

EVERYBODY CAN BE GREAT BECAUSE EVERYBODY CAN SERVE!*

Why teach service to our children to honor the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr?

Dr. King thought service was our greatest legacy. In one of his last sermons, "The Drum Major Instinct," he said that in future days he didn't want to be remembered for his Nobel Peace Prize, awards or the books he had written. "I'd like somebody to mention on that day Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to give his life serving others....I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity."

As the civil rights movement shows, children learn lessons about service at a very young age. Sometimes they teach us more than we teach them. But service always begins with a need. When Martin Luther King Jr. started his service, his family, neighbors and many other people were suffering because of unjust laws and the prejudice that permitted them. Real service addresses real needs. Step up. Speak out. Give back.

MLK Day as a National Service Day

President Ronald Reagan signed the bill first recognizing Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the 3rd Monday in January which comes closest to Dr. King's birthday, as a national holiday in 1983. In 1986 all 50 states observed the day as a federal holiday for the first time.

According to www.mlkday.gov, the site co-sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service, and [The King Center](http://www.kingcenter.org), "In 1994 Congress passed the King Holiday and Service Act, designating the King Holiday as a national day of volunteer service. Instead of a day off from work or school, Congress asked Americans of all backgrounds and ages to celebrate Dr. King's legacy by turning community concerns into citizen action."

MLK Day is a great day to start or recommit to service but, as the site suggests, the needs are great. Please think about ways to continue your service throughout the year.

Can kids really make a difference? Yes they can!

Go to <http://www.heartofamerica.org/ambassadors.htm> to learn about the remarkable kids this national service organization has inspired to make a difference in their communities.

Visit <http://www.giraffe.org> to see videos and profiles of kids and others who stick their necks out to help others.

Visit <http://www.treepromise.org> sponsored by The Children's Museum of Indianapolis to learn how their permanent exhibit, "The Power of Children: Making a Difference," that features the stories of the Anne Frank, Ruby Bridges and Ryan White has helped thousands of kids to make promises to make a difference in the world since 2006.

How do we teach service to our children?

Service begins at home. Cultivate the servant in your child's heart and soul.

Give your children opportunities to help with household tasks. Identify a need. Ask for help and thank your children when they give it. Encourage them to do the same with you. Consider family members with unmet needs and how your children's help can make a difference.

Next, help your children discover needs in other places.

Start with your neighborhood. Be curious. Be compassionate. Pay attention.

Identify the need(s).

What works well in your neighborhood? How could your neighborhood be improved? What might make it a better place for all? Add your own questions as your family becomes your own community service investigation (CSI) team. Consider the environment or populations in need (don't forget animals) where your help can matter.

Do research. Talk to others. Gather and check information.

Find the oldest neighbor and interview him or her. How long has she lived there? How was the neighborhood different when she first moved in? What can she tell you about the first neighborhood that she remembers? Talk with other neighbors. What do they see that needs fixing? What stories can they share about neighborhoods they have lived in?

Find out if other organizations are already involved in your community or able to help with the need(s) you've found.

Decide what you want to do.

Does someone in your family have a special hobby, talent or passion? How could they share it with others?

Think about your school and church or congregation if you belong to one. What does your family value about those experiences? Do they have service projects that interest you?

Has anyone in your family—or someone close to your family—had an experience that changed or affected their life in an important way? Did it alert you to a need in the world that you did not know about?

Is anyone studying a problem or issue that they want to learn more about or become involved in?

Has anyone traveled in the US or elsewhere and seen a need they would like to explore?

Talk about everyone's favorite and least favorite service experiences. What did you learn? How can those lessons help you as you choose a service program or create your own?

Make a plan, commit to it and follow through.

Assess your progress.

Are you keeping your commitments? Has the project gone as expected? Are you learning new things or using your skills? Are you meeting your goals? What impact has your project had and how do you know? Dr. King had a dream for this country. What is your dream today? Can your service project contribute to that dream?

What type of service can we do with our our kids?

Visit www.mlkday.gov for a general introduction to service opportunities. Look at "[create your own individual, family or neighborhood project](#)"

Volunteering with your kids and grandkids is one of the best ways to show them what you care about and why. Here are some great sites from Freedom's Feast Go and Learn! These family friendly organizations help you to match your passions with your family's location and capabilities.

www.serve.gov
www.volunteermatch.org
www.mygooddeed.org
www.dosomething.org
www.familycares.org
www.rootsandshoots.org
www.newyorkcares.org
www.createthegood.org

*Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Drum Major Instinct"

Please visit us again for Presidents' Day at www.freedomfeast.us/