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**School Practitioner
Listserv**

**A Weekly Community of Practice Network
for Sharing and Interchange**



December 22, 2014

Special Times and All Year Long:
***Natural Opportunities to Help Others &
Promote Social-Emotional Development***
About What's Coming in January

Happy Holidays and Best Wishes for 2015 from the staff of the Center

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**Please forward this to a few colleagues you think might be interested.
The more who join, the more we are likely to receive to share.**

**For those who have been forwarded this and want to be part of
the weekly exchange, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

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Special Times and All Year Long

Natural Opportunities to Help Others & Promote Social-Emotional Development

The holiday season presents a special opportunity for students and schools to reach out and help others. And the effort represents a range of activities that can be pursued all year long as natural opportunities for promoting healthy development.

Here are a small sample that can be adapted by schools now and throughout the year.

(1) “Highland Acres Elementary School's third graders are making this holiday season about more than themselves. Students are raising money in a unique way to help other children in the community who may not be able to celebrate the holidays this year. The third grade class has been working all week to finish this holiday project. Students created two art pieces, wrote letters and radio advertisements promoting the idea. The teacher combined the class' holiday project with art, marketing, writing, and life skills, and came up with a brilliant idea: sell students' artwork on the internet and use the profits to buy gifts for kids who are in the hospital during Christmas. These student created pieces of artwork are available online in an online gallery for the paintings and the prints.”

<http://www.kfyrtv.com/story/23982584/students-use-art-to-spread-christmas-cheer>

(2) “Students at Greenwood Elementary School in Brookeville perform in a group called the Teen Angel Project Jr., or TAPjr. They sing and dance for sick kids, wounded veterans and nursing home residents. The audition process includes writing an essay about why you want to be in the group. (There’s also a TAP for high school students.)”

http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/kidspost/busy-kids-take-time-to-help-others/2014/01/02/79e7e9b6-70bc-11e3-8b3f-b1666705ca3b_story.html

(3) “High School Teacher Cadets ‘adopted’ 32 new teachers at Northwoods Middle School and surprised them with teacher supply gift baskets and thank-you notes with meaningful and inspiring quotes about teaching. The cadets collected school supply items and created 32 gift baskets. They then personally wrote 32 thank-you cards with educational quotes that meant something to them. ‘These cadets aspire to be teachers and have learned that your first year may be full of surprises,’ said the Teacher Cadet Faculty Sponsor. ‘They wanted to surprise these teachers to show them thanks for their hard work.’”

<http://www.moultrienews.com/article/20131215/MN06/131219851/1007>

(4) “Southern Boulevard School students believe, they dream and they HOPE, and this past week they participated in HOPE Week and gave HOPE to others in need. The Principal introduced students to HOPE Week — Helping Others Persevere & Excel — during a recent assembly and discussed what it means to go without the necessities of life and the importance of helping others. Over the course of the week, children from all grade levels completed several service projects.

>Kindergartners made weekend meals for children who participate in the free-lunch program;

- >first-graders constructed baby-care kits for babies in need;
- >second- graders hand-knitted Project Linus blankets for area children
- >third graders created holiday gift boxes for families in need.

All materials were assembled by the children and included a personal handwritten note to the receiving child.”

http://www.nj.com/independentpress/index.ssf/2014/11/sharing_hope_southern_boulevard.html

Using Natural Opportunities Throughout the Year

While the holidays bring special opportunities to demonstrate caring and for helping others, the essence of the above examples can become part of a school/district culture all year long. In general, those concerned with promoting social-emotional learning need to place greater emphasis on strategies that can expand and capitalize on natural opportunities at schools. Increasing a school’s focus on natural opportunities for personal and social growth requires advocacy, planning, and building the capacity of school staff. At most schools, student support professionals represent natural leaders for pursuing all this. As a starting point, such staff can form a small work group dedicated to moving the agenda forward.

For more on this see the following resource:

- >*Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning and MH*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/naturalopportunities.pdf>

The document (1) outlines a range of natural opportunities, (2) highlights key principles underlying efforts to use such opportunities, and (3) suggests who might take the lead in developing strategies for capitalizing on them.

Listserv Participants

Help others by sharing your ideas about natural opportunities.

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Coming soon

January 3 – the monthly electronic newsletter (ENEWS) will be sent out

January 8 – watch for the launch of the 2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports

January 12, 19, 26 – the next editions of the Practitioners’ Community of Practice Listserv

... and much more

Please share relevant resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences! Send to ltaylor@ucla.edu

Note: Responses come only to the Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA for possible inclusion in the next week's message.

We also post a broad range of issues and responses to the *Net Exchange* on our website at

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm>

and to *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

For Recent Previous Postings, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>