

How to Raise Charitable Children with the *Guide to Giving*: A Philanthropy Curriculum in Preparation for #GivingTuesday

By Heidi Kasevich, Ph.D.
The Nightingale-Bamford School

Community service is often an activity that is tacked on to the daily routine of a school child, with its most popular manifestation in the form of a bake sale to raise money for some charity. “Eat a cupcake for the poor!” decrees the most well-intentioned child. Later, in a lackluster fashion, this same student checks off boxes on high school community service forms to demonstrate that she has fulfilled the school’s required service hours. The *Guide to Giving* (<http://www.givingtuesday.org/guide-to-giving-3/>) aims to assist educators in grades K-12 to confront these issues, revitalize their service programs, and ultimately move from a community service model to a service learning program. While the curriculum is designed to prepare an entire school community for a national day of giving, #GivingTuesday or the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving, many of the lessons can be used at any time of the year. #GivingTuesday was inspired by the core Jewish value of “tikkun olam” or “repairing the world,” and the nine lessons offer educators concrete strategies to engage students in the twin tasks of cultivating a genuine commitment to service and energizing an entire school community around the idea of #GivingTuesday.

Each lesson can be adapted to the needs of various age groups and is created to be taught during co-curricular or advising sessions – with the possibility of expansion into relevant academic programming if scheduling permits. The lessons can also be used as part of a school’s leadership program, provided that such programming is predicated on the idea that leadership encompasses *more* than the acquisition of a specific title or a certain salary. The *Guide to Giving* is rooted in the notion that leadership is a learned behavior that involves motivating and empowering others to make an impact on their communities.

The *Guide to Giving* curriculum begins with an exploration of why *and* how we give, with an emphasis on the way that serving others is part of the fabric of American society. Citizens are engaged individuals who actively work to establish justice and ensure liberty, and no gift is too small to make a difference. A historical spotlight on the *March of Dimes* illustrates this essential point: the scourge of polio was eradicated in this country by contributions made by ordinary citizens who literally mailed in their dimes to the White House. All too often, students equate philanthropy with the very rich who spend just a couple of minutes after dinner signing large checks. Time in class needs to be devoted to exploring the meaning of the word “philanthropy,” which is defined as an application of one’s skills and knowledge to solving community challenges and problems. It involves donating one’s time and talents to raising funds to help support the work of a non-profit organization. Can you make a craft? Offer a yoga class? Organize a walk-a-thon? Give a concert?

These donations of time and talent need to be connected to both an authentic mindset of giving and a genuine commitment to a specific cause. The *Guide to Giving* encourages educators to explore the reciprocal relationship that unites giver with recipient by marrying the *how* with the *why*. Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen offers sage advice to help students understand the differences between fixing, helping, and serving others: “When you help, you see life as weak. When you fix, you see life as broken. When you serve, you see life as whole.” Students can be motivated to approach giving with a spirit of empathy by investigating inspiring stories of individuals or groups who have made a real difference in the world. In fact, the theme song of the *Guide to Giving* is *We are the World*, which was just one of the creative acts that was part of a larger and extremely effective response to the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85.

In order to find a meaningful cause that students can feel truly connected to, the *Guide to Giving* suggests a multi-faceted approach: discussing the basic necessities of life (what it takes to make safe, secure, and strong communities), investigating the idea of privilege in order to raise awareness about ways that students do *and* do not experience privilege in their own lives, referring to the school’s institutional history to select a meaningful cause, or consulting a variety of news sources to explore a certain issue. When embracing a community partner, it is important to discuss ways in which the targeted problem manifests itself at home, in the nation, and in the world; in the digital age, we are all citizens of the world. In order to instruct students about how to research the viability of a potential community partner, educators are encouraged to send students to www.charitynavigator.org to verify that the organization uses its funding wisely and efficiently to help those in need.

The rest of the curriculum is geared towards energizing a school community around the idea of a Day of Giving. Pre-#GivingTuesday sessions include practical advice about how to raise awareness about community partners, empower students to become leaders, launch fundraising activities, and finally, to orchestrate a school-wide event on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving. As the special day draws near, educators are reminded to convey to their students that every donation of time and talent matters and that no gift is too small.

Each session is preceded by a personal reflection that is intimately connected to the theme of that particular lesson; personal questions are designed to open up the mind to the possibilities of learning that are embedded in each segment. For example, when considering *why* we give, students are asked to consider what people in their families do for them every day and what they do for their family members on a regular basis. For the *how*, students are invited, among other things, to think of a time when they were given help by someone but ended up feeling powerless in return. When raising awareness about a specific cause, educators can begin by launching a discussion about the difference between positive and negative attention. Finally, when preparing for #GivingTuesday students are asked to describe the “best birthday ever.” What made it so special? How can these memories be applied to your school preparations for a Day of Giving?

At the Nightingale-Bamford School, the *Guide to Giving* is currently being implemented in grades three, eight, and eleven. One of the most positive consequences of the implementation of this course in a K-12 school is the sense of community that is built around the common endeavor of giving. At Nightingale, we selected the goal of the eradication of poverty as our community cause, with the lower school focusing on hunger, the middle school on illiteracy, and the upper school on homelessness. We chose community partners with which we have an institutional history, including All Soul's Friday Soup Kitchen, the African Dream Academy, and the Women's Refugee Commission. The curriculum has been adapted for the third grade, for instance, by replacing the word "philanthropy" with the phrase "purposeful acts of kindness." Students in all divisions have had their spirits raised by listening to and singing *We are the World*. As Community Service Director Damaris Maclean reports, "In all grades, the students "get" the power of the words. The song clearly sets the tone for the power of every person to make a difference. All ages were amazed to learn that the average contribution of \$40 from individuals around the world added up to millions of dollars sent to Ethiopia to save starving children."