

12 Take-Aways from Awesome Kids Changing the World for the Better

The initiatives highlighted in this section bring out key lessons that can be generalized across diverse projects. Here are some of our important take-aways:

1. Partner with a successful non-profit organization so they can offer their expertise on organizational elements like fundraising, donating, communication, and rallying volunteers.
2. Start with what you love. When combined with activities kids enjoy, from basketball to chess, baking cookies or creating art, outreach efforts will stick longer and more meaningfully.
3. Listen humbly. Don't assume that your idea to "help beneficiaries" is what others need. You may start with one idea for making a difference, but through effective communication, entailing humble listening, you may emerge with a completely different – and more effective, more needed – initiative.
4. Let it sink in. When sharing information with children about serious global needs, from hunger to disaster relief, don't jump right in with solutions. Honor the problem-solving abilities of children and let the issues sink in to their consciousness, then allow some time and space for them to come up with solutions and initiatives. This could take a few minutes, or overnight – ask them to sleep on it, to think about it for a day, then continue the conversation. You can help guide their thinking not by offering answers, but instead, by asking "driving questions" which help explore challenging issues more meaningfully and profoundly.

5. Set fundraising goals in small, manageable chunks. The primary objective for young children's engagement is rarely the amount of money raised; rather it is the long-term connection, service and learning that comes out of a project. Groups that sought pennies or a single dollar often emerged with the most funds, largely because the buy-in was whole-hearted from their community.
6. Service, when integrated into academics, makes the learning stick. Aiming to make a difference in the world, and integrating research, implementation and outreach into math, science, social studies, reading and writing provides an ideal vehicle for high-quality Project-Based Learning.
7. Kids are more resilient than we often give them credit for. Those children who walked longer than they ever had before, or who carried heavy bottles of water across the field, or skipped a meal, or slept in a box to raise awareness on the plight of the homeless, came out stronger and more committed to causes that went beyond their own desires, demonstrating that a little hardship (with their parents' blessing) can have a powerful effect.
8. Start with tangible gifts and causes. Just like having a home, elementary-aged children can relate to going to school, playing, and eating. So, for early outreach efforts, collect items like school supplies, sports equipment, backpacks and shoes that enable other kids to enjoy these basic rights; then donate through a trusted organization.
9. Children who are given space to make mistakes, set ambitious goals then revise them, and commit to serving a cause for a longer period than one school project with a deadline, often emerge from high school with a clear mission and purpose for their lives,

including clarity on future studies and careers, as well as healthier inter-personal relationships.

10. When processing the learning from a project, go beyond the material aspects. Yes, discuss the donation and logistics and learn from the experience to organize an even stronger initiative next time; but don't miss out on discussing the intangibles: what virtues or qualities you needed to summon, like empathy, patience, flexibility and responsibility; how your perspective may have changed over the course of the effort, and what you will continue to work on beyond the project.
11. Working together for a cause builds friendships, breaks social barriers.
12. Think of the effort like a compound-interest earning bank account: the children who start early will realize the greatest long-term gains and the benefits of their "investment" -- of time, energy, courage and material resources. At first the small steps may not feel like much, but with consistent, sustained exertion the impact may seem surprising, and significant.