



aspirations, employable skills, experience with a wide variety of ways of living, and increased well-being. Service-learning is an avenue to build such contexts. As Kielsmeier writes, “Emerging approaches that authentically engage young people as contributing citizens to communities — especially when linked with well-designed learning and youth development content — are a credible structural response to issues of adolescent dissonance and community decline” (Kielsmeier 2005).

Other research on service-learning also affirms that service-learning engages youths academically and civically, and encourages positive character development (Billig 2005). Academically, service-learning students exhibit higher GPAs and enhanced writing and critical-thinking skills (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee 2000). The Minneapolis-based Search Institute has recorded multiple benefits of service-learning, including a reduction in the achievement gap between students of high and low socioeconomic status (Scales and Roehlkepartain 2005). In addition, youth participation in prosocial endeavors is correlated to decreased participation in risky behavior and increased education levels (Eccles and Barber 1999).

### Overview

Service-learning has been proven beneficial for the youths and communities who participate. However, there is still a need for additional data

about the relationship between service-learning and youth-adult transitions.

To examine the hypothesis that service-learning offers the potential to ease the transition to adulthood, as well as to explore other aspects of the transition to adulthood, the National Youth Leadership Council commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct a two-part research project on how young people are making the transition from youth to adulthood, and how service-learning impacts this transition. The project included a nationally representative survey of 3,123 U.S. residents ages 18-28. The survey included young adults with a range of experience providing direct or indirect service: those with service-learning experience (Service-Learning), those with service experience that does not qualify as service-learning (Service Only), and those with no service experience at all (No Service). To explore the service-learning experience more deeply, focus groups were conducted with high school students currently involved in service-learning, as well as with young adults who had previous service-learning experience.

### Service-Learning

In our survey, service-learning was defined as those service experiences that required reflection on the service experience. Service-learning could be part of a class or school experience, or it could happen



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outside of school. Participants classified as Service Only participants did some sort of service but lacked the reflection component. Participants classified as No Service did not take part in any form of service. Overall, the survey revealed that 28 percent of young adults in the United States have had a service-learning experience before the age of 18. Teens and young adults describe service-learning as mutually beneficial to both the community they were helping and themselves. For example, in the focus groups conducted for this project young people described service-learning as:

“Learning more about yourself and the environment around you.”

“Learning about the issues in your community and how you can solve them.”

“Being aware of other people, the environment in your community, and how you can get involved.”

“Chance to learn something new, meet new people, and interact with the community.”

# The Impact of Service-Learning on Transitions to Adulthood continued...

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## Where Do We Find Service-Learning?

### Schools

For young adults who participated in service-learning in school, the school itself plays a role in service participation. Students attending private or parochial schools seem to have the greatest access to service opportunities, with Service-Learning and Service Only participation each reported at 45 percent, and No Service reported at only 10 percent. Public school students have higher access to Service Only participation (57 percent); however, they also reported higher levels of No Service participation (17 percent). Home-schooled youths have the least

access with more than one in five (21 percent) reporting No Service participation but matching public school youths at Service Only participation (57 percent). Home-schooled youths have the least opportunity for service-learning, which was reported in one in five (20 percent) youths.

Student coursework and involvement in other activities are also related to service participation. Students who enrolled in honors courses are more likely to take part in Service Only (58 percent), followed by Service-Learning (33 percent) and No Service (10 percent). Non-honors students are much less likely to do service at all with No Service almost three times as high as the honors students rate (27 percent) and lower Service-Learning participation (22 percent); however, they report just slightly lower Service Only participation (52 percent).

Like their honors student counterparts, special education students are more likely to take part in Service Only (58 percent) but are less likely to do Service-Learning (26 percent) or No Service (17 percent). The students who are not in special education are also most likely to take part in Service Only (56 percent), followed by Service-Learning (29 percent) and No Service (15 percent). Those youths

reporting being very/extremely involved in other school activities were more likely to report doing service; conversely those not involved at all were less likely to report service, as shown in Figure 1.

Eighty-five percent of Service-Learning students participate as part of a class. Service-learning is most often found in social studies (26 percent), art/music/theater (21 percent), and science (19 percent). Service Only participation is less likely to be associated with a class (67 percent). If service is associated with a class, it is most often associated with art/music/theater (18 percent), social studies (13 percent) or vocational (10 percent) courses.

### Community-Based Organizations

A little over one in four youths (26 percent) took part in Service-Learning in a school. The number

Figure 1

	% Took Part in Service	
	Very/Extremely Involved in Activities	Not At All Involved in Activities
Club or organization	97	60
Student government	96	79
Team sports	93	78

Figure 1. Students who are very involved in activities are significantly more likely to participate in service than students who are not involved.

“It’s not  
about me...  
it’s about  
other people.  
How can I help?”

of youths taking part in service-learning in a community-based organization is about half that (12 percent). Youths were about twice as likely to take part in service-learning for an organization if they lived in the city (41 percent) or suburbs (38 percent) compared to their rural counterparts (20 percent). Youths taking part in service-learning within a community-based organization report having higher numbers of adults they could go to if they were in trouble or needed help (7.2 adults) compared to youths who participated in service-learning within a school (5.8 adults). It also seems as if youths participating in service-learning in community organizations were held to higher standards by the adult leaders; 73 percent report that adult leaders

in organizations set high expectations compared to 69 percent of school-based service-learning participants. Those participating in service-learning in an organization were also more likely to design or plan their service project (57 percent vs. 51 percent). Youths participating in service-learning in community organizations also seem to be allowed to customize their experience a little more.

### Why Service?

A school requirement plays a major role in whether or not a youth will have a service experience. According to our survey respondents, half of schools have no requirement for service. Among youths who participated in service projects before age 18, 42 percent (59 percent of Service-Learning and 34 percent of Service Only) said that they were fulfilling a requirement. Interestingly, the top two motivators for service among Service-Learning youths are to fulfill a requirement (59 percent) and to help other people (57 percent), while the two major motivators for Service Only participants are to help other people (52 percent) and to “feel good about myself” (43 percent) (see Figure 2).

Most focus group participants noted that they were not initially enthusiastic with the idea of service-learning. They thought it was “uncool.” Some faced a dilemma between giving their time to service-learning and getting paid for a job.



Photo courtesy of CNCS.

“I was very selfish when I found out I had to do service. I thought ‘I don’t have time for this.’ I dance and I’ve got schoolwork. When I first did it, on my way home I was like, okay it wasn’t what I really thought. It actually changed me. I don’t know if it was that first time, but it definitely changed me. What was that feeling? It’s not about me... it’s about other people. How can I help?”

“Initially I just went in for the credit; that is what pulled me into the program. But then when we started working with the kids, it’s the feeling you get helping somebody.”

As these quotes illustrate, once the youths began participating in service-learning and felt the impact of helping others, their attitudes changed. Many described the feeling as “addictive” and that they had become “passionate” about their programs.

# The Impact of Service-Learning on Transitions to Adulthood continued...

## Service Experience

Service-Learning participants recalled their project experience at a much higher rate than their Service Only peers. On average, Service Only peers did not remember specifics about participation 20 percent of the time, compared to 5 percent of students who participated in service-learning. One of the most striking differences between past participants of Service-Learning and Service Only participants is their assessment of the importance of the project for the group it served; 90 percent of past participants in service-learning believed their work was important to the group they served, while only 65 percent of the Service Only participants expressed this (see Figure 3). The experiences of a Service-Learning participant appear much richer than the Service Only experience. When 14 characteristics of service-learning are examined, on average, service-learning programs contained 5.5 characteristics compared to 2.3 in programs with service only.

Students involved in service-learning regularly participated in their service for longer periods than their Service Only peers (39 percent versus 30 percent for at least three months of involvement with a focus on providing direct services). A majority of service-

**Figure 2**  
Why Did You Participate in Service Projects Before You Were 18 Years Old?

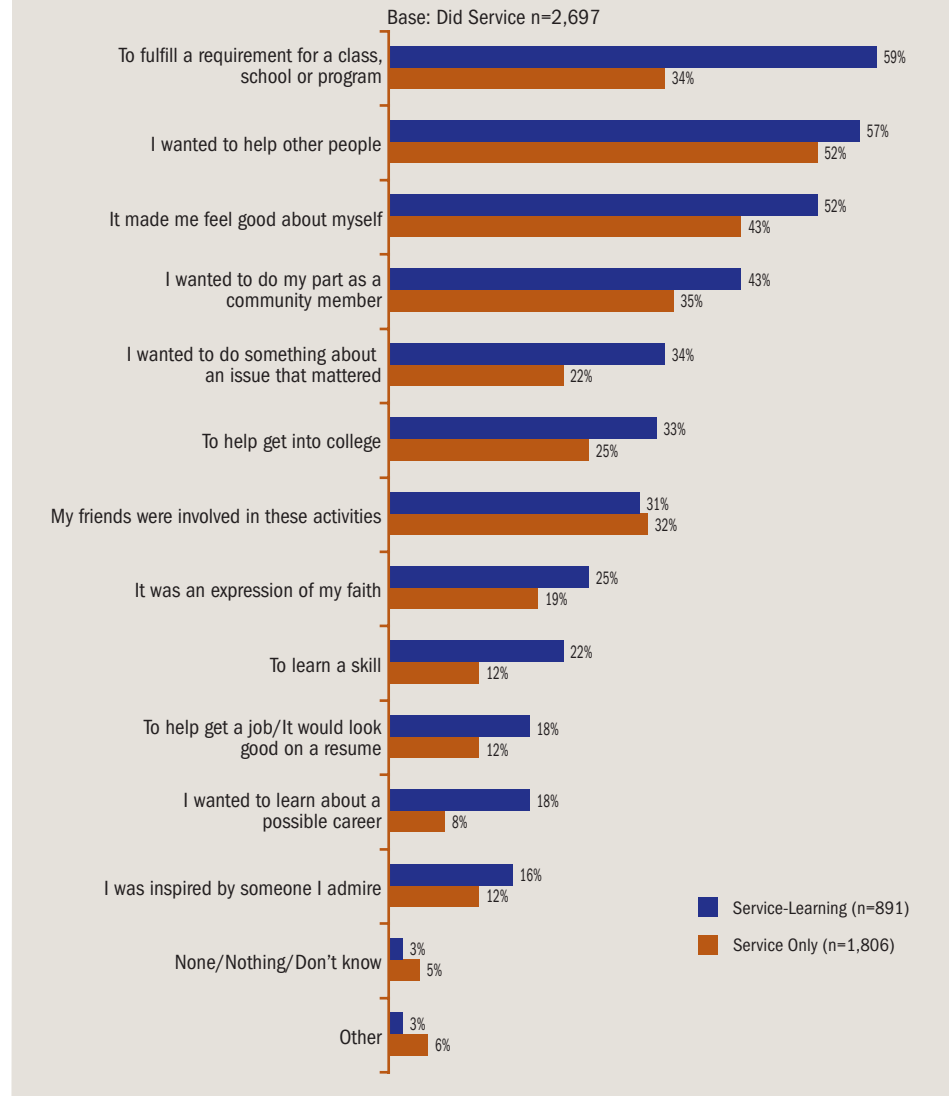


Figure 2. Although a service requirement is a major impetus for young people to engage in service projects, they report a broad range of reasons for participation.

**Figure 3**  
**Presence of Characteristics of Service as Part of School:**  
**Service-Learning vs. Service Only**

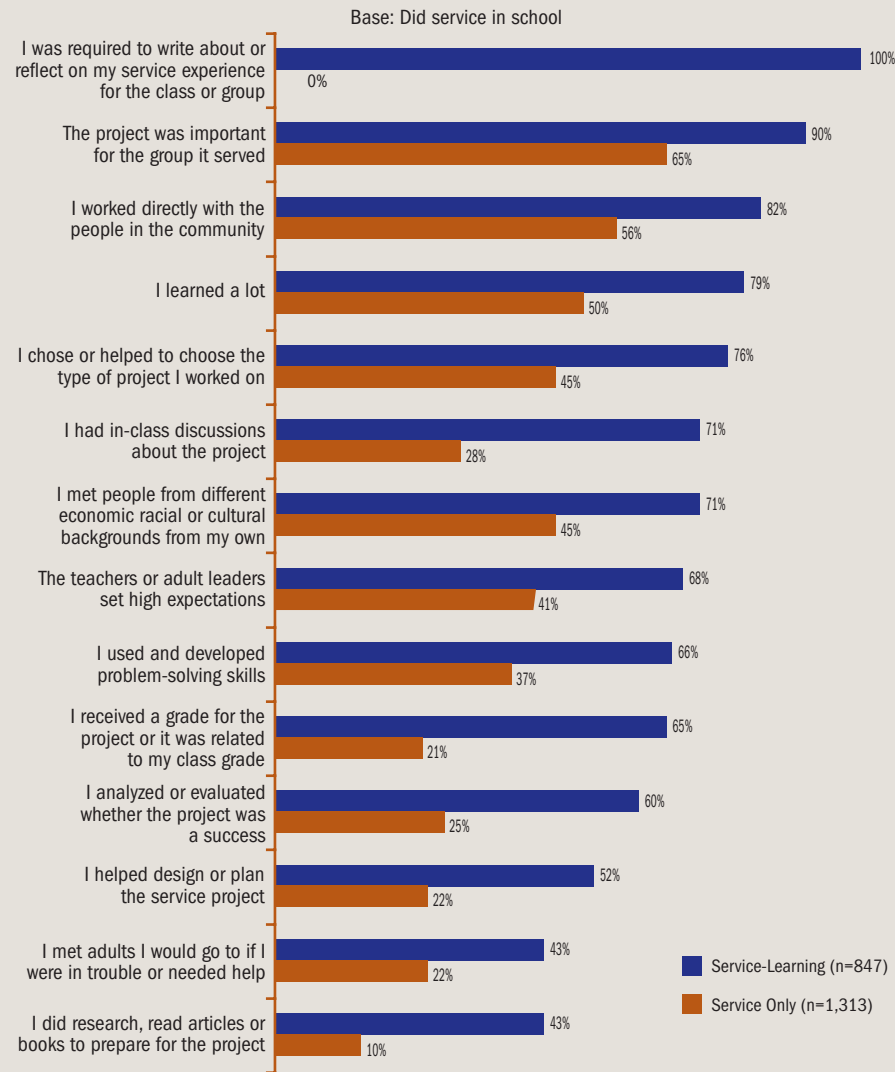


Figure 3. Service-Learning students are significantly more likely than Service Only students to believe that their projects are important to the people they serve.

learning projects revolve around direct services (72 percent) such as:

- Education 18%
- Entertainment 10%
- Health care 10%
- Helping the environment 9%
- Food 7%
- Shelter 6%
- Elder care 4%

A small portion (8 percent) of service-learning projects involved indirect services such as fundraising (5 percent). Direct service activities were more prevalent in Service-Learning than in Service Only, as shown in Figure 4.

When evaluating their service experience, about seven in 10 (69 percent) Service-Learning alumni graded their experience at the A or B level, while only about five

**Figure 4**

	% Direct Service Participation	
	Service-Learning Participants	Service Only Participants
School activity, class requirement	97	74
Religious youth organization	64	50
Another type of youth organization	54	42
Another organization	50	39
Not part of an organization or class	42	37

Figure 4. Service-Learning participants are significantly more likely than Service Only participants to do direct service.

# The Impact of Service-Learning on Transitions to Adulthood continued...



Photo courtesy of CNCS.

in 10 (51 percent) Service Only graded their service experience at that level.

## Service-Learning Experience: Just the Beginning of Being More Active in the Community

### Relationships with Adults

Most respondents, both current students and alumni, felt that they were not taken seriously as teenagers. They had the impression that adults did not give them enough credit or understood what they were truly capable of. They felt their experiences in service-learning improved their relationships with adults.

“When I first started doing this I saw a lot of ageism. Adults were like, ‘Oh, we will help you out,’ or

‘Do you need anything?’ After a while the adults that you work with have a newfound respect for you because they don’t really expect you to be able to do some of the things you do. I feel like my relationship with adults has strengthened.”

Some noted that adults are “afraid” of teenagers and stereotype them as troublemakers. While they lamented this, they understood that perhaps this was because these adults had not had any positive experiences with working with teenagers.

“Adults in their middle age are very impressed when teenagers take initiative to do things because a lot of times they don’t see it in their world. What they see are teenagers getting in trouble.”

More important, young people felt that through their service-learning, they are better able to understand where adults are coming from. They believe their experiences had matured them and provided them with some insight into adults’ points of view. In several cases this was a result of working with children. Here, participants had to take the role as the adult. Their experiences affected their relationships with adults, including their parents and teachers.

“Working with the kids helped me to see how adults were looking at

us. That helped me to mature more, and I am able to connect with adults more now. I was able to see they have to deal with a lot of immature people, and I see how they can put a stereotype on teens.”

As such, respondents felt that service-learning had given them the tools to better deal with situations where there might be a potential conflict with an adult. From their experiences working and being around adults, they perceived that they were more apt to think about what action to take, as opposed to acting first. In fact, one student reported that he felt as though an adult was taking advantage of his service-learning group. He credited his experience with enabling him to confront the issue maturely whereas previously he may have been too afraid or intimidated.

“I think service-learning is definitely a problem-solving tool that really teaches you how to approach a problem differently or in ways you wouldn’t think of. So when you do come into contact with these types of situations you can choose to walk away or solve it differently than the first thing that comes to you.”

Respondents also found that adults involved in service-learning were “enthusiastic” and “appreciated” what they were doing. The youths felt supported by these adults and

looked up to them as role models.

“[An adult I worked with] is so proud of everyone involved, and she makes you want to make a difference and help people because she is so giving. She is a really cool person.”

“I look up to some of the people who I have worked with over the years. My youth director is great. He and his wife are really special, and they motivate you. They become your biggest supporters. You just make these connections with people through the different activities that you do that help your support system.”

### Role Models

Almost all (97 percent) Service-Learning youths had an important positive role model in their life growing up; this varies dramatically from youths with No Service involvement (78 percent), but less so from those involved in Service Only (93 percent). Being involved in any service activity also increased the pool of adults the youths could go to if they were in trouble or needed help from an average of four adults for No Service, to six adults for those participating in service. Students who participated in service-learning reported a higher number of more positive role models, and this was particularly true for educator role models (see Figure 5). Quality of education was also rated more highly, perhaps in part due to the number of adults available to youths if they needed help (quality of education was reported as excellent by those

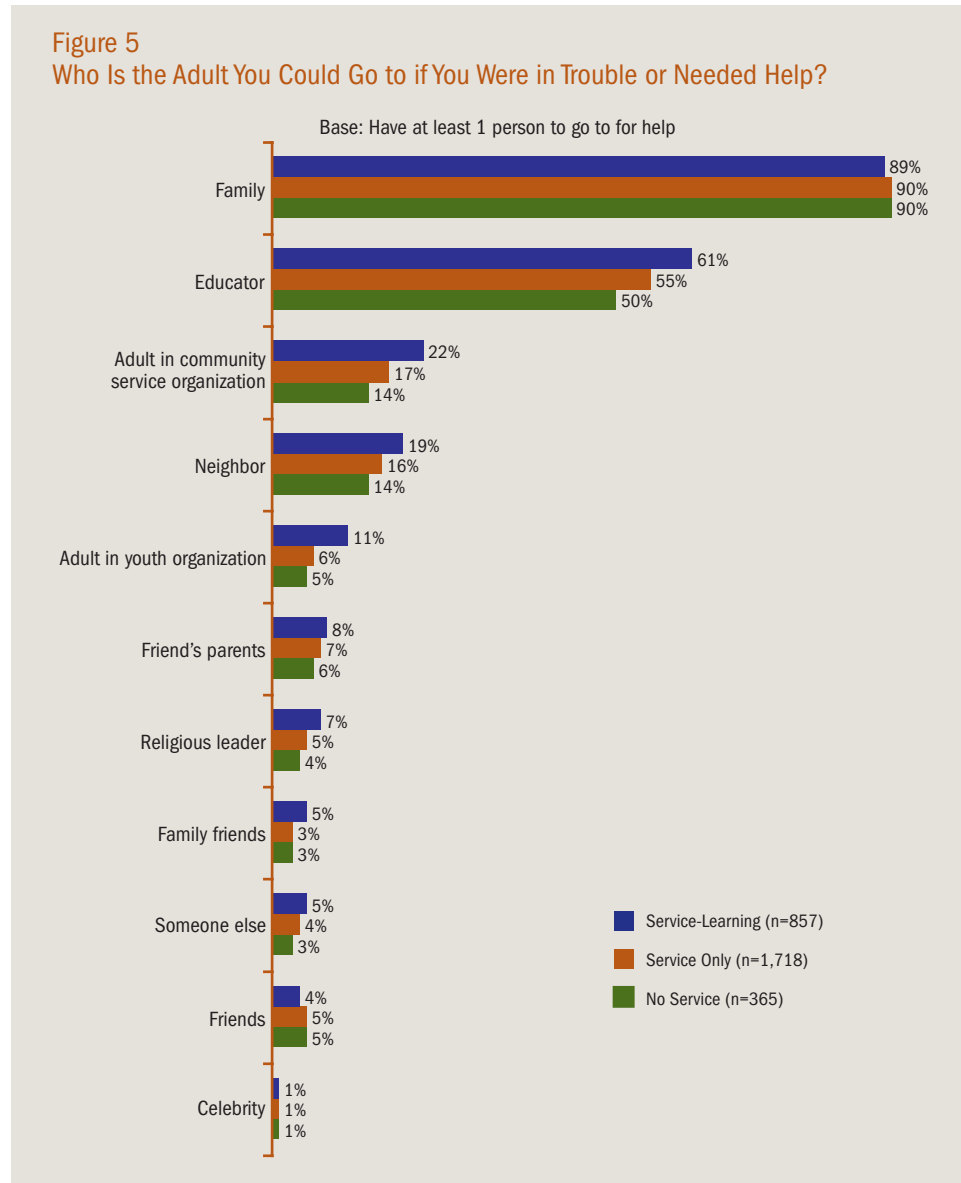
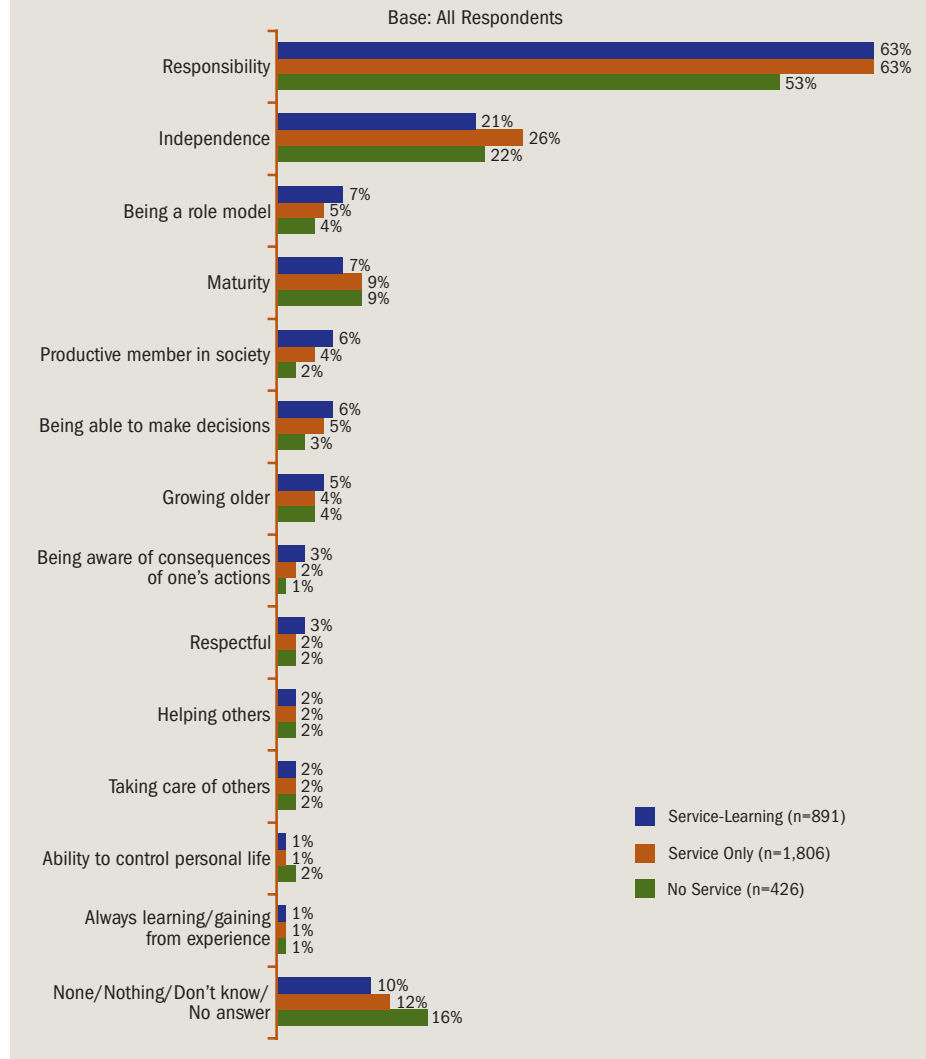


Figure 5. Students who participated in service-learning report having more positive adult role models in their lives than other students do.

# The Impact of Service-Learning on Transitions to Adulthood continued...

**Figure 6**

**What Do You Think it Means to Be an Adult?**



*Figure 6. Respondents overwhelmingly indicate that they consider the markers of adulthood to be internal characteristics rather than external factors.*

with 7.1 adult role models; very good/good, 5.7 adults; fair/poor, 4 adults).

Youths who did not take part in service had fewer adults available to help: 72 percent who performed some service had three or more adults available, while only 42 percent of those who did not perform service had such support.

## What Makes You an Adult?

As previous literature suggests (Arnett 2001), this survey found that being an adult has more to do with subjective markers of maturity rather than external markers, like age, committed lifelong relationships, or children of one's own (see Figure 6).

Responsibility, independence, and maturity are considered markers of adulthood. Past Service-Learning participants rated adult characteristics such as being a role model and being a productive member in society higher than their Service Only peers. Students who participated in service-learning were more likely to somewhat agree/strongly agree that they are adults (Service-Learning alumni, 86 percent; Service Only, 82 percent; No Service, 76 percent). Past service-learning participants also were more likely to perceive that others think of them as adults (Service-Learning, 83 percent;

Making the transition to adulthood is a very complex time, and expectations for the acquisition of new skills and roles are high. The very characteristics reported as making service experiences positive are those that provide youths with tools for this transition.

Service Only, 78 percent; No Service, 67 percent).

When asked to provide an age at which different life transition points occur, young people who had participated in some service felt that at age 21 a person should be considered an adult. This differed a bit for those who had not done any service; they thought most people should be considered adults at age 22.

Most youths in both groups planned to marry at age 26. Interestingly, 13 percent of the No Service people did not plan on marrying compared to 9 percent of their peers who were engaged in some kind of service. The average age for having a child was 27 years for No Service participants and 28 years for service participants. Twenty percent of the No Service group reported not planning to have a child compared to 13 percent of their service peers. Almost one in four (23 percent) of those who did not take part in any service have a child, whereas about one in six (17 percent) youths with service experience have a child. While we understand that marriage and children are traditionally used as indicators of the transition to adulthood, we also recognize that there are multiple types of relationships and family structures that may not be accounted for in this research.

Service participants plan on completing their highest level of education by age 27 and their No



Photo courtesy of CNCS.

Service counterparts plan to finish by about age 25. Four percent of service participants said they did not plan on having a full-time job compared to 12 percent of their No Service peers.

**Service and Transition to Adulthood**  
Making the transition to adulthood is a very complex time, and expectations for the acquisition of new skills and roles are high. The very characteristics reported as making service experiences positive are those that provide youths with tools for this transition. As shown in Figure 7,

# The Impact of Service-Learning on Transitions to Adulthood continued...

three of four Service-Learning participants reported as their top experience making a difference in their community, thereby making their community and their role in the future of their community stronger. Additionally, it helped them become lifelong learners. They acquired strong role models and deeper relationships with adults. They even became aware of skills they did not realize they had before engaging in service.

## Life Arenas Touched by Service-Learning

### Leadership

The focus group participants found themselves in leadership roles through their service-learning programs. These included leading a group of their peers in a particular activity and mentoring younger youths. The service-learning participants valued these leadership roles and felt as though they had helped them to mature and see the importance in being responsible and leading by example.

“Before I was in Fresh Force I didn’t know how to deal with kids really. The more I was used to them I can see that kids are not that hard to deal with as long as you have patience. It showed me that there is a leader in me, that I can be a role model for someone. The more they watch me, the more

Figure 7

### Why Were These Service Experiences Good/Very Good/Excellent?

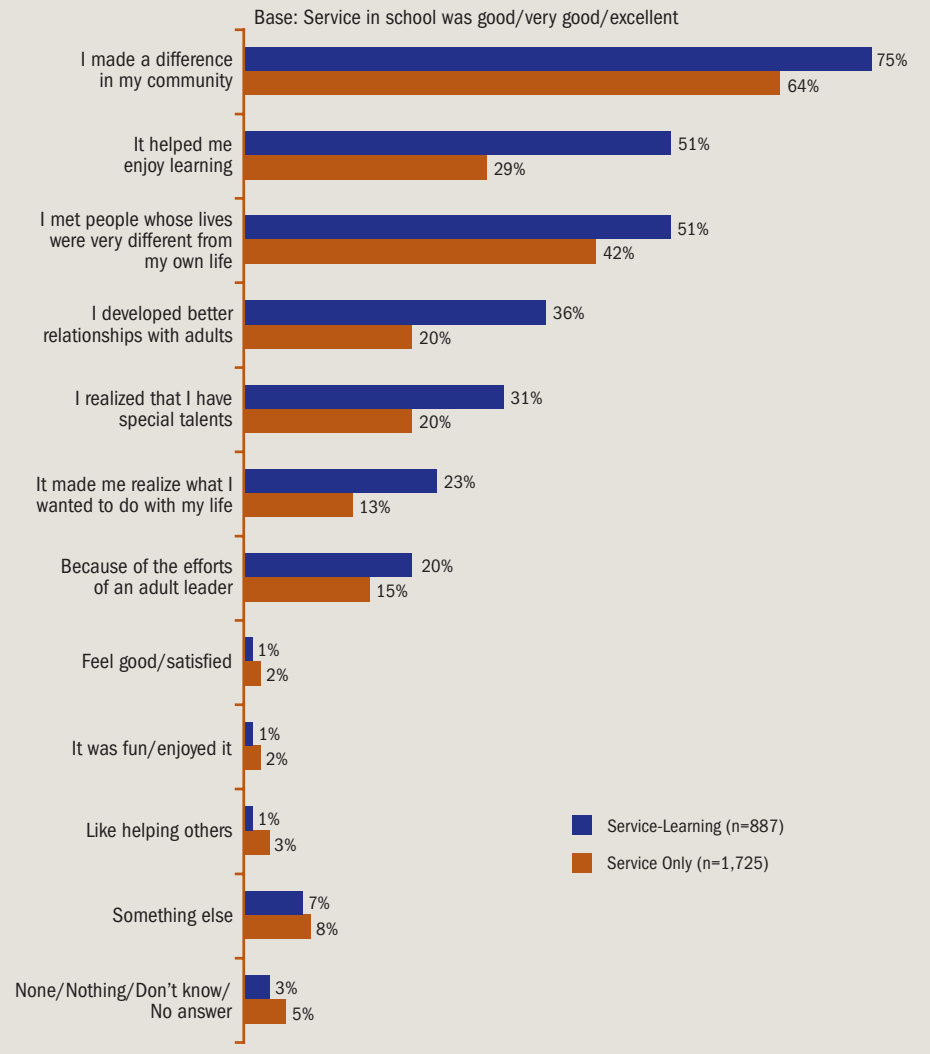


Figure 7. Young people who report their service experiences as being positive describe the many factors that made the experiences good for them.

**Figure 8**  
**During the Past 12 Months, Have You Done the Following Often/Very Often?**

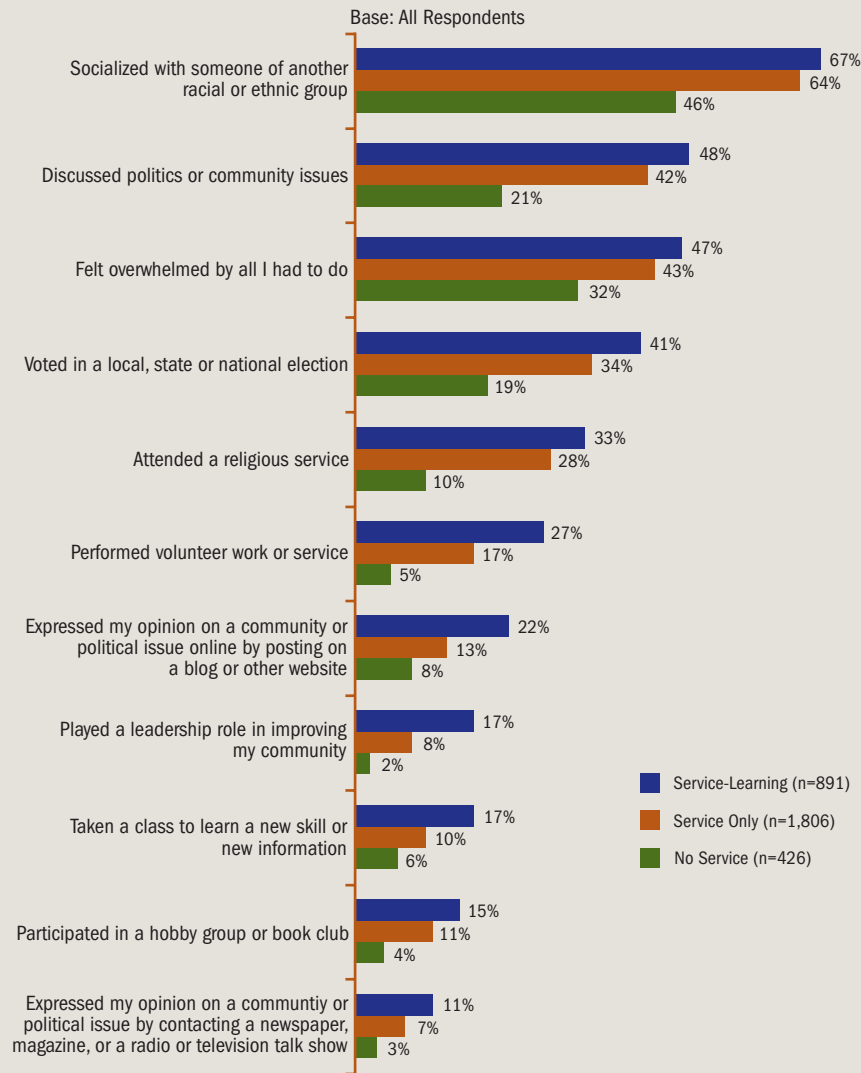


Figure 8. Young people who participate in service are more likely than their peers who don't to be engaged in their communities in a variety of ways.

"I try to do the right thing. That is what I learned, to watch what I do."

This increased leadership role seems to continue beyond the service-learning experience itself. In the 12 months prior to our survey almost one in six (17 percent) past Service-Learning participants report playing a leadership role in improving their community, a level much higher than for Service Only (8 percent) and No Service (2 percent), as shown in Figure 8. A majority (70 percent) of previous Service-Learning participants report that service-learning positively affected their leadership ability; which is almost 20 percent higher than their Service Only peers (see Figure 9).

#### Network/Sense of Community

Focus group participants were very dedicated and connected to their service-learning programs and those they served with, developing strong friendships, even familial bonds. One youth noted that he was able to go to his peers in Fresh Force, a youth-run organization, if he had any type of problem or needed help. It was apparent that this relationship was extremely important to him.

"Before I started with Fresh Force, I didn't know a lot of people in school. When I am at school, and I see people I know from that program I feel like I can ask them for help. If I have a homework problem, or a problem with my family, I can go to them and ask them that question. I don't have to be afraid to say something to them. Especially the leaders in Fresh

# The Impact of Service-Learning on Transitions to Adulthood continued...

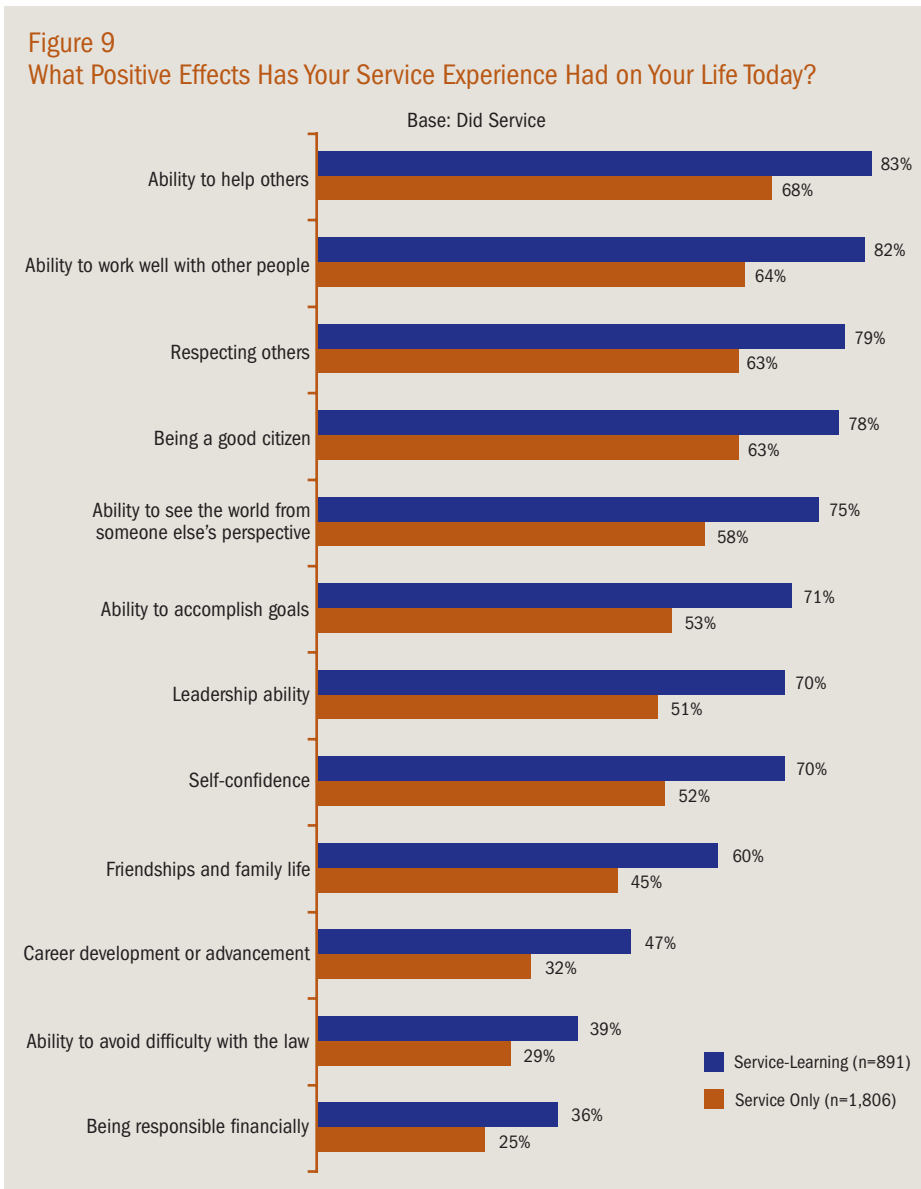


Figure 9. Service-Learning participants report more positive effects of their service experience than do Service Only participants.

Force have helped me with my family. When you talk to someone that is your age that you look up to, it helps you more than when you have someone older than you, and they give you answers that you don't want to hear. But when you talk to a teenager who understands you, he gives you things that you do want to hear, but also things that people should know. I asked one of the leaders how to start a savings account, and he told me how his Mom told him what to do and now I actually have my own savings account. Not just in the program but outside of the program I can depend on him in some sort of way."

## Confidence

Service-learning helped to build confidence in respondents. Through taking on tasks and responsibilities they were able to see themselves grow and noted their own achievements. This was apparent to them in how they dealt with other people, particularly adults. Many noted that they used to be shy, but felt that they had learned how to speak to adults and not be so afraid to do so.

"Last week I went to an interview and I was so afraid and nervous, and the experience I had with service-learning gave me more confidence to talk to the person. When he asked me questions I wasn't afraid to answer anything. I had more confidence."

### Communication

Through working with all different types of people, respondents felt that they had learned to communicate better. This included the ability to both speak as well as to listen. In fact, many noted that they had become more “patient” and this contributed largely to their ability to better communicate with others.

They understood that some individuals may not be as open or accepting of differences. Rather than start a conflict, they would try to use their communication skills in order to make their point and hopefully enlighten those individuals.

“There is something you can learn with just listening to people. I like to work with inner-city children, and they need someone to talk to. Don’t come into the situation with preconceived notions, and don’t underestimate them... if you just stop talking and listen you can learn a lot.”

### Patience and Sensitivity

Prior to participating in service-learning programs that exposed them to individuals different from themselves, some respondents noted that they had not been sensitive to differences such as in age, race, and economic status. Now, they often try to educate their friends and family.

“For me it is learning not to be so self-centered. When my family came here as immigrants, we received a lot of help from the community. So now to be able to give the same thing back, it teaches me to be appreciative of peo-

ple and their willingness to help. To see that there are a lot of people struggling and feel very fortunate.”

During the past 12 months, previous service-learning participants were more likely to have socialized with someone of another racial or ethnic group (see Figure 8). Students who took part in service-learning report more positive effects from their experience on their ability to help others, work well with other people, respect others, and see the world from another’s perspective, when compared to their Service Only counterparts (see Figure 9).

### Academics

Service-learning taught the focus group participants the value of education — that it is not just about sitting in a classroom and getting a particular grade, but rather that the information can be applied to something meaningful and larger. Many felt that they had a greater understanding of how education could help them in the future than they did prior to participating in service-learning. For example, they were able to make the connection between the importance of developing writing and presentation skills. One student noted that she was able to apply something from her math course to building houses in Nicaragua. These lessons were enlightening and gave them a sense of the bigger picture outside of school.

“Before I was doing volunteering, my grades weren’t so important to

When my family came here as immigrants, we received a lot of help from the community. So now to be able to give the same thing back, it teaches me to be appreciative of people and their willingness to help.

me. After I started [service-learning] all my teachers saw a difference in me, the way I talk, the way I act. When I was in class and we had projects, I usually worked with my friends because I thought they would let me get away with things. I found out that it is better when you are doing something important in school to work with others that you don’t know because you are more serious and you worry more about yourself than them.”

“I am understanding why school is important because when I am working on service-learning projects I see

# The Impact of Service-Learning on Transitions to Adulthood continued...

where it is applied, like writing a paper or giving a presentation. I am more inspired to continue doing school work because I see where it is coming in handy, that it has a point.”

“I became much more interested in the history of developing countries. In order to help other countries we need to understand that.”

Some alumni of service-learning programs did feel as though their experiences helped them to identify how they “learned best.” They understood that they may not always absorb information simply by memorization or reading and taking notes. Rather, they need to be more hands-on, have visual aids, or work in groups to fully grasp and retain the information at hand.

Interestingly, some respondents reported that they became so engrossed in their service-learning that they began to fall behind in school and their grades slipped. But they were able to recognize this, and it helped them to establish a balance between their schoolwork and extracurricular activities.

“For me it was different, my grades started to do down because I was missing a lot of school due to all the service-learning. [I] earned that you have to make that balance in your own life. Yes this is my passion, but education is one of my top priorities.”

**Figure 10**  
Are You Very/Extremely Satisfied With Your...?

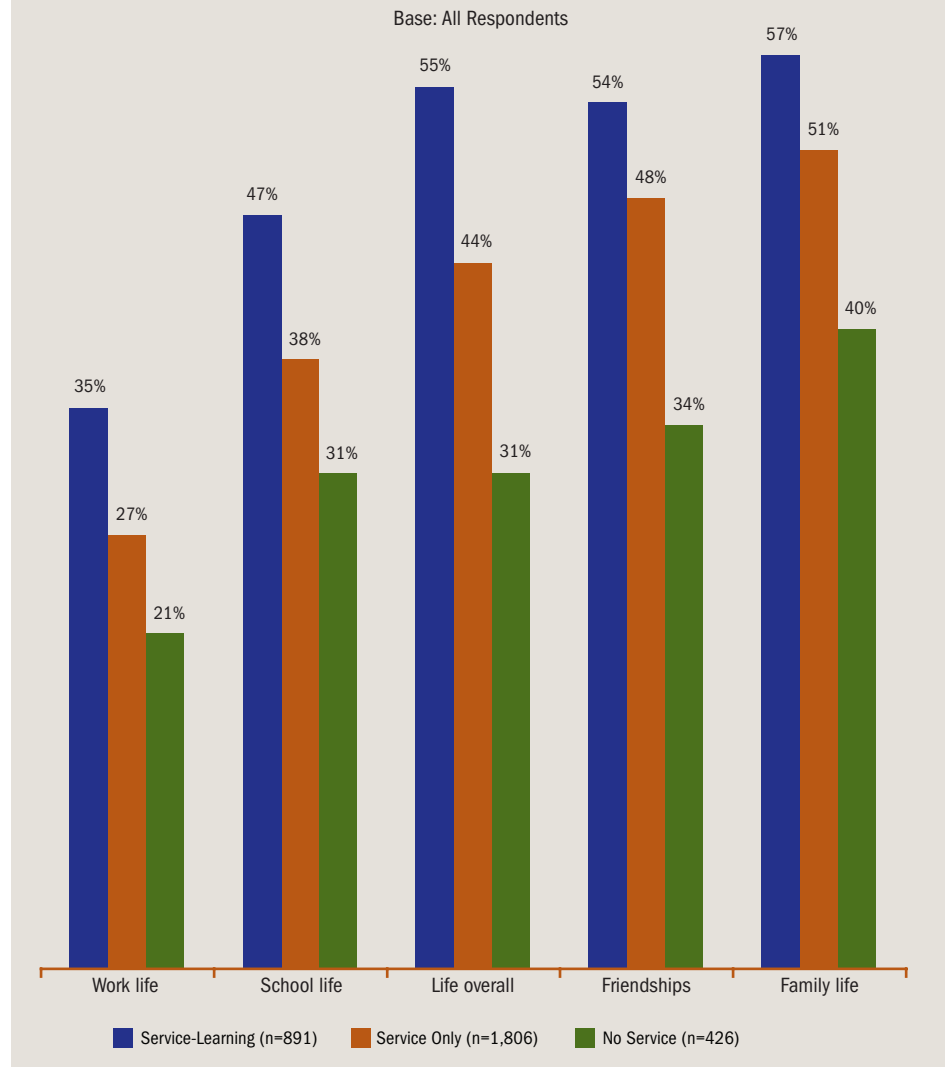
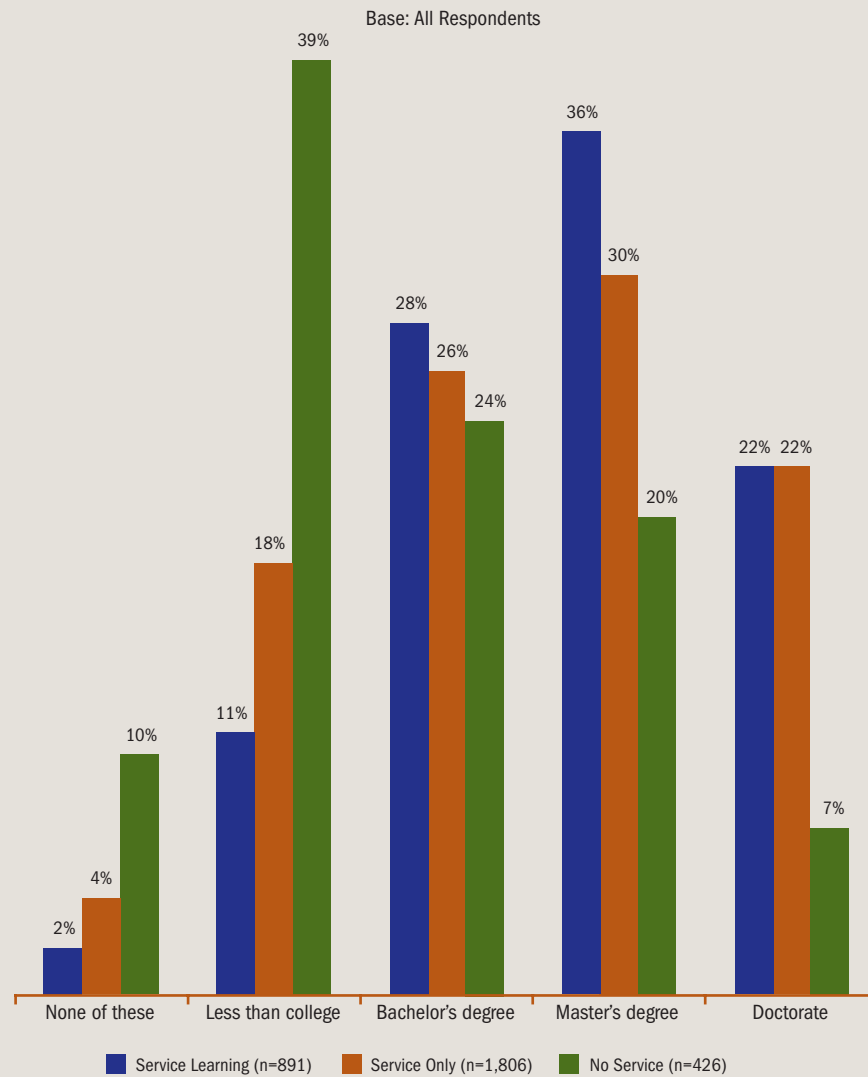


Figure 10. Service-Learning youths report being more satisfied with important aspects of their lives than their Service Only and No Service counterparts.

**Figure 11**  
**What Is the Highest Level of Education You Plan on Achieving?**



*Figure 11. Service participants report higher educational degree aspirations than their peers who do not participate in service.*

Those who took part in service reported higher high school grades. Mostly As were reported by 72 percent of the past Service-Learning participants, 68 percent of the Service Only participants, and 45 percent of No Service participants. Grade reporting is positively correlated with the perceived quality of high school education. Alumni of service-learning were more likely to rate the quality of their education higher; 66 percent gave their schools A's and B's compared to non-service-learning participants, who reported 58 percent A's and B's. Youths who reported being very/extremely satisfied with life rated education quality an A or B (67 percent) versus those somewhat/not at all satisfied with life (44 percent). Young people who participated in service were significantly more likely to report being very or extremely satisfied with not only their school life, but also expressed the same sentiments about other important aspects of their lives — family, friendships, work, and life overall (see Figure 10).

Service-Learning alumni are more educated than Service Only and No Service youths. Sixty-three percent of past participants of service-learning have completed some college compared to 52 percent of Service Only participants and 48 percent of No Service. Not only are Service-Learning alumni more educated and more likely to have educational goals, those goals are higher than their Service Only and No Service

# The Impact of Service-Learning on Transitions to Adulthood continued...

I started thinking  
that I should get  
the most out  
of school so that  
I can use it  
to help  
other people, too.

counterparts. As shown in Figure 11, almost three in five past Service-Learning participants hope to achieve a master's or doctorate degree.

The educational goals that past service participants aspire to are real. Service-Learning (64 percent) and Service Only alumni (63 percent) are most likely to be enrolled in some educational system; their No Service peers (47 percent) have far lower enrollment. Thirty-five percent of Service-Learning participants are currently enrolled in a four-year college, compared with 20 percent of their No Service counter-

parts. Interestingly, if service was a requirement, youths were more likely to be currently enrolled in an educational setting (68 percent versus 55 percent). Those not enrolled in some education system were not only less educated but just over half (52 percent) were not at all/somewhat satisfied with their life.

In the past 12 months, previous Service-Learning participants were more likely to show signs of lifelong learning than their No Service peers by being more likely to often/very often take a class to learn a new skill or information (17 percent versus 6 percent) and participate in a hobby group or book club (15 percent versus 4 percent).

## Career

Service-learning opened participants up to consider various career options for themselves. This included specific careers (e.g., doctor, teacher, etc.) or, in some cases, just a general desire to pursue a profession in which they would help others and make a difference (e.g., Peace Corps, etc.).

"I started thinking of what I would want to do as a job when you have less time to volunteer, when you have to work, what you would want to be doing? For me, I think I would want to be a doctor and go into medicine. You will have to work really hard in school to get there, but how many lives will you

affect if you work hard to get there? I started thinking that I should get the most out of school so that I can use it to help other people, too."

"I want to do humanitarian work. I want to teach. I understand how important education is, and I want to make sure people understand our history and others' history. People who haven't done service-learning don't really know that."

"This has made me want to help other people as a career. I've decided that I would like to be a dance teacher and inspire them to express themselves and then help other people through whatever they have learned from me."

"I initially thought, 'Let's get this 15 hours done and over with.' Now, working with other people, I was thinking I may want to continue this even after I go to college. Maybe have a career in medicine."

Service-Learning alumni (10 percent), especially those who have participated in service-learning within an organization (14 percent) rather than a school (9 percent), are more likely to do community or national service or to volunteer as a full-time activity for an average of 7.1 months. Service-Learning alumni are most likely to report that they plan to continue such involvement within the next five years (39 percent somewhat/very likely) followed by Service Only (25

percent somewhat/very likely) and No Service (19 percent somewhat/very likely).

Past Service-Learning participants report that their experience positively affected their career development or advancement (47 percent) compared to their Service Only peers (32 percent).

### Risk-Taking

The survey showed slight differences in risky behaviors. No Service youths were more likely to use drugs and be arrested, but less likely to receive a speeding ticket (see Figure 12).

### Civic Involvement

Some respondents had participated in service-learning activities which included addressing the government. They attended meetings at the state capitol and spoke with senators about issues such as under-funding in the school system. They felt empowered by these experiences and understood that they did, in fact, have a voice. They learned that if they had an issue they believed was important, there was something they could do about it.

“I think when adults see you in service-learning projects and caring about the community they really notice that. I didn’t think if we called up senators they would want to hear about our opinions. But they were all really interested and excited and got us all these boardrooms to come to. And it was like, ‘Whoa, they really care.’ I think that was cool to see.”

Figure 12  
Have You Ever Done Any of the Following?

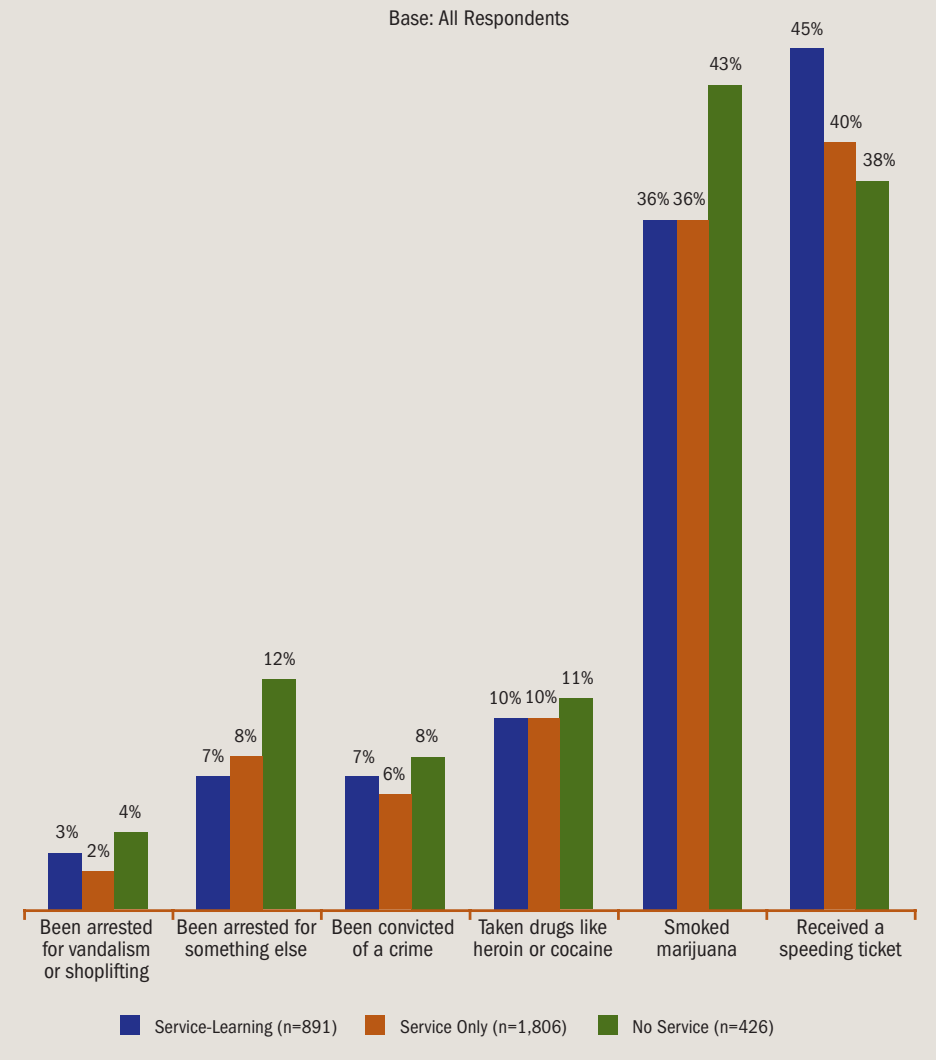


Figure 12. Youths who did not participate in service were slightly more likely than others to engage in risky behaviors.

# The Impact of Service-Learning on Transitions to Adulthood continued...

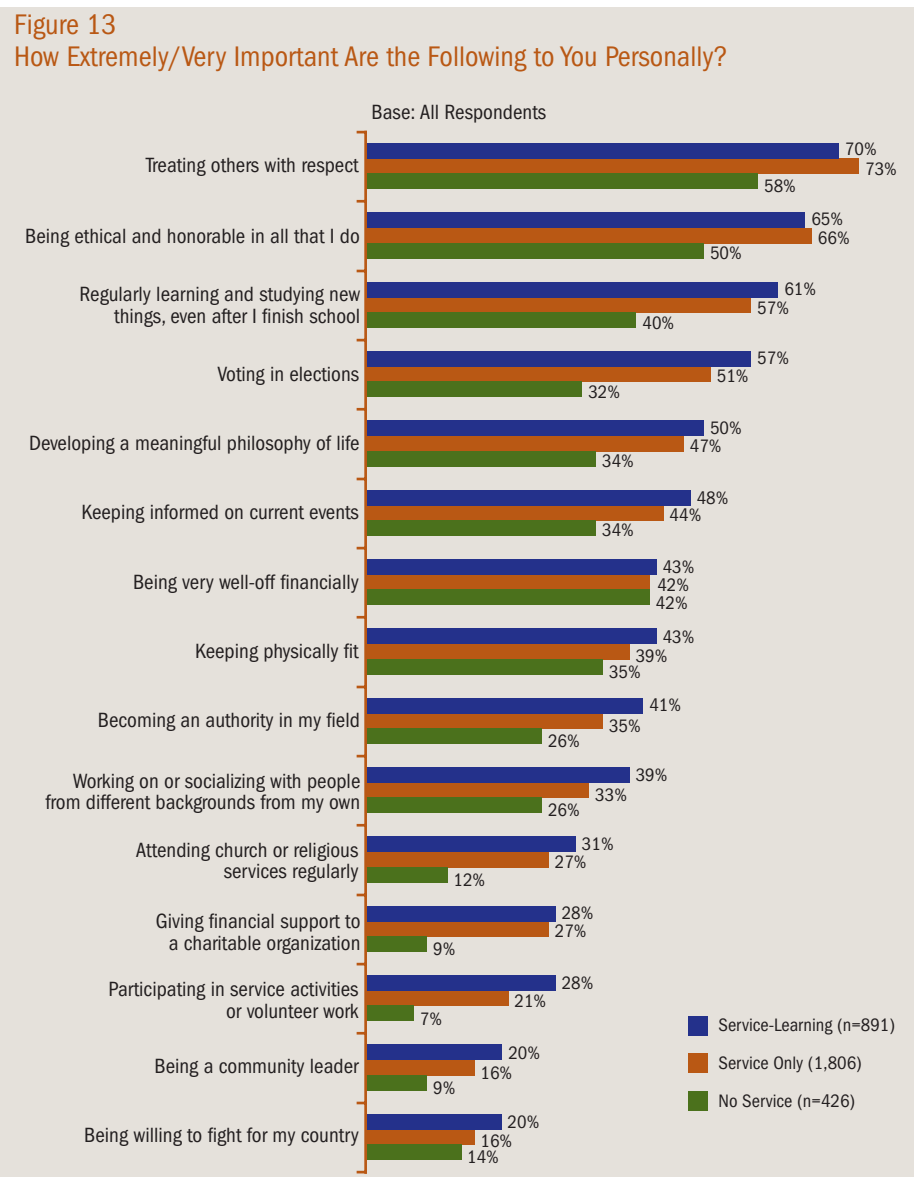


Figure 13. Those who have participated in service report higher levels of civic engagement, being more likely than their No Service counterparts to value voting, keep informed on current events, participate in service in the future, and be a community leader.

As shown in Figures 8 and 9, one of the overarching messages received by about four in five Service-Learning participants (78 percent) was to be a good citizen. Increased civic involvement is apparent in the actions of previous Service-Learning participants in the past 12 months compared to their No Service counterparts. They reported discussing politics or community issues (48 percent versus 21 percent), voting (41 percent versus 19 percent), expressing political issues online (22 percent versus 8 percent), and expressing political issues by contacting a newspaper, magazine, or radio or TV talk show (11 percent versus 3 percent).

Service involvement also has long-term effects on civic engagement. For example, past service-learning participants report that they value voting and being a community leader more highly than Service Only or No Service students (see Figure 13).

## Service-Learning, Communication, and Ethnic Diversity

Focus-group comments suggest that service-learning gives students a context to navigate societal and adult expectations, including negative expectations related to ethnicity or age.

“It’s so hard to do something right when you are constantly portrayed

As a response to the unfortunate reality of racism and ageism, service-learning provides a context to practice strategies for bridging differences and making connections.

as bad. You hardly ever see promotion when minorities do something good. With our group we are really diverse, when we go out people are so surprised because they are not used to see minorities doing well or even having the ambition to do something on an upper scale.”

“When I go to a board meeting, and there is not one other person who looks like me, I try to act more civilized, or proper. I know that if they see a little thing that is wrong with me or if I dress up all ghetto...they will say, ‘Forget about him.’”

“For me, with different people I will talk in a different way or say things in a different way, but you can still portray yourself because yourself is your opinions. But how I portray them is different depending on who my audience is. I try to talk to the people who I am trying to influence.”

Focus group participants with various backgrounds reported that they changed their dress and behavior during their service placements. This code-switching is an opportunity to learn or practice intentional strategies to promote communication and connection. As a response to the unfortunate reality of racism and ageism, service-learning provides a context to practice strategies for bridging differences and making connections.

#### Service/Donating Behavior

Past service-learning participants are more apt to continue volunteering and donating. Service-learning alumni are about six times more

likely to have performed volunteer work in the past 12 months than their peers who did not do any service. When examining donating behaviors in response to two tragedies, Hurricane Katrina and the Asian Tsunami, we found significant differences among the Service-Learning, Service Only, and No Service groups. For Hurricane Katrina, 61 percent of Service-Learning, 51 percent of Service Only, and 35 percent of No Service provided aid. Overall, all groups were more likely to help for Hurricane Katrina than the Asian Tsunami. For both tragedies, most assistance came in the form of donations and collections. Direct service was most often provided by the past Service-Learning participants (8 percent) compared to Service Only (4 percent), and No Service participants (3 percent).

#### Conclusion

The benefits of service-learning to youths and communities are many. Service-learning youths are more politically and socially connected to their communities, both as leaders and as role models for young adults. They understand the importance of lifelong learning and, as a whole, are more educated and have higher aspirations than their peers who did not take part in service. Not only are they more active members of society, they are more satisfied with their current status in life. Many of the important skills learned by service-

# The Impact of Service-Learning on Transitions to Adulthood continued...

learning participants are those that ease the transition into adulthood. By providing youths with the service-learning option, communities are not the only ones to benefit: service-learning assists in the building of happier, more satisfied adults. **G2G**

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