



Council of Michigan Foundations K-12 Education in Philanthropy Project

In what appear to be times of abundance in America, there is an unprecedented and troubling undercurrent in our culture – a lack of understanding of the lifeline that connects individual acts of service and our common welfare. Unselfishness as a principle of action has diminished as a distinctive feature of our national character. The creative tension between individualism and voluntary community responsibility that helps define America is unbalanced.

It has not always been so. The honor rolls of diverse American institutions memorialize the selfless acts and ongoing service of committed citizens – individuals dedicated to creating a better tomorrow for all. Citizen engagement is the “Great American Way” which makes it possible for commerce, democracy, and social life to flourish.

Today, that spirit is being reinvented by a remarkable educational undertaking in the State of Michigan. Three years ago, The Council of Michigan Foundations created the K-12 Education in Philanthropy Project (EPP) whose mission *seeks to perpetuate a civil society by the education of children about the independent sector, and to inspire their commitment to private citizen action intended for the common good.*

The project seeks nothing less than the education of this generation of schoolchildren in the principles of philanthropy – giving, serving, and taking action for the common good. The project is unique in four powerful ways:

- It expands the traditional concept of philanthropy (financial giving) to include volunteerism (the giving of time and talent to help others), and private citizen action (the acknowledgement of individual leadership outside of government of the great civic innovations in our culture)
- It mobilizes the great change agents of American life; children
- It has created an academic foundation for teaching young people to fulfill their highest potential through esteemable acts of generosity and
- It educates children about the value of the independent sector, which comprises 13 percent of the American economy, yet is virtually ignored in classrooms and public life that focus solely on government and commerce.

The EPP has discovered a national hunger for its work. With primary support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and other national foundations, the project has exceeded every operational goal in each year of its existence. School principals e-mail the Project to ask if they might send teams of teachers to the professional development. Educational

leaders from emerging democracies are requesting the lesson plans. A recent White House Conference on Philanthropy recognized this new Project. The Girl Scouts have developed a national patch based on the curriculum.

Working within the school curriculum, working with practicing teachers, the Project has identified what children should know about the critical role of giving and serving in our society-deep democracy. The Project uniquely brings together the formal educational system and the formal philanthropic system to intentionally transmit this tradition to the next generation.

At a time when key traditions important to our way of life are crumbling, the project can infuse traditional and vital American values in children who might not otherwise encounter such noble ideas. As Pamela McIntosh, a Detroit, Michigan kindergarten teacher, put it: “It is often said that history repeats itself. Perhaps by teaching the good and unselfish acts of mankind, we may steer youth toward repeating the positive aspects of our history”.