



Independent Living Skills Group Activities Manual

April 2018

651-431-4670

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Independent Living Skills group activity manual

Independent Living Skills Groups give transition assistance to 14 to 21 year olds who have been in substitute care after the age of 14. These groups are funded by Minnesota's Support for Emancipation and Living Functionally (SELF) program. Through this program youth workers help to prepare young adults for their future. They use skill-building group sessions to cover topics including budgeting, relationships, effective communication and decision-making.

Youth workers have written about these experiences for this manual. The manual is divided into three categories:

- In-house activities, which take place in group meetings
- Field trips, which occur off-site, but are not overnight trips
- Retreats, ranging from one night to more than a week away from home.

Each activity page documents the organizing agency, expenses, a description of the activity, professionals who helped with activities, ground rules, safety, relaxation, recommendations and successes.

Group in-house activities

Group in-house activity: Adjective game

Agency

Lutheran Social Service, Rochester

Ideal number of youth

Five or more

Cost

None

Ideal number of adults

One or more

Transportation

None

Professionals

None

Activity

Adjective game

Ground rules

Have to find adjective that starts with the first letter of their name and go around with each next person starting with the first person and ending with themselves.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Group members can help if they're having some difficulties.

Recommended because:

Fun icebreaker game, can be used for the blanket game.

Learned as a youth worker

Learn their names.

What youth learn

Each other's names.

Group in-house activity: Human Bingo

Agency

Lutheran Social Service, Rochester

Ideal number of youth

Five to 20

Cost

None

Ideal number of adults

One to two

Transportation

None

Professionals

None

Activity

Human Bingo

Ground rules

Must get up and interact with group members. Depending on group size, can only have two of the same name on the sheet.

Recommended because:

Interaction, get to know other group members; good icebreaker.

Success

Learning about new group members.

Learned as a youth worker

Observe how members interact. Get a feel for their personalities.

Group in-house activity: Blanket game

Agency

Lutheran Social Service, Rochester

Ideal number of youth

Five or more

Cost

None

Ideal number of adults

One or more

Transportation

None

Professionals

None

Activity

Blanket game

Ground rules

Break up into teams. Hold up blanket/cloth so they can't see each other. Each team sends one person to the blanket, drop the blanket and whoever says the other's name gets that person onto their team. Whoever has the most people wins.

Recommended because:

Fun, interaction, team work

Group in-house activity: Casey Life Skills Assessment

Agency

Clay County Social Services

Ideal number of youth

Dependent of size of room

Cost

None

Ideal number of adults

Dependent of size of room

Transportation

None

Professionals

None

Activity

Casey Life Skills Assessment

Ground rules

Get a computer lab and complete assessment.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Some kids struggle with computer skills and need more assistance.

Recommended because:

Helps kids and workers know how to direct group sessions, focus on activities needed.

Success

Very helpful and aids workers in making independent living plans.

Learned as a youth worker

Lots of kids know their stuff and just need to review basics. This assessment can really guide independent living plans.

What youth learn

What they need to work on for independent living skills.

Group in-house activity: Car insurance

Agency

Anoka County

Ideal number of youth

10

Cost

None

Ideal number of adults

Two

Transportation

None

Professionals

Insurance agent

Activity

Insurance agent speaks to group about car insurance. Discuss how criminal records and driving violations can affect insurance rates.

Ground rules

All questions are OK. Be respectful of the speaker. Be honest. Have questions ready.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Group develops feeling prior to presentation.

Recommended because:

Groups realize there is much more to insurance than they thought. It puts into perspective how much it costs to insure a vehicle.

Success

Energy, relationships, working with presenter.

Group in-house activity: Self-defense

Agency

Southwest Health and Human Services

Ideal number of youth

12

Cost

\$37 for pizza

Ideal number of adults

Three

Transportation

Offered volunteer drivers

Professionals

Police officer

Activity

A police officer came in to offer self-defense and personal safety training. This was our fourth year and the youth love it. The officer talks with the youth and demonstrates different types of self-defense. Then he has the youth try some of the moves. He also talks with the group about safety issues and not using self-defense to hurt others. We do this activity because safety is important when living on your own but even more so the youth have a positive interaction with the police. It is also nice for the police to see the youth in a positive light.

Ground rules

Don't touch the police officer unless the officer asks you to demonstrate. This is practice, not the real thing.

Feeling safe and relaxed

We warned youth weeks before who was coming and when. We also tried to make the environment informal. We ate before the officer came in and thought of questions. The officer wore street clothes and learned everyone's names.

Recommended because:

The youth had positive interaction with a police officer, and also learned tips on how to defend themselves.

Success

Youth interact with an easy-going and knowledgeable police officer. He lets the youth demonstrate on him.

Learned as a youth worker

It is a risky project because of its content. This could lead youth to getting carried away, but they have always behaved appropriately and shown interest. Youth like having this sort of an experience with an authority figure.

Group in-house activity: Cooking

Agency

Southwest Health and Human Services

Ideal number of youth

Any

Cost

\$68

Ideal number of adults

Any

Transportation

Agency cars or volunteer drivers

Professionals

None

Activity

In group the week before, the youth planned the menu and purchased the groceries. On cooking night, each youth selected what they wanted to prepare or help prepare. When the meal was complete, we ate and cleaned up. We do this activity so the youth can do menu planning, cook and clean up. Some youth don't have any idea about cooking. Some of the food has been really good and some not so good. The youth enjoy it either way because they have fun.

Ground rules

Everyone must help in preparation. Everyone must help in clean-up.

Feeling safe and relaxed

The youth have a choice about what they want to help with.

Recommended because:

The youth always have fun with this activity. They enjoy making their own food and trying new things.

Success

They are able to laugh however the cooking turns out. They see results. They all have a story to tell. Teamwork experience.

Learned as a youth worker

I am very surprised at how many youth have no cooking experience.

Group in-house activity: Budgeting

Agency	Ideal number of youth
Evergreen Youth and Family Services	3-30
Cost	Ideal number of adults
\$4 for a bag of jelly beans	1-2
Transportation	Professionals
None	Professionals can facilitate this activity

Activity

Budgeting game: Living on a “20 Bean Salary.” Associated handouts can be found at <http://financeintheclassroom.org/downloads/BeanGameExtension.pdf>

Ground rules

Each youth starts with 20 jelly beans. You are not allowed to steal or give away any of your jelly beans to other players. You must decide how to spend your jelly beans based on the scenarios given in the rest of the game. There are many more options for this game, please contact a Department of Human Services adolescent services worker for more scenarios if interested.

Recommended because:

This is an excellent activity that promotes budgeting through an interactive game that youth are able to learn hands-on from. This is an area where every youth can learn something from.

Success

Assists with budgeting which has been an area youth have asked for more training and development on. It is a fun way to begin to teach youth about making budgeting choices and have an opportunity to discuss and learn why these choices were made.

Learned as a youth worker

An excellent opportunity to teach not only young people, but professionals as well. This game gives you a better concept of what youth need more direction with in order for them to become fiscally responsible.

What youth learn

The beginning stages of what budgeting is, how life throws curveballs at you and allows young people an opportunity to think through real-life scenarios and understand how to deal with different financial circumstances.

Group in-house activity: Mock interviews

Agency

Clay County

Ideal number of youth

Any

Cost

None

Ideal number of adults

One or more

Transportation

None

Professionals

None

Activity

Roleplay mock interviews

Ground rules

Write interview questions for kids to review. Set up interview stations to have mock interviews.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Review interview techniques and prep strategies (sleep, dressing, deep breathing, and relation and hygiene tips).

Recommended because:

Practice before actual interviews.

Success

Reviewed interview ratings/score with youth after the interview. Provide feedback for improvements.

Learned as a youth worker

Just like adults, kids need practice when interviewing for jobs.

What youth learn

Tips for interviews.

Group in-house activity: Thank you cards

Agency

Southwest Health and Human Services

Ideal number of youth

Any

Cost

None

Ideal number of adults

One to four

Transportation

None

Professionals

Caseworkers, social worker

Activity

Thank you cards to assist in identifying permanent connections.

Ground rules

Have youth think about their past experiences and who was able to help them in situations. Have them look at theme examples on the next page, and begin writing thank you cards for each individual theme. Once youth are finished, have them think about how that person had been a support to them in the past, and how it may still be possible that person could support them today. Assist youth in contacting these individuals and setting up future meetings together. Allow youth that would like to share their ideas with others in group, helping generate ideas in youth who may be struggling.

Feeling safe and relaxed

This activity could bring up past triggers or trauma if youth are not able to think of anyone that has supported them. Allow for private reflection time for youth at the end of the activity and check-in with them on progress.

Recommended because:

It is a great way to have youth come up with potential supports in their life they may not have realized could still be or are a support to them.

Success

Reviewed interview ratings/score with youth after the interview. Provide feedback for improvements.

Learned as a youth worker

Everyone usually has a support they may have forgotten and this allows youth workers an additional resource for identifying additional supports.

What youth learn

Supports are important and we all need to identify as many people in our lives that could be a support to us.

Handout for youth: Thank you cards

Use these prompts to identify people who have helped you in different ways throughout your life. Then, write them a letter, thanking them for their encouragement, caring or support of you. Try to write a name in each “Thank you” section, then expand on what that person did to help or support you.

- Thank you for pushing me to reach my goals.
- Thank you for caring enough to encourage my best work.
- Thank you for supporting me.
- Thank you for being a great example.
- Thank you for introducing me to something new.
- Thank you for celebrating my victories.
- Thank you for listening to me.
- Thank you for encouraging my dreams.
- Thank you for supporting my education.
- Thank you for helping me realize and reach my potential.
- Thank you for giving me a chance.
- Thank you for helping me step outside my comfort zone.

Group in-house activity: Stress management

Agency	Ideal number of youth
Lutheran Social Service	Five to 10
Cost	Ideal number of adults
\$20-100 depending on size of group	Two
Transportation	Professionals
None	None

Activity

Stress management, creating a salt scrub, rice bags, stress balloons and glitter jars.

Ground rules

Try to create a calm environment. Ask youth to keep their voices down and try very, very hard not to make a mess. Clean up after yourselves.

Recommended because:

Gives the youth a time to relax and have fun, while learning new coping activities and strategies.

Learned as a youth worker

Our youth have come back and told us that they do use the coping materials they made in group. We have received feedback that the salt scrub and rice bags are favorites.

What youth learn

Youth learn different ways to cope with stress. The balloons, glitter jars, rice bags and salt scrubs are all materials they can take with them and use. We provide them with a list of essential oils and directions for use, so they can make them again someday, or with friends.

Stress management group instructions

Helpful tips

- It might be a good idea to get some sort of plastic wrap or tarps to put down to eliminate the mess; typically when we do this, youth get flour and rice everywhere.
- We typically start this group out by discussing stress with youth. What is it? How do you know that you are stressed? What do you do to cope with stress?
- When we go into these activities, we will usually start an essential oil diffuser. It is important to make sure that none of your youth have any sort of allergies or sensitivities to scents, though!
- We will also play calming music. The whole point of this activity is to do some stress-free activities that will provide our youth with some coping objects. We encourage our youth to not talk and to really embrace the calming environment.
- You can buy essential oils from almost anywhere. Don't feel that you have to use expensive Young Living oils; oils from Walmart do just fine!
- These four activities usually take us the whole hour. It is a good idea to have all stations set up so people aren't waiting for a station and can move on to the next activity when they are ready.

Salt scrub

Ingredients

- Mason jars, any size
- Sea salt
- Oil (grapeseed, olive oil, etc.)
- Favorite essential oil

Instructions

1. Fill a mason jar 2/3 full with sea salt.
2. Top the remaining 1/3 with oil.
3. Sprinkle in 3-8 drops of essential oil.
4. Stir and enjoy!

You may want to follow scrub with soap and water after using.

Rice bags

Ingredients

- Crew or tube socks
- Rice
- Favorite essential oil (we recommend lavender or peppermint)
- Plastic cups

In advance:

1. Soak rice in essential oils. We recommend filling big bowls with rice and putting in 10-20 drops to start. Stir the rice and adjust oil drops for a stronger scent. Two to three cups of rice per bowl, per youth.

During activity:

1. Choose a sock and place it inside the plastic cup, folding it over the edges (for easier scooping and less spilling).
2. Fill the sock half-full with rice, usually two to three cups. Make sure to leave room to tie a knot at the top.
3. Tie your sock extra tight so no rice will spill out.
4. Put sock in microwave or freezer to heat or chill.
5. Start destressing!

Stress balloons

Ingredients

- Funnels
- Balloons
- Flour or cornstarch

Instructions

1. Straw or stirring stick
2. Stretch out a balloon, blow it up and release the air.
3. Put balloon on the funnel. Instruct youth to hold the balloon and funnel together and not let go, or there will be flour everywhere.
4. Have the youth pour flour into the funnel. It might be easier if they have one person hold the balloon/funnel and one person pouring.
5. Use a straw or stir stick to work the flour into the balloon.
6. Repeat step 3 until balloon has the desired amount of flour inside, then tie it off.

Glitter jars

Ingredients

- Mason jars (16-ounce size works best)
- Clear glitter glue
- Variety of glitters
- Food coloring
- Stir sticks
- Plates (plastic or glass)
- Toothpicks
- Microwave or stove

Instructions

1. Heat up a pitcher or large cup of water until it is very hot.
2. Pour hot water into mason jars, halfway full.
3. Add 2 tablespoons of clear glitter glue.
4. Mix glitter glue so it is completely dissolved into the hot water. It should be a little thick, with glitter slowly floating around.
5. Add small amount of hot water so Mason jar is 3/4 full.
6. Add in glitter of choice slowly, mixing well after each color is added.
7. Continue to add hot water and mix well until the jar is completely filled with water.
8. When all glitter is added, the jar should have a snow globe consistency. If it is too thick or slow moving, pour out some of the mixture and add more hot water.
9. To add food coloring (if desired) put one drop on a plate. Touch toothpick to the color, then touch to the mixture in the Mason jar. This way the mixture won't become too dark.
10. Tightly close the lid and shake the jar!

Handout for youth: Benefits of essential oils

You can use any essential oil of your choosing, in a scent that makes you feel calm, relaxed and happy. You can buy essential oils from many businesses. Don't feel you have to use expensive oils.

Lavender

Lavender essential oil is said to reduce anxiety and depression. It is also said to improve sleep quality and may aid in treating insomnia. Lavender is thought to relieve pain and assist in treating respiratory disorders.

Peppermint

Peppermint oil is thought to relieve pain. Inhaling the scent of peppermint also calms nausea. Peppermint oil can give the body a cooling sensation, making it great for relieving headaches. It can also increase energy.

Lemon

Lemon oil is thought to help with concentration. It is also a well-known disinfectant. Inhaling the scent of lemons is thought to help with asthma and allergies. Lemon essential oil is also meant to uplift moods.

Group in-house activity:

Agency

Ideal number of youth

Cost

Ideal number of adults

Transportation

Professionals

Activity

Ground rules

Feeling safe and relaxed

Recommended because:

Success

Learned as a youth worker

What youth learn

Send to Kim Lemcke, SELF program coordinator, Minnesota Department of Human Services, 444 Lafayette Road North, St. Paul, Minn. 55155, kim.lemcke@state.mn.us, or fax to 651-296-4471, care of Kim Lemcke.

Group field trips

Group field trip: Anoka County housing coordinator

Agency	Ideal number of youth
Anoka County	10
Cost	Ideal number of adults
None	Two
Transportation	Professionals
Youth workers' vehicles	Housing coordinator

Activity

The housing coordinator spoke to the group about affordable housing options in the county. We also discussed subjects like leases, landlord and tenant rights. Then the group toured a local apartment complex that would be affordable to them. The group had time to ask the manager questions about costs and responsibility.

Ground rules

Be prepared with questions. Be respectful of everyone, please and thank you. Be attentive to what is going on.

Recommended because:

It helps youth understand all aspects of renting and lets them know what is affordable to them.

Success

Nice off-site field trip. The youth built a relationship with the landlord. Taught youth to be prepared and know what to discuss when looking for an apartment. It showed them an option in Anoka County.

Learned as a youth worker

Anoka County needs more affordable housing.

Group field trip: Automobile dealer

Agency

Anoka County

Ideal number of youth

10

Cost

None

Ideal number of adults

Two

Transportation

Youth workers' vehicles

Professionals

Auto sales rep

Activity

Youth had the opportunity to question an automobile sales representative about buying or leasing a vehicle. They also asked about payments and insurance. The youth really enjoy walking the lot and seeing what is available. This activity helps develop a realistic picture of what is affordable. It also helped to build our group process and culture.

Ground rules

No questions are dumb. Be prepared with two or three questions. Remember the expectations of the community. Use strong social skills.

Feeling safe and relaxed

It comes with time. First we focus on icebreakers and trust activity. We don't take a group out until the second week into the program.

Recommended because:

It is a preparation for the often overwhelming cost of owning and maintaining a vehicle.

Success

Depends upon the youth worker's motivation and relationship with the contact. Preparation prior to the activity is important. Discussing our expectations of youth is critical.

Learned as a youth worker

There is something new about the vehicles each and every session. I don't know as much as I think I do about transportation.

Group field trip: Norwest Bank

Agency

Anoka County

Ideal number of youth

10

Cost

None

Ideal number of adults

Two

Transportation

Walked half a block from weekly site

Professionals

Bank employees

Activity

The group met with bank employees for an hour and a half to discuss banking options available to them. Also gave the group a bank tour. We discussed all aspects of banking, including savings, checking, Certificates of Deposit, investments and mortgages.

Ground rules

All questions are OK. Everyone must be included and respected. Attend to the person talking.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Preparation prior to the activity so youth know what is going to happen. The culture of group that allows them to feel safe has hopefully already been developed.

Recommended because:

Some benefited more than others did by gaining a sense of where to start in the banking process.

Success

Relationship with presenter; preparation by youth facilitator; motivation and anticipation for the future.

Learned as a youth worker

Youth generally do not know a lot about banking or what is available.

Group field trip: Anoka-Ramsey Community College

Agency	Ideal number of youth
Anoka County	10
Cost	Ideal number of adults
None	Two
Transportation	Professionals
Youth workers vehicles	College staff

Activity

We toured Anoka-Ramsey Community College. The youth were told all the school has to offer for post-secondary options. They got a real sense of the careers they may choose from, including carpentry, electrical, optical, computers, medical and potential salaries.

Ground rules

Be respectful. Come prepared with questions. Use good social skills. Attend to the person who is speaking. Send thank you card.

Recommended because:

It is a self-confidence builder and good career exploration opportunity.

Success

The youth were able to experience a relationship with the presenter. They saw how excited the staff was about presenting the information. They got fired up about education. They learned about career options.

Learned as a youth worker

It was great to see the youths' energy and motivation skyrocket when they found something they like or want to do.

Group field trip: Any local restaurant

Agency

Southwest Health and Human Services

Ideal number of youth

12 to 16

Cost

\$350 to \$400, including gifts and meal

Ideal number of adults

Two

Transportation

Agency cars and volunteer drivers

Professionals

None

Activity

We do a year-end celebration at any local restaurant. While we are there, we do positive strokes. We have youth write one to three things about themselves that they enjoy. Sometimes we give them certificates of positive attributes. We also handpick a gift for each youth in attendance. Cost will vary greatly depending on the number of youth, the restaurant and gifts.

Ground rules

We are there as a group. We must stay as a group.

Recommended because:

We do this so youth can celebrate each other and receive recognition for their hard work. This also gives them an opportunity to eat in a restaurant, check their social graces and be seen in public doing something positive. It's a nice thank you.

Success

It is all about the youth and thanking them. They learn from the entire group why we appreciate them.

Learned as a youth worker

What the group appreciates about me.

Group field trip: Trollwood Performing Arts School summer musicals

Agency

Clay County

Ideal number of youth

Any

Cost

Contact box office for donations

Ideal number of adults

One or more

Transportation

None

Professionals

None

Activity

See a summer musical at Trollwood Performing Arts School, Moorhead, Minn.

Ground rules

Respectful of others.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Relaxing to sit and watch a great show.

Recommended because:

Allows youth to see a play in their community.

Success

Support local actors and musicians in the community. Fun activity, unique.

Learned as a youth worker

Fun, relaxing opportunity for kids.

Group field trip: Local community garden

Agency

Otter Tail County Human Services

Ideal number of youth

Eight to 15

Cost

None

Ideal number of adults

One to two

Transportation

County vehicles

Professionals

None

Activity

Volunteer at community garden, picking vegetables, weeding, etc. Could also implement a section on healthy eating at the garden.

Ground rules

All help and volunteer. Wear appropriate clothing.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Something all youth can do.

Recommended because:

Good volunteering activity to help kids give back; community gardens supply Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clients, food shelves, etc.

Learned as a youth worker

Patience and wear bug spray.

What youth learn

It's good for them to do some physical work and to accomplish something. Many have never gardened before.

Group field trip: The Salvation Army

Agency

Lutheran Social Service, Mankato

Ideal number of youth

10

Cost

\$5 per youth

Ideal number of adults

Three

Transportation

Walked

Professionals

None

Activity

We offered each youth \$5 to spend at The Salvation Army store. They were to shop for items they might need to set up an apartment such as dishes, glassware, pots and pans, and cookbooks.

Ground rules

Shop for household items, not clothing. Be respectful.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Shopped with them and made suggestions if they were undecided.

Recommended because:

Learn the thrifty way to shop for everyday household items.

Success

"The finds." Learn there is more to a thrift store than clothes.

Learned as a youth worker

Youth would rather shop for clothes. Many already shop thrift stores and are proud of their wise buying for less.

Group field trip: Minnesota State University, Mankato

Agency

Lutheran Social Service, Mankato

Ideal number of youth

10

Cost

\$15 per youth

Ideal number of adults

2

Transportation

Local dealership van, \$50

Professionals

Two Lutheran Social Services leaders, three Minnesota State University, Mankato staff

Activity

Group initiatives course for team building before the ropes course. Time average for the day runs five hours.

Ground rules

Pay attention and listen carefully. Confirm comments made by partner to ensure safety. Push beyond your normal limits.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Group has been together a few weeks prior to ropes course; Minnesota State University, Mankato interns relate well to youth.

Recommended because:

For a healthy challenge. To get out of norm or comfort zone. To learn trust and support.

Success

Being supportive, sensitive, encouraging, thoughtful and alert. Conquered fears and took risks. Used physical strength and listening skills.

Learned as a youth worker

To listen well and know tones of voice and body language to prevent fear and/or panic. To accept each individual as they are and where they are on the course and in life.

Group field trip: Hubert H. Humphrey Job Corps Center

Agency	Ideal number of youth
Lutheran Social Service, Mankato	10
Cost	Ideal number of adults
None	Three
Transportation	Professionals
Free with Job Corps van	None

Activity

The Hubert H. Humphrey Job Corps van picked us up at 8 a.m. and we arrived in St. Paul two hours later for a tour of the campus. We ate lunch in the cafeteria and headed for home at 3:30 p.m.

Ground rules

Respect program. Respect people.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Job corps staff and teachers were welcoming and open to questions. We spoke informally with some of the students in the lunch line.

Recommended because:

The educational opportunities (free) are for the future.

Success

A few of our youth have followed up on job corps interviews. Seeing the campus and student population makes a bigger impression than the job corps video.

Learned as a youth worker

To show youth no-cost options for learning a trade if they can abide by the restrictions (such as observing a curfew and being substance free).

Group field trip: Mankato climbing wall

Agency

Lutheran Social Service, Mankato

Ideal number of youth

10

Cost

\$30

Ideal number of adults

Three

Transportation

Leaders' cars

Professionals

Climbing wall staff

Activity

Group members learned the safety, trust and physical fitness aspects required to take part in a climbing wall, and to have fun together.

Ground rules

Watch, listen, do safety checks.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Could try a lower section first (without harness) to get the feel of the grips on the wall. Safety checks with more challenging sections (overhangs) were available for those who wished to try them.

Recommended because:

Most of the group tried and succeeded. A few became photographers because they were not strong enough to climb.

Success

Teamwork: Enjoy the feelings of success and cheering for others. Physical and mental challenges: Know when to set limits or challenge self.

Learned as a youth worker

How nervous I get watching, even though many safety measures are practiced.

Group field trip: Hy-Vee

Agency

Lutheran Social Service, Mankato

Ideal number of youth

10

Cost

None

Ideal number of adults

Three

Transportation

Walked

Professionals

Store manager

Activity

Walked to Hy-Vee where the manager gave us a tour of the workings of the store and talked about being a good employee.

Ground rules

Stay together. Be respectful of other shoppers, manager and property.

Recommended because:

There are many departments within a grocery store that might appeal to different interests and abilities.

Success

The manager taking the time to speak about various departments and employee issues. Working in a grocery store is presented as a viable option for most youth while going to school.

Learned as a youth worker

How hard it is to keep teens attentive in a grocery store.

Group field trip: The Salvation Army, Bundle Me Warm program

Agency	Ideal number of youth
Lutheran Social Service, Mankato	10
Cost	Ideal number of adults
None	Three
Transportation	Professionals
Walked	Salvation Army staff

Activity

We helped transfer barrels of coats, snowsuits, hats and gloves to a central location in The Salvation Army. We unpacked and hung up coats according to age and gender. We placed accessories on long tables around the room. These winter items would be made available to needy people.

Ground rules

Be careful of wall damage. Watch personal safety while moving barrels on handcarts through the hallways.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Allowed youth to try on various coats and pose for camera; monitored hallway corners and sloping area for safety.

Recommended because:

A feel-good-about-helping-needy-people project and the opportunity to talk about volunteerism and follow through.

Success

Good feelings about helping others. Fun working as a team. Rewarding to see the results of a project (within two hours). Each youth was offered the chance to take home a coat.

Learned as a youth worker

Some of the youth had worked community service hours at The Salvation Army and already knew and liked Elaine. Even though they complained about the smell of used coats, they worked hard, had fun and enjoyed the feeling of accomplishment.

Group field trip: Adopt-a-Highway

Agency

Lutheran Social Service, Mankato

Ideal number of youth

No limit

Cost

\$10 Salvation Army caps

\$5 approximately cost of groceries

Ideal number of adults

One car load

Transportation

Leaders' cars

Professionals

None

Activity

We walked three abreast through the ditch on each side of a two-mile stretch of county highway picking up trash to clean the area designated Lutheran Social Service, On My Own.

Ground rules

Stay together in groups of three. Wear yellow vests provided by highway department. Wear sun screen. Wear socks over long pants for tick prevention. Wear sturdy shoes. Drink fluids. Have fun. Do not cross the highway.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Provided supplies and advice.

Recommended because:

Understand the hazards and unsightliness of litter.

Success

Pride in accomplishment. Appreciation of a clean roadway. Fun together, exercise, suntan. Sense of accomplishment. Cooperation, no complaints.

Learned as a youth worker

Many of the youth had done highway cleanup as community service. I was surprised by the lack of complaining about this service project.

Group field trip: A Room of One's Own

Agency

Catholic Charities

Ideal number of youth

One or more

Cost

\$140 per night plus \$5 per person

Ideal number of adults

Two or more

Transportation

Car or bus

Professionals

None

Activity

Coaching, hiking.

Ground rules

No smoking.

Recommended because:

Fun getaway in gorgeous part of Minnesota.

Group field trip: Mary's Place

Agency

Watsonwan County Human Services

Ideal number of youth

14

Cost

None

Ideal number of adults

Four

Transportation

Vans, trolley, truck with horse trailer

Professionals

Mary's Place staff

Activity

Our youth played games, gave trolley rides and interacted individually with the children at Mary's Place shelter. They were given a tour of Mary's Place and also shown a 15-minute video (which is available from Mary's Place). Mary spoke to our group and with tears thanked them for the trolley rides for the children. Our teens were visibly moved. The youth then helped serve 200 homeless people.

Ground rules

Behavior contract was in force.

Feeling safe and relaxed

We had built a relationship with the youth.

Recommended because:

It was a healthy opportunity for our youth to be able to serve. It was also an awakening for them to see the homeless and to see how Mary, who had once been in a similar situation, now reaches out to others. She has built the complex through her positive outlook, her faith and determination.

Success

The hands-on opportunity to serve and to have Mary share her experience. They saw that you could change a bad situation with a positive attitude. Thankful that they had a home even though there may be problems. Individually the youth were emotionally moved. The experience gave them hope. They felt self-respect to be looked up to by the children and workers. They came away feeling thankful and good about themselves.

Learned as a youth worker

Being able to give our youth opportunities such as this is more than we ever thought it could be. It means more than we could have taught in class. Being able to help others was good for their self-esteem.

Group field trip:

Agency

Ideal number of youth

Cost

Ideal number of adults

Transportation

Professionals

Activity

Ground rules

Feeling safe and relaxed

Recommended because:

Success

Learned as a youth worker

What youth learn

Send to Kim Lemcke, SELF program coordinator, Minnesota Department of Human Services, 444 Lafayette Road North, St. Paul, Minn. 55155, kim.lemcke@state.mn.us, or fax to 651-296-4471, care of Kim Lemcke.

Retreats

Retreat: Camp Amnicon, Wisconsin

Agency

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency

Ideal number of youth

5-10

Cost

\$1,400 (regularly \$2,800)

Number of adults

2-4

Transportation

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency transit

Food

Camp Amnicon organized the trip. We made all our own food. Approximate cost of groceries included in the overall cost of trip.

Activity

Voyager canoeing and camping in the Apostle Islands near Bayfield, Wis. with group talking, sharing, building camp sites. We enjoyed recreation and celebration.

Ground rules

No drugs. No sex. Respect each other. Work on trusting each other.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Many, many circles. We stopped and asked each other questions a lot.

Recommended because:

It is really an awesome adventure. Everyone should take this trip if they work with youth.

Success

The environment, the staff, the preparation at the camp made for a successful experience. Incredibly binding, brotherhood, friends for life, spirituality, thoughts about giving back to the community. Huge issues were dealt with, the young men were disrespectful in the beginning and totally respectful at the end.

Learned as a youth worker

There is no replacement for community building and it takes six days to develop it.

Retreat: Laurentian Environmental Center – Britt, Minn.

Agency

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency

Ideal number of youth

Any

Cost

\$72.50 per person

Number of adults

5 to one

Transportation

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity
Agency bus – Grand Rapids Office

Food

Make sandwiches or stop along the way

Activity

Team building, legends, dog sledding, appreciation of Ojibwe lifestyles, map and compass tracking to woodland, pond and sauna.

Ground rules

No drugs, no sex, no alcohol. Respect yourself and others.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Games led by staff helped youth get to know each other.

Recommended because:

Highly professional staff, variety of activity and nice lodging.

Success

Youth worked together to help each other achieve and feel comfortable. Appreciation of the great outdoors. Make new friends (we go as a four-county group). Going beyond normal boundaries.

Learned as a youth worker

Youth learn and achieve from experimental activity. The more adults – the more individual attention – the better the youth experience.

Retreat: Camp Widjiwagan – Ely, Minn.

Agency

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency

Ideal number of youth

40

Cost

\$69.50 per person

Number of adults

One adult per five youth

Transportation

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency transit system

Food

All food is cooked on site and included in the costs

Activity

Initiative games encourage youth to work together and cooperate with one another. Hiking, canoeing, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, nature studies, saunas and night hikes all help youth develop and build group cohesion.

Ground rules

No drugs, no sex, no alcohol. Respect yourself and others.

Feeling safe and relaxed

I think we develop our group well during our weekly meetings. By the time they go to the camp they are all ready to jump in.

Recommended because:

The camp staff and their programming and our group of workers make all of the activity very beneficial.

Success

Acceptance. Goals for the future. Fun friendships. Numerous adventures.

Learned as a youth worker

Many, many things — most of all how much energy the youth have to give if guided properly.

Retreat: Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center and Old Barn Resort – Preston, Minn.

Agency

Rochester Area Family YMCA LINK program

Ideal number of youth

Eight

Cost

\$203.26

Number of adults

Two

Transportation

Rented vans from Affordable Auto Rental

Food

The group cooked breakfast and dinners. Groceries cost \$116.79. Eagle Bluff Environmental, Center charged \$55 plus an additional \$31.47 for lunch on Wednesday.

Activity

River study, high ropes course, canoeing, dissected owl pellets, trout fishing, horseback riding.

Ground rules

Respect yourself and others.

Feeling safe and relaxed

I had established a rapport with youth prior to the trip and the youth had been involved in 12 weeks of group prior to the trip.

Recommended because:

There were enough activities to keep the youth active and engaged. The variety of activity challenged youth to try new and often scary things.

Success

Learned to take risks, to trust. Learned about the environment. The only male in the group learned to interact well with female youth and was open to their feedback.

Learned as a youth worker

It reminded me how important and lasting new experiences are for youth.

Retreat: Camp Menogyn – Grand Marais, Minn.

Agency

Southwest Health and Human Services

Ideal number of youth

Three to six

Cost

\$325 per person

Number of adults

Seven

Transportation

\$69 per person transportation; roundtrip bus rides from Twin Cities to Boundary Waters Canoe Area; rental from Breyfogle Auto Sales for van to cities.

Food

We brought all of our food

Activity

We stayed in Camp Menogyn in Boundary Waters Canoe Area the first night where we prepared for being on trail and had a campfire. Youth went on a trail that we would take to portage and then canoe. Youth had to set up camp and take camp down each day. We explored some waterfalls one day. We had to hunt for firewood, cook and clean up. When we returned to Menogyn, the youth had a celebration and each group did a skit.

Ground rules

Agree to try new experiences.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Youth had worked together as a group before.

Recommended because:

Self-esteem, awareness and team building experience. Youth can experience something they may never do again, an experience of a lifetime. Youth and adults really get to challenge themselves.

Success

Awareness of outdoors and nature. Feeling the sense that we all need to work together. The fun mixed with hard work and accomplishment. Youth can actually see themselves getting somewhere. There is a sense of accomplishment, testing their limits, starting a tradition.

Learned as a youth worker

Adaptability, flexibility and sense of accomplishment.

Retreat: Tomorrow's Leaders Today conference

Agency

Southwest Health and Human Services

Ideal number of youth

Four to six

Cost

None

Number of adults

Two

Transportation

Used agency vehicle

Food

Prepared by University of Minnesota Duluth Food Services

Activity

Youth have gone every year of the conference as a way to learn, experience and use leadership skills. It is a way to connect with youth from across the state.

Ground rules

Participation in all activities expected. Respect for others. Talking optimal.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Youth had been in the group together already and felt safe and connected with each other. By choosing the youth to go and letting them know you chose them because of their skills, they felt even more secure.

Recommended because:

Youth get an opportunity to learn and use their skills. Youth are celebrated, not insulted. They get to have fun and are rewarded for their hard work.

Success

Youth feel a sense of accomplishment, boost in self-esteem. They make friendships and connections with cultures and youth different from themselves. The mixture of activity provides fun and hard work

Learned as a youth worker

We learned that over 200 youth really isn't frightening, they made things happen. Positivity is the key.

Retreat: Kamp Dels (Waterville, Minn.), Minnesota State University, Mankato ropes course, cosmic bowling (Sunset Bowl)

Agency

Lutheran Social Service, Mankato

Ideal number of youth

12

Cost

\$18 per person, Kamp Dels

\$160 supper

\$84 bowling

\$41 pizza

Number of adults

Three

Food

Paid for food

Transportation

Local dealership van, \$136

Activity

Made sandwiches at Lutheran Social Service, Mankato, trail rides in Waterville, pontoon rides, bike rides, swimming, volleyball, hamburgers at Gilligans, back to Lutheran Social Service, Mankato youth room for movie night. Next day did ropes course at Minnesota State University, Mankato, pizza in youth room, went bowling, movie, "early" to sleep.

Ground rules

One leader was to be at each group activity at all times. Observe life jacket and pool rules.

Feeling safe and relaxed

The camp activities were fairly well scheduled, so group members knew where to meet and when. Ropes course very well run, safety first!

Recommended because:

This is a well-run camp with a nice variety of activity. We had fun together.

Success

Seven different types of outdoor exercise activities. Enjoyed fun, sun and food together. Developed friendships.

Learned as a youth worker

16-17 year olds can play hard and long. I had a good time, too!

Retreat: Camp Omega – Waterville, Minn.

Agency

Lutheran Social Service, Mankato

Ideal number of youth

Five

Cost

\$85

Number of adults

Two

Transportation

Leaders' vehicles

Food

Dinner at a restaurant, made breakfast

Activity

Drove to Camp Omega and did group initiatives course, ate dinner at Gilligans, played sand volleyball, stopped at Duck Lake on the way home to swim. We got groceries, watched our job interview tapes and ate omelets for breakfast.

Ground rules

Pay attention. Encourage others. Obey camp staff. Be respectful.

Feeling safe and relaxed

We had already been together for seven weeks. We do the activity with the youth.

Recommended because:

It is an opportunity to see youth interact with outside leaders. It was relaxing for youths' last day of summer school.

Success

Exercise. Outdoor experience. Chance to get away for fun. Friendship. Less disagreements with a small group.

Learned as a youth worker

How to better describe activity and ideas to youth as a group leader.

Retreat: Camp Tanadoona, Camp Fire Boys and Girls Camp

Agency

Lutheran Social Service, Mankato

Ideal number of youth

10

Cost

\$80

Number of adults

Three

Transportation

Leaders' cars

Food

Purchased groceries

Activity

Planned menus and grocery list, shopped for food (divided list), drove to camp, disability game while unpacking cars and preparing supper, night hike, organized activity around campfire, breakfast and cleanup.

Ground rules

Leader present around campfire and on hikes.

Feeling safe and relaxed

The night hike was possibly the most uncomfortable activity for some youth. We encouraged youth to let the person behind them know what obstacle (water, branch, steep climb) was ahead.

Recommended because:

Group bonding. Outdoor experience. Campfire cooking. Sharing. Inexpensive overnight trip.

Success

Good weather and good cooks. Willing participation. Exercise, friendship and memories.

Learned as a youth worker

How many boxes of supplies and groceries needed. How watchful one must be for social and physical safety of group members. How much I enjoy the campfire experience.

Retreat: Camp Amnicon, Wisconsin; Brule River State Forest

Agency

Lutheran Social Service, Mankato

Ideal number of youth

Nine

Cost

\$1,500 (including groceries)

Number of adults

Three

Transportation

Van rental, \$467

Food

Campfire - everyone had a role in preparation and cleanup

Activity

First and second nights we spent doing activity around the campgrounds and Lake Superior. Next three nights/four days we canoed on the Brule River and camped alongside the river. Canoeing was chosen as our reunion trip activity this year. Youth tend to request water trips and everyone encounters some type of challenge. There is always a grand adventure or two.

Ground rules

Listen. Follow instructions. Be prepared/expect the unexpected. Show respect to others and earn it for yourself. Support each other.

Feeling safe and relaxed

The van ride broke all silences in the group. Swimming and canoeing safety training eases nervousness.

Recommended because:

To learn respect for the outdoors. The challenge is fantastic to go beyond normal limits in this healthy, nurturing, and supportive environment.

Success

The blend of people for support. Great weather, good spirits. Growth, trust, humor. Conquer fears, take risks. Fun and friendship.

Learned as a youth worker

To let go and have fun and be more spontaneous because I had to. The river has a will of its own. The youth appreciated the real me versus the teacher me.

Retreat: Lutheran Social Service youth room, Minnesota State University, Mankato

Agency

Lutheran Social Service, Mankato

Ideal number of youth

12

Cost

\$10, two cameras
\$60 bowling

Number of adults

Three

Transportation

Leaders' cars

Food

University cafeteria and groceries, approximately
\$60

Activity

Our intern, a Minnesota State University, Mankato graduate student, devised a clue sheet and team competition to tour the college campus. Each team was given a disposable camera to use in order to prove that they had visited each site. They had to follow signs or ask directions and they took some creative photos, while learning a bit about the campus. Everyone convened at the appointed time and ate together in the cafeteria. Bowling at the campus lanes followed. Then back to the youth room for a night of movies/sleep.

Ground rules

Stay with one adult/team. Respect people and property. Have fun.

Feeling safe and relaxed

Helped with tour clues, allowed funny photos.

Recommended because:

The teamwork is built by active participation. There is mystery and fun in learning about MSU campus.

Success

Gain some familiarity with a college campus. Exercise, fun, friendship. Group bonding.

Learned as a youth worker

Let the teams find their way and have fun. I can watch four movies in a row!

Retreat:

Agency

Ideal number of youth

Cost

Ideal number of adults

Transportation

Activity

Ground rules

Feeling safe and relaxed

Recommended because:

Success

Learned as a youth worker

What youth learn

Send to Kim Lemcke, SELF program coordinator, Minnesota Department of Human Services, 444 Lafayette Road North, St. Paul, Minn. 55155, kim.lemcke@state.mn.us, or fax to 651-296-4471, care of Kim Lemcke.