

**The American School in London**

# **Community Opportunities**

**Pilot Program for the High School**

**2010-11**

*ALS 29/1/22*

# The ASL Community Opportunities Pilot Program

2010-11

## Every week at ASL:

107 students

20 faculty / staff coaches

11 partner organizations.

## Current Programs:

- **Doorstep Homeless Families Project**

ASL has been working with Doorstep for many years on one-off and individual fundraisers and drives. This project allows our students to build relationships with Doorstep's clients and staff, to spend time with them and hear their stories. The aim is to create a book containing recipes from client families, together with their stories. The group meets once a week to cook recipes together and to talk. The book is being funded in part by an ASL Parent Community Association Community Connections grant and will be sold at Sainsbury's. **(10 students)**

*"The most valuable part was meeting the families...because each had a story. This project showed me the close proximity of people with different incomes in London. It was awesome!"*

*"I loved meeting all of the people. They all came from different places and they were all so kind. This project made me see that people in the local community all have very different backgrounds and stories. The mothers we met influenced me. They had hard lives, but they still did so much for their kids."*

*"I really loved learning new cultures. The way I see the local community changed a lot, I never thought that so close to my house people that needed so much help lived.... It was amazing and I loved it!"*

- **Kilburn Park School**

Building on a long-standing relationship, this project has been designed to meet a specific need: a student-produced newspaper. ASL's HS Journalism teacher and Standard advisor now leads a team of 8 ASL students and some 12 KPS pupils in the creation and publication of Kilburn Park Shouts Out! Issue one was published in December 2010. **(8 students)**

*"I have been able to form a completely different perspective."*

- **The Winchester Project**

ASL's partnership with The Winch has blossomed into one of our most popular and fruitful, partly due to the creation of the SWISH fundraising event in 2010 by 2 ASL students. Current projects are intentionally small to match the number of children in the after-school program, but take place two days a week. Many QK students use the Winch. **(6 students)**.

*"It was incredibly rewarding to immerse myself into a community that I was unfamiliar with."*

- **St John's Hospice**

This project has evolved as the partnership between the two organizations has strengthened. The hospice can only deal with small numbers of ASL students, so it was not offered to new students in Season 2. 9 students have continued and visit regularly, both to meet clients through Day Services and to hear from medical professionals and expert service providers. **(9 students)**

*"I realized how important it is to meet others in your community. I think ASL should push this service opportunity as it can change people's lives."*

*"The most valuable aspect was meeting people I otherwise wouldn't have. It made me realize how much I didn't know.... It really helped me view the community differently and also made me feel more grateful."*

*"I was surprised when I was talking to one of the visitors because she was so extremely happy to be where she was even though she knew she was there to die. The lady that we talked with gave us some advice; to live life happy always, and I think she knows what she's talking about! I'm looking forward to the second part of the hospice community opportunity for the second term."*

- **Whizz Kidz**

In the first season HS students worked with LS students on the Blue Peter Go-Cardz appeal: making Christmas cards to be sold in Tesco's to raise money for mobility equipment and training for children with disabilities. All students met Ashley, who works full-time with Whizz Kidz, and Summer, who is one of the Whizz Kidz Ambassadors. In Season 2 HS students are planning an awareness raiser involving wheelchair use at school, and looking ahead to the 2012 Paralympics. **(10 students)**

*"I really enjoyed working with the Lower School because I love the children. I think it's important to instill more open-mindedness at a young age. I hadn't really thought about handicap access in the community before working with Whizz Kidz. After our first meeting I went walking down St John's Wood High Street and realized someone in a wheelchair wouldn't be able to go into all the shops... I was surprised by what Summer's mother said, that you get used to having to go round to where the bins are to get into a building."*

- **Westminster Refugee Consortium**

The most logistically challenging of all current projects, however ASL students and their coaches have maintained the momentum of this project and are determined to complete it. Their task is to create a new website for the Refugee Consortium. This

involves both building the website and creating the content by interviewing families and hearing their stories. Students also held a RefuTea fundraiser in December to support the UK Refugee Council. **(7 students)**

*“It has opened my eyes to this side of life had has spurred me onto continue my work because it became apparent that these type of organizations rely so much on help from not only internal but external resources and people.”*

- **Solace Women’s Aid**

A new project and partnership for Season 2, although SWA has been a partner for the Family Community Service Day for several years. Our aim is to establish an after-school homework club for young people who live at one of the Solace shelters. Logistics are challenging, not least because of the considerable distances some young people have to travel, however we are trying hard to make this work. ASL students have received an in-depth briefing on issues surrounding domestic violence and child protection. **(10 students)**

*“I think it has raised the awareness of domestic violence amongst ASL students. More importantly by delivering a DV workshop and having the opportunity to meet the young people we work with they can see that DV transcends gender, class and ethnicity”* (ASL faculty member)

- **QK Green Cities**

Green Cities aims to strengthen and extend links between our schools through shared projects. Students are currently designing and building a solar-powered cell to provide hot water for the animal husbandry unit at QK. In future they plan to explore other environmental issues in both schools, particularly with reference to the global Eco Schools program. **(6 students)**

*“My favorite part was creating friendships and finding an alliance between ASL and QK”*

*“I loved getting to know QK students and being able to form my own opinions on the school.”*

- **Right to Play**

ASL is Right to Play’s first UK partner school. Over 10 weeks 2 RTP experts are training a cohort of ASL students to be Right to Play coaches, equipping them with the knowledge and expertise to use sport and play activities to teach life skills. This brings ASL into a network of 15,000 coaches around the world, and opens up opportunities for new partnerships with schools both in the UK and overseas. **(25 students)**

*“I was really engaged in the games we played. Each one related to something important in life”*

*“There are simple things that can change the world, and by teaching people these games you can spread awareness.”*

- **St John’s Wood Adventure Playground**

The playground is London’s oldest. It is right in our neighborhood and serves young people across the local community. ASL students work with the Director to develop arts, crafts, sport and play projects. **(8 students)**

*“The most valuable part was seeing how well the kids responded to attention and care in their development. I’ve always lived here, but this gave me my first significant opportunity to do something about it... It’s really sad having to leave!”*

*“It made me think of lots of the other things that are near here that many people don’t know about.... I had lots of fun! I would definitely recommend it to anyone!”*

*“Meeting the kids and getting to just have fun with them. It didn’t feel like an obligation, I wanted to do it. It made me appreciate what I may take for granted in my life... I enjoyed it so much. Thank you for the opportunity. I can’t wait for Season 2!”*

- **Sparks (Sport Aiding Medical Research for Kids)**

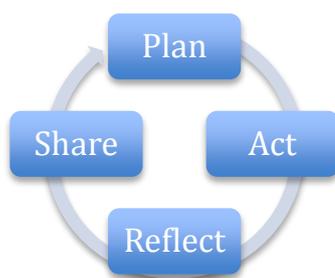
New in Season 2 and still developing. Students have learned about Sparks from a key fundraiser and a senior research clinician. They will visit the Sparks headquarters and a hospital, and will meet both a child and a family who have been helped by Sparks-funded research. **(8 students)**

*“It changed the way I view our local community by reminding myself that fundraisers and charities all around the world really do need help. The only hard part is getting the message out.”*

## **Rationale**

The High School Community Opportunities Program has been designed to translate the spirit of the Mission and Strategic Plan into practice. It anchors our definition of Global Perspective close to home, animating the elements of Learning, Character, Community and Service and giving them concrete presence in our own community. At the same time it becomes a vital springboard for more challenging and higher-stakes global community interaction.

The program shifts learning to a new venue and maximizes opportunities for the development of key 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. By creating a powerful and supported learning environment we encourage young people to engage with head, heart and hand.



The Experiential Learning model

## The ASL Model

- 3 seasons, paralleling Athletics.
- Each Opportunity designed in collaboration with the partner organization around a specific project or focus.
- Based on the approaches of both academic and experiential learning.

## Community Coaches

The program is underpinned by a team of ASL Community Coaches:

- Pairs of faculty and staff volunteers drawn from across the whole school.
- Work closely with the partner organization and learn alongside their students.
- Powerful role models for “passion and purpose”.
- Provide advice and support, particularly in environments where students may be upset or unclear about what they see or hear.

## Community Training



All coaches receive a personal briefing with the partner organization and an email briefing on health and safety. In some cases, where there are greater issues surrounding working with particularly vulnerable people, there are more extensive training sessions (such as with Solace Women’s Aid.)

All students receive an orientation / briefing from their partner organization in the first session of the season.

## Next Steps

- In future we would like to offer a **training workshop** for all coaches and students before each new season. This would be led by our partner organizations, and could include sessions on mental health, physical disability, domestic violence, UK government policy and a detailed introduction to our neighborhood.
- Each season could also be preceded by a ‘Meet the Coach’ night for students and parents. This would allow parents to share in this experience with their children, and to gain greater understanding themselves of our local neighborhood.

## Links to the Curriculum

The Community Opportunity program is not an extra or an add-on. It has been designed to extend and reinforce the educational program at the highest level.

### **Points of contact:**

- The HS Global, Character, Service, Leadership & Environment (GCSLE) initiative offers connection points, both at Foundation level and beyond
- Individual Independent Studies
- Electives (such as Global Issues, Ecology)
- Senior Projects (proposed)
- The HS Alternatives program (experiential learning week).

Our student body has exceptionally high degrees of global experience - many self identify as Third Culture Kids. At present, however, we ring-fence little academic time to capitalize on this. In drawing these elements together, we help our students to strengthen their own sense of identity and also to make sense of the world they live in.

We want our students to develop core, transferable skills and practical understandings. These include:

- Building relationships and collaboration
- Application of knowledge and understandings to novel situations
- Creativity and innovation
- Mastery of communication, media and technology
- Critical and analytical thinking
- Leadership
- Understanding UK government policy
- Social enterprise and social entrepreneurship
- The role of happiness and wellbeing, helping others and being part of a community

### **Reflection:**

Currently coaches are encouraged to ask questions to prompt reflection, perhaps over coffee, or at school during lunch, however there has been no time allocated to formalize this process..

### **Next Steps**

- All students to keep some form of journal, online or paper.

### **Celebration and sharing:**

Season 1 culminated in a Community Tea, to which all participating students, coaches and partners were invited. This was hosted by the Head of School, and was a great success.



## **Next Steps**

- A culminating experience for all those in the program. Young people to share what they have learned with the school, parents and the wider community.
- Possible formats include a ‘museum’, a film festival or even a one-day symposium, all student-led.

## **Evaluation**

A vital tool in the development of the pilot program: All stakeholders are regularly asked for honest feedback.

## **Student Leadership**

At present all Deans are kept informed of attendance and outstanding work.

## **Next steps**

- Develop a leadership curriculum which guides students through the progressive acquisition of specific skills and experiences. This could be developed in partnership with Athletics and other co-curricular activities.
- Create a culture of evidence-based success.

## **Conclusion**

- The Community Opportunities program has proved to be low-budget, high-impact, popular and effective.
- There is great potential to develop a full community and leadership curriculum to underpin ASL’s signature approach to global and community education.
- It has received strong (unsolicited) endorsement from student leadership:

**The Standard** wrote “Buy: new community service programming,” then quoted six students who supported it’s impact.

**Student Council:** “As a council we have been impressed by the work of the community programs”.

## **Next steps**

## **Community graduation requirement**

- To assign value and recognise student work
- To ensure students can meet the demands of the college application process
- To be filled in a number of different ways, including international trips, local or on-campus community service etc
- To include a written component.
- To be tracked in an ASL passport, which would record student experience in Global, Community, Service, Leadership and Environmental activities.