

A Helping Hand

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Perry Service Learning (PSL) is a senior only elective class that is provided at Perry High School, which focuses on active learning. For instance, rather than sitting in a classroom all day, students are expected to engage in social activities through service and education. Such activities include sponsored events, and the PSL program will help support student-driven projects, like the 9/11 Memorial Service event and the Holiday Food Drive.

Now, in particular to sponsored events, there is no specific process for planning and deciding. Instead, in terms of planning for events, "...we try to run everything past the student advisory board, which typically meets once a month for one hour after school. That's also [a time] where students can bring ideas to us about events they would like to see," says Mr. Soeder. In addition, there are required resources provided to make such events happen. A very important resource is grants, PSL this year has been provided a grant by Youth Service America of \$19,500, to fund PSL's three major national service events: September 11th, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and Global Youth Service Day. "...We've been doing it historically every year since 2005," Mr. Soeder states.

Although money is quite an important factor to pay for setting expenses, the main requirement is students. "It's really student-led there, so a lot of it happens throughout the advisory board. So talking about the events coming up and who will take on committee roles and leadership roles through there. So, students have to want it. We don't assign anything," Mrs. Trentanelli says. Students are needed for every aspect, which can be quite difficult, as there's only so much time in a day and days in a week. PSL doesn't aim to be a strain in their life, so there must be a schedule, if there are no students to attend the event cannot go on. "So many

guys are so involved, they're not just a member of one club or one organization. They wear lots of hats on top of their life outside school and on top of work responsibilities and friendship they're cultivating. So I think one of the biggest obstacles is students only have twenty-four hours in a day, and we don't want to tax anybody too much, but it's hard for students, in some cases, to make that commitment just because they're so busy," claims Mrs. Trentanelli. This class utilizes leadership and assertive skills, students are treated as adults and are expected to behave and perform at a higher level. With the purpose of students engaging with their surroundings to make a difference and "create leadership positions for students and PSL to learn how to plan and implement, and be resilient when it comes to planning these events," states Mrs. Trentanelli.

One of the national events, as mentioned, is the 9/11 Day of Service, where PSL students gather together to celebrate in remembrance for an entire week, by leading numerous service projects. PSL obtained grant funding from Mott Foundation, AmeriCorps, as well as training and support from Youth Service America. PSL had also joined with more than twenty nonprofit organizations and eighty individuals to help take action and improve the community: Perry Recreation, Footprints Center for Autism, The Perry Center, Karpos, Salvation Army Learning Zone, Madison Senior Center, Thriving Threads, Forbes House, Sparks Specialized Services, Congress, an Joyce's office, Project Hope for the Homeless, Perry Elementary School, Perry Middle School, Perry Library, Broadmoor, United Way of Lake County, PHS Green Team, PSL Kitchen, Pirate Power Packs, and Seniors Helping Seniors. This year to start the week off, a veterans' pancake breakfast was held on September 9th, sponsored by Perry Service Learning and Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) organization. In addition, the Perry American Legion connected with the PSL students by briefing them on service expectations and

honoring more than 1,000 veteran graves at the Perry Cemetery by removing and replacing tattered flags. The students also traveled to the Lake Erie Bluffs participating in a beach clean up, and they also joined Mrs. Perry and Mrs. Pietra-Freeman's middle school classes to harvest vegetables from the garden. All 140 lbs. of potatoes, sweet potatoes, and cabbage were donated to the Perry Center of Lake County. Lastly, the Perry Fall Festival, a Sheetz's sponsored event and the PSL class served over 150 hours at the event ("Perry Service Learning"). The idea of participating in the Perry Fall Festival became a "bit of a transition from Shantytown, which was a one night event to more of a...awareness week. Multiple events over the course of five days," explains Mr Soeder.

Not only does PSL participate in national events, they also regularly hold occasional day-to-day events and donations. For instance, there is the Holiday Food Drive, the PSL Kitchen, A Walk in Their Shoes, Advisory board nights, holding sports clinics at Perry Rec., and teaching elementary lessons. Shantytown, an event previously discussed, is a community-based project that was "developed and participated in to raise awareness and promote change" ("Special Programs"). It was first inspired after students attended a Cincinnati workshop, and noticed the rate of homelessness. The annual overnight experience allowed students to "engage in dialog with individuals who had experienced homelessness while engaging in activities designed to break down stereotypes" ("Sponsored Programs"). Another service project is Seniors Helping Seniors (SHS), which is sponsored by X Press Printing Service, Inc. The SHS program was founded by two PSL students in 2007, wanting "to connect high school seniors with senior citizens in the Perry area in need of support and friendship" ("Seniors Helping Seniors"). Students involved in SHS visit the homes of senior citizens located in the Perry area who apply for assistance. The students attempt to improve their elderly residents' living conditions by assisting in everyday

activities: like reading mail for the visually impaired and running for the physically impaired; grocery shopping, recycling drop-offs, etc,. They'd also assist in repairs, and maintenance: cleaning, painting, trash removal, removing/installing window screens, light bulb replacements, etc ("Seniors Helping Seniors").

PSL also offers extra volunteering opportunities, all that is required is a bit of will-power and communication. For instance, going onto the Perry Service Learning website and clicking on the extra volunteer opportunities - make sure the label is the correct year - currently there is nothing provided on the site, so it's best to check in with Mrs. Trentanelli and Mr. Soeder, along with the latest PSL students. In addition, all extra services are sponsored by local organizations, primarily Perry High School itself ("Extra Volunteer Opportunities").

There are also donation sponsorship opportunities, whereas 25 dollars is level bronze, where the individual receives a PSL sponsorship certificate of appreciation and a shoutout on both PSL Facebook and PSL Twitter. Silver level is a \$50 donation, receiving both previously stated awards along with a listing of their company name on the monthly PSL e-newsletter and PSL webpage with link. A \$100 donation is gold level, again awarding all previous premiums, as well as, their company name on a PSL shirt, and link on both e-newsletter and website. Platinum is reacted with a \$250 donation, where the individual receives an additional logo on the t-shirt, e-newsletter, and website. Lastly, diamond is a \$500 donation, where sponsorship is one of PSL's student run programs ("Sponsorships").

In summary, Perry Service Learning is a very rewarding experience; however, it must be kept in mind that it can be quite rigorous, so it's best to ensure that any considering participant is aware. Although, the expectation and responsibilities shouldn't be the reason to overlook the class, as it benefits the students in communication, professionalism, enlightenment, community

involvement, relationship building, and so much more. Entertain the possibilities of joining something bigger than oneself, contact Mr. Soeder and Mrs. Trentenelli, speak to current/former students, and even peruse their PSL website, and decide if PSL is best to benefit you.

Works Cited

- “Extra Volunteer Opportunities.” *Perry Service Learning*,
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