people in your community to their issues in a safe and educational manner. Use the Action Kit to engage local youth in volunteer service that will impact critical concerns.

✓For more information on Reality Columbus:
Youth Beyond the Freeway contact:

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