

## Service Learning at The American School of Warsaw

What is the purpose of education?

In June 2009, the Board of Trustees of the American School of Warsaw approved a strategic plan that institutionalized what had been a long-held educational practice at the school, service learning. Until that time service learning had been the province of well-meaning and enthusiastic teachers who knew the educational value and impact of its methodology. Over many years there were numerous and often haphazard examples of Service Learning activities throughout the school, some which later took root and became school traditions.

The strategic plan established four student-centered, school-wide goals to which all activity would be anchored. They are as follows:

### **The school-wide student-centered goals.**

1. *Our students will be actively engaged in learning, articulating and demonstrating progress towards challenging academic goals.*
2. *Students will recognize and demonstrate that their unique talents and abilities can enrich society.*
3. *Our students will value and develop social, emotional intelligence*
4. *Our students will be responsible world citizens who contribute to the community in mutually meaningful ways*

The service learning pedagogy speaks directly to the above learning aspirations: “*social-emotional learning,*” “*unique talents and abilities,*” “*responsible world citizens,*” “*articulating and demonstrating progress towards academic goals.*”

One of the external strategic goals of the 2009-2012 strategic plan called for ASW to “*embed itself in the community in mutually meaningful ways.*” This was an institutional statement realizing the value of breaking the isolation of an international school and using the community as part of the learning and as a resource to be embraced. The phrase “key partnerships” was employed to communicate the desire to develop relationships with community institutions that would deepen over time and enrich the learning opportunities of our students.

Beginning in the spring of 2010, a position was established to help the school meet that strategic goal to “embed itself in the community in mutually meaningful ways.” The equivalent of one FTE was divided into 60% PK – 8, 20% 9-10 and 20% 11-12. The rationale for the position split was to ensure that the people who were specific to elementary, middle and high schools as well as the IB (International Baccalaureate), promote service learning in those respective areas. The twenty percent 11-12 position was due to the presence of CAS (Creativity, Action, Service) in the IB and our desire is to have CAS be the culminating service learning experience. The fit is perfect. At ASW we work hard to move students away from an “hours” orientation of the CAS requirement, as is often used, to a “leadership-service-learning” orientation. The learning outcomes of CAS and the principles of service learning mesh perfectly. We will challenge CAS students to identify a societal issue, learn about it and design service activities that address the issue, locally or globally.

These staff positions are in place currently and have led to the formation of a mission for Service Learning at ASW that states:

*“Every child, every year they attend ASW, will participate in meaningful Service Learning activities.”*

Additionally, language in our strategic plan states that “key partnerships” will be established to deepen the connection between the school and partnering institutions. Hence, these staff positions help ASW connect meaningfully with the community in both service learning as well as with community connections that lead to service learning.

Over many years, much training and professional development has been undertaken at ASW to further inculcate the principles of service learning in our school. Cathryn Berger Kaye, service learning author and international consultant, has been to ASW and we have sent teachers to Cathryn Berger Kaye’s service learning institutes and workshops at conferences to implement her effective model of service learning. The CEESA region, in which ASW lives, has adopted service learning as an initiative for its member schools. In-school committees have been formed and our service learning coordinator conducts workshops in each division of the school.

Is the purpose of education to be a productive member of society? Is the purpose of education to do what we can to utilize our talents and abilities to improve the lot of humankind? Is the purpose of education to be happy? What combination of cognitive intelligence and social-emotional intelligence will be needed to be successful in the world? The American School of Warsaw believes the answer is all of the above and we believe that service learning is an excellent vehicle in developing the skills necessary to achieve our student-centered goals, and help students answer these questions.

Below is a list of current service related activities across our three schools. Some are service only (S); others are our more desired outcome of service learning (SL)

Elementary School	Middle School	High School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Roots and shoots (S)</li> <li>▪ Cafeteria Staff Recognition (S)</li> <li>▪ Warsaw Children’s Hospice Center (S)</li> <li>▪ Student Council (S)</li> <li>▪ Books and letters for Haiti (SL)</li> <li>▪ Chopin Biography (SL)</li> <li>▪ Peace Police Patrols (SL)</li> <li>▪ Museum of the History of Polish Jews (emerging) (SL)</li> <li>▪ Pre-K ASW Security Guards Recognition (SL)</li> <li>▪ Kindergarten Food Hamper (S)</li> <li>▪ 1<sup>st</sup> grade ASW Staff Directory (S)</li> <li>▪ 2<sup>nd</sup> grade &amp; PK Konstancin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Student Council &amp; Special needs Schools (S)</li> <li>▪ 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> &amp; 8<sup>th</sup> grade Warsaw Volunteer Mission (SL)</li> <li>▪ 6<sup>th</sup> grade KIVA (micro lending) project (SL)</li> <li>▪ 7<sup>th</sup> grade Friendship Quilt (SL)</li> <li>▪ 7<sup>th</sup> grade Botanical Garden (SL)</li> <li>▪ 7<sup>th</sup> grade Animal Cruelty Awareness (SL)</li> <li>▪ 8<sup>th</sup> grade Living History (SL)</li> <li>▪ 8<sup>th</sup> grade Refugee Project (SL)</li> <li>▪ Other isolated student leadership examples involving charity fundraising. (S)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ HS dance troupe (S)</li> <li>▪ Habitat for Humanity (S)</li> <li>▪ Wielka Orkiestra Swiatencznej Pomocy (charity) (S)</li> <li>▪ Race of Hope (S)</li> <li>▪ 9<sup>th</sup> grade Museum of the History of Polish Jews (SL)</li> <li>▪ 10<sup>th</sup> grade Bike path Comp Gov project (SL)</li> <li>▪ HS KARTA, History Meeting House (SL)</li> <li>▪ 10<sup>th</sup> grade Technology class &amp; Special Needs School (SL)</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">and</p> <p>CAS 10 – 12 (SL)</p>

<p>Nursing Home (SL)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2<sup>nd</sup> grade School Campus Beautification (SL)</li> <li>▪ 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Gardening Club (SL)</li> <li>▪ 3<sup>rd</sup> In Our Global Village (SL)</li> <li>▪ 4<sup>th</sup> grade Immigrants Project (SL)</li> <li>▪ 4<sup>th</sup> &amp; 5<sup>th</sup> grade Road Warriors (SL)</li> <li>▪ 5<sup>th</sup> grade Fair Trade Project (SL)</li> <li>▪ 5<sup>th</sup> grade Swallow Project (SL)</li> <li>▪ 5<sup>th</sup> grade Pennies for Peace (SL)</li> <li>▪ 5<sup>th</sup> grade E-waste Awareness (SL)</li> <li>▪ 5<sup>th</sup> grade Lopuszna trip (SL)</li> </ul>		
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### IN-SCHOOL SERVICE LEARNING

In **Pre-K**, students learned about the life cycle and nutritional value of apples. In class, they investigated how apples are grown and demonstrated their knowledge and skills making apple cider and apple pie. The students offered their products to ASW security guards to express appreciation for all the hard work the guards perform every day.

The **2<sup>nd</sup> grade** plant unit aimed to increase students’ understanding of plants and their value to our society. While learning how plants are important for the people and the environment, the second graders decided to take action to beautify their own school community by planting tulip bulbs and other flowers around campus.



In **4<sup>th</sup> grade**, the students partnered with one of our “key partnership” sites, the refugee center in Linin. During their study on immigration, students interviewed immigrants, studied patterns of immigration, designed and answered questions on why people immigrate. ASW students interacted with the refugees, interviewed them, learned from them and developed relationships with them to ease their transition to Poland.



In **5<sup>th</sup> grade**, the students investigated various global issues. The Pennies for Peace activity incorporated service learning directly into the study of the history and geography of that part of the world focusing on Pakistan. The fund-raising activities connected to this project evolved from the reading of the book *Three Cups of Tea* as part of their curriculum. Students put on plays for their class and their parents and publicized the lack of

education among girls in Pakistan around the school.

**5<sup>th</sup> grade** students also learned about the concept of Fair Trade which galvanized them to write local and global confectionary companies urging them to employ fair trade practices. The Cadbury Company responded to the students acknowledging their arguments. Students put on plays and raised the awareness of the community of why purchasing fair trade products prevents exploitation of workers and children

The E-waste issue has been another part of service learning in **5<sup>th</sup> grade**. Based on their research on the mining of the rare metal “coltan” used in the manufacture of electronic products, the fifth graders learned that child labor is often used, exploited and forced into other nefarious activities. They developed a campaign for the school and the community to recycle cell phones which they will donate to a school for blind children in Warsaw which raises their own money by recycling electronic products.



The **7<sup>th</sup> grade** Science class has not only established a relationship with the Warsaw Botanical Gardens, where they learn about organic farming techniques and issues, students also instructed 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students about promoting composting in our school.

In Middle School, each **Advisory group**, what we call team time, was challenged to select a topic, an issue about which the entire middle school could learn, support, rally around and develop service learning activities. They chose animals as their topic and after first learning about the plight of abandoned animals in this urban environment, they designed service projects in support of local animal shelters.

## SERVICE LEARNING with KEY PARTNERS

The above list is an accurate and probably incomplete list of service and service learning activities that occur at the American School of Warsaw. Additionally, and more interestingly, we are developing key partnerships with institutions and agencies in the greater Warsaw area. The intent is to develop sustainable relationships between our school and these community institutions so that our service

learning experiences deepen over time and provide leadership opportunities for our students.

Some examples include the following:

- **Children of the Holocaust: “Living History.”**

In their annual learning on WWII, the eighth graders invite Holocaust and World War II survivors living in Warsaw to our school where they are interviewed by students about their war experiences. The students create a website articulating what they have learned. The interviews are archived so that the survivors’ stories are available to all

current and future ASW students. Thanks to Living History, students learn about WWII through the



ultimate primary resource, participants. They have a greater understanding of life during the war, an appreciation for what their elders experienced and accomplished and the elders are thankful for the archived stories and the knowledge that young people do not take for granted the sacrifices of a former generation. The website allows students globally to also integrate our experience into their studies, wherever they are in the world. Anyone can access the site via this link:  
<https://sites.google.com/a/aswarsaw.org/asw-living-history/2010>.

- **KARTA History Meeting House**

The KARTA History Meeting House is an organization devoted to archiving historical data of life in Poland under Communist rule. ASW Social Studies students have spent time organizing, translating, and digitizing data for KARTA. ASW hosted a History Meeting House photo exhibition open to the public concerning life in Warsaw after World War II. Our students participated in a workshop on propaganda and experienced the use of primary sources (pictures, documents, propaganda posters) provided by the History Meeting House in the study of history. The History Meeting House delegation visited ASW social studies classes and also learned of the interactive approach to teaching history in our school.

- **Refugee Center in Linin**

The cooperation between ASW students and the Chechnya Refugee Centre in Linin has become an important and meaningful service learning practice for ASW High School and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students. Last year, students provided the adult refugees with an opportunity of creating a short movie about their lives in the refugee center, a product that has been used in other venues around town. Interaction among our students and the Chechen, particularly around the instruction of football (soccer) showed the refugees that international young people care about their plight, while assisting them to transition to their new world.

- **Special Needs School in Konstancin**

The Middle School student council and High School CAS students have established a partnership with students from the Special Needs School. Students from IB Psychology as well as Middle School students plan and organize annual Christmas Sweet Jar Food Drive and host their disabled friends during various events. Last spring our student council shared their drumming skills with their peers from Special Need School and enjoyed time together.



Our 10<sup>th</sup> grade Design Technology class recently taught students at the school how to use ASW-donated computers. Our students learned how to design educational video games geared for a special needs population. Furthermore, our library is engaged in a fund raising effort to purchase books to donate to the special needs school as our partnership grows.

- **The Warsaw Botanical Gardens**

This activity is a collaboration among ASW 7<sup>th</sup> grade science students, the Office of Agricultural Affairs, the American U.S. Department of Agriculture Embassy and the Botanical Gardens. The students have created and maintained a local vegetable garden utilizing organic farming techniques. Working with the Botanical Gardens, ASW students learned about biology, organic fertilizers, soil

chemistry, the plight of rural farmers, and the growth and nutritional benefits of plants. ASW students used their harvest in the school cafeteria. The Warsaw Botanical Gardens engages our students to promote their educational gardens initiative.



This plaque, placed at the site and written by the people from the Warsaw Botanical Gardens, commemorates the partnership with our school. The translation, while not exact, reads as follows:

*“This project was initiated by the Office of Agricultural Affairs, Department of Agriculture, US Embassy in cooperation with the American School of Warsaw and the Botanical Gardens – Center for Biological Diversity, Conservation of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Powsin. The American School students have created a local vegetable garden and will watch its growing season. Harvested vegetables and fruits will be consumed in the school cafeteria.*

*In the classroom, students learned about different agricultural systems, such as conventional, integrated, ecological or biodynamic agriculture. While gaining knowledge about various aspects of food production, they become more aware of the problems the farmers face such as water management, biodiversity loss, climate change, environmental pollution, the challenges in developing nations, and many more. Caring for the garden, students learn not only about biology and the growth of plants, but also the nutritional benefits of those plants and their uses. Participants learned the secrets of vegetables and fruits which should be eaten daily and are essential ingredients to a healthy diet.*

*The First Lady of the United States of America, Michelle Obama, and US Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack dedicated 2010 to fight against obesity among children and youth. Gardening promotes physical activity as well as healthy nutrition.”*

- **Warsaw Children Hospice**

Each year Elementary School students become involved in fund-raising activities to support Warsaw Children Hospice, an organization aimed at supporting bereaved adults and children. Our students learn about circumstances that caused young children to end their days at the Hospice Center and participate in a number of activities which allow them to develop leadership skills and demonstrate their compassion and civic engagement in making a difference in the lives of stricken young people.

- **Museum of History of Polish Jews**

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews is a new museum being built in Warsaw. Its mission is to tell the story of the 1,000 year history of Jews in Poland. The American School of Warsaw and the Museum have been working together to preserve the lasting legacy of the thousand year history of Jewish life in Poland. Our students participate in the creation of the Virtual Shtetl project of the museum, in designing an IB Art collaboration called the “Art of Heroism,” and are helping to design and critique museum exhibitions.



- **Warsaw University / Rada Polek / Wola Batorska**

The cooperation with these institutions involves local teachers deepening their pedagogical experience while visiting the American School of Warsaw. ASW faculty share their methods and strategies that are utilized in their classrooms with their Polish colleagues.

Rada Polek brings rural Polish to ASW for three days of observation and conversation with teachers.

Warsaw University sends elementary teacher candidates to our school to learn from ASW teaching methodology. Polish student teachers familiarize themselves with teaching techniques for second language learners. ASW Elementary teachers have spent time at Warsaw University conducting workshops on assessment in elementary instruction.

Wola Batorska is a small school in rural Poland to whom we are connected electronically. Our Computer students spend a day at the school and their students spend a day at ours exchanging different uses of internet communication.

## **CAS: CREATIVITY, ACTION and SERVICE**

To accomplish its stated mission of “*Every child participates in meaningful Service Learning activities each year they attend ASW*” we turn to CAS to accomplish this for IB students in grades eleven and twelve. CAS (Creativity, Action and Service) is a requirement of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program where students are to participate in certain activities that demonstrate creativity, which includes arts and other experiences that involve creative thinking; action which is physical exertion contributing to a healthy lifestyle; and service, which is an unpaid and voluntary exchange that has a learning benefit for the student.

As a result of their CAS experience as a whole, including student reflections, there should be evidence that students have:

- increased their awareness of their own strengths and areas for growth
- undertaken new challenges
- planned and initiated activities
- worked collaboratively with others
- shown perseverance and commitment in their activities
- engaged with issues of global importance

- considered the ethical implications of their actions
- developed new skills

In our mind, the above eight outcomes in the IB Diploma Program CAS requirement speak to the principles of service learning. Often viewed as an accumulation of hours in Creativity, Action and Service, we seek to engage students in leadership and in learning about issues of self and others for the benefit of humankind. Incorporating all good principles and practices of service learning into the CAS component of IB will transform CAS into the leadership development aspect of the IB for which it was initially intended.

The American School of Warsaw, beginning in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, will challenge all students in grades 10, 11 and 12<sup>th</sup> grade to design activities that combine learning with service while meeting the above CAS outcomes. This is exciting work.

An example of that is the Art of Heroism. ASW's IB Art students combined with other Polish students in Warsaw to learn about the theme of heroism developed by the Museum of History of Polish Jews. Their task was to design an Art showing with the Theme "The Art of Heroism."

### **DATABASE and JOURNAL RECORDS**

Another key ingredient of our efforts as a result of dedicated staff to Service Learning is the creation of ASW's Service Learning Data Base, a place where all updated records of contacts, curricular connections, community connections, CAS connections are kept and updated regularly. This is important for our internal efficiency and is essential to remind everyone of the amount of service learning currently in place and in process, and raise and maintain awareness. Categorizing and keeping records of our service learning activities has been very helpful. For example:

Of the 98 entries in the Service Learning/Community Connection database:

- 49 are Community Connections that are not specifically tied to the curriculum
- 31 are Service Learning experiences specifically tied to the curriculum
- 18 are related to Creativity, Action, Service (CAS), a required aspect of the IB Diploma

Additionally, weekly journal entries chronicle all activities that are connecting students to the community and incorporates service into the curriculum; this serves to keep everybody "in the loop" and helps generate ideas and activities related to service learning.

Respectfully submitted

Tony Gerlicz  
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