

Dear Parents

There is a lot of agreement amongst those concerned with the mental health of teenagers that Community Service/Project activities generally have a wonderfully positive effect on teenagers who engage in them – especially if this is done for an extended period of time. (Probably the best scenario is when a family gets involved in some community outreach project and the children are engaged as part of this on an on-going basis.).

There are a number of reasons for Community Service/Projects being so beneficial:

1. In each boy there is a knight just wanting to ride forth and save a damsel in distress. This may seem hard to accept as your son may seem to be causing more distress to “damsels” than saving them (especially those close to him). However, boys do feel a lot better about themselves when they have been able to give to others – when their actions have made a positive difference to those who are struggling in life in some way or other. This is especially true if they actually meet the people they are helping.
2. It helps teens to think “outside their own reality” (as one commentator put it). Many teenagers are very focussed on themselves because there is so much going on inside them, and find it hard to think about things away from their home, school, or social circles. In a way it is a relief for the self, the psyche, to focus on the need of another person - hence a benefit to mental health.
3. They develop values. Empathy is one of them – helping people in need often has this effect, as does observing their trials. Courage is another, as it is not easy for them to move out of their comfort zones. Patience – especially if the people they are helping are young or handicapped in some way. Gentleness, kindness.....

Bishops does have an Interact group which you may like to encourage your son to join, if it is not too late for him. Mr Peter Hyslop runs this if you want information. In addition, there are a number of choices for grade 10 boys during Civics which give them an opportunity to help others.

My experience of boys who are keenly involved in Community Service/Projects is that they do have a special quality. Now whether it is the result of the activity or they do the activity because they are special, I am not sure. However, if the experts are to be believed, it is probably both.

Yours sincerely
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(Deputy Headmaster Pastoral)