

Service learning in Lutheran schools

International service learning trips

Thoughts, reflections and questions

Be clear on the purpose and focus of the trip

Questions to consider:

- How will this overseas trip help to develop and add to the service learning program in your school?
- Does this overseas trip fit with the values of your local and national service learning programs?
- What does your school want to gain from the trip?
- How can your school contribute to partnerships with overseas organisations?
- What do you want to be the focus of your participation?
- How are you going to incorporate this service learning opportunity into the whole school learning experience?
- Do you have the staff with time and passion to plan and organise an overseas trip? How is this sustainable? How will the staff work with an international organisation to make this easier?

When considering an organisation to work with, consider the following:

- Ensure you have extensive knowledge of the organisation through whom you are working – and this means developing a relationship with it.
- Does the organisation approach its work with the policy of “Nothing about us, without US!”?
- Does the organisation follow a ‘Do no harm’ approach?
- Are you involving students in inclusive development?
- Is sustainability the guiding principle in the approach?
- Does the organisation encourage advocacy by the people?
- Does the organisation participate in ongoing hand-outs and gifts of money?
- Does the organisation introduce students to terminology of respect and which preserves dignity?

Please see www.alws.org.au for further information

When considering a country to serve and learn in:

- Check the Smart Traveller website to determine if travel to the country is advisable and what levels of precautions need to be considered.
- How will sending students to this country meet the vision and mission of your school?
- Is there a link to this country through your church or school history, or will it be a new partnership for your school?
- How can this country be linked to the curriculum and to worship experiences?
- Does this country have a link to the Lutheran Church of Australia or to LEA?
- Do you have people from this country in your community that you could use to advise or help train students?
- Is choosing this country sustainable in the long term (taking into account if a passionate key teacher leaves the school)?

Benefits to Service learning experiences

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There are incredible benefits for teams visiting overseas partner countries. These include:

- Experience of God – students and staff see Christ's love in action through the staff, and meet Jesus in those in need
- Educational – learning beyond what could ever be experienced in a classroom
- Change of world view – students are challenged with what they may think or believe about the world
- Change of heart – poverty touches people in a way that reaches straight to the heart
- Change in understanding of inequality and its causes– students are met with the reality of inequality and injustice and see the difficulty in making real change.

To avoid the danger of 'poverty tourism' to both visitors and the visited, the focus must be on creating a learning opportunity that permeates the whole school community and all people, regardless of their situation, are to be treated with dignity and respect at all times.

Preparation and planning

Preparation and planning is essential. Teaching students before you go is essential.

You will need to consider:

- Ideally, a staff member will have visited the country and programme before students' travel or staff members may choose to go with an organisation who will lead the tour prior to travel.
- Check with the organisation about the number of students you wish to travel. Be realistic with staff numbers and expertise. Large groups can be difficult for some countries to accommodate.
- Liaise with your chosen aid or mission organisation about the purpose of the trip, needs of the community and the itinerary.
- Develop an application process for students and staff (the organisation may have these already for you to use).
- Talk with the travel agent and make all booking and payments on time (the organisation may do this for you).
- Development a payment plan to ensure all money is paid on time (the organisation may do this for you).
- Run a parent and student information session about trip. Include purpose, facts and history about the culture of the country, cultural understandings, how you wish to be involved in the long term, travel requirements, including visas, passports, insurance, vaccinations etc. and give a basic overview of the itinerary.
- Prepare newsletters, what to bring suggestions, tips on culture and customs, basic words and phrases in the overseas language,
- Run training sessions in the lead up to the tour for those travelling.
- Ensure staff members have appropriate First Aid qualifications.
- Ensure all team members know and understand the rules around child protection (and have signed documentation where required), photography in overseas countries,
- Risk assessment to be completed (the organisation should have one of these ready for you to use).
- Medical and Legal documents need to be completed.
- Comprehensive Travel Insurance needs to be taken out for the group.

The organisation your school chooses for an international service learning tour will determine the level of

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coordination required by staff and /or the organisation. Some organisations will coordinate the entire process and staff just implements the training etc. developed by the organisation in their schools. Other organisations will be less able to offer this assistance, and much more work will be required of staff.

Training session for team

All team members must be adequately trained before leaving Australia. To ensure the greatest benefit to students and staff, there needs to be deep and thoughtful learning in many areas, including:

- World poverty issues
- Aid and development issues
- The history of the country
- Current country challenges and events
- Travelling in developing countries
- The history of Christianity in the country
- The current state of Christianity in the country
- Worshipping in developing countries
- About the organisation they are representing

Before a group leaves Australia

- Copies of itinerary, passports, visas, and contact details given to relevant people
- Register with Smart Traveller
- Make sure families have contact details
- Organise management of medications, passports, money, buddy systems, phone communication and so on for while you are on the trip.

The organisation you are travelling with may have all these procedures in place, so open and clear communication with the organisation is vital.

Whole school focus

Ideally, when a school is involved in an overseas service learning opportunity, the whole school community becomes involved – students, teachers, and ancillary staff. The focus of the whole school participation is for everyone in the school community to develop compassion and a heart for people overseas who are in great need. This is not as an ‘add-on’ to school life, but an integral expression of what it means to be a faith-based community.

A whole school focus also provides the opportunity to present a positive image of the Lutheran Church or Lutheran Education Australia by demonstrating faith-driven hands in dynamic service ministry.

Through this learning, students can better understand service and love in action and the need to serve all people as a response to God’s love. Service learning encourages service of other and following the example of Jesus, who came to serve and not be served (Mark 10:45). Through participating in service and learning overseas, the school community can come to see Jesus in everyone in need (Matthew 25).

To maximise the educational benefits to students, they need to have opportunities to learn about the country, its people and the work the team will be doing with the partners of the overseas country. This can occur in lesson

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time along with whole school sessions at assemblies or worship. Once a tour is organised, the school/college should commit to teaching about community development in a way that goes beyond 'helping poor people' to an in-depth understanding about the reasons for poverty and inequality in the world and the need for an integrated approach to development. Your organisation partner may provide resources for these opportunities.

The school will need to consider interesting and creative ways of engaging the community through worship, assemblies, curriculum, staff meetings, newsletter, hand-on experiences and activities.

This is just a basic overview for schools to use as a starting point when considering an overseas service trip.

References

- Australian Lutheran World Service – www.alws.org.au
- LCA Mission International – <http://www.lcamission.org.au/>

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