



# Student-Led Best Practices

## Submitted by Bonner Congress Representatives

### **Name of Best Practice:**

First-Year Trip to Big Creek People in Action in McDowell County, West Virginia

### **College/University Name and Contact Information:**

West Virginia Wesleyan College  
59 College Ave.  
Buckhannon, WV 26201

### **Name of Congress Representative Preparing Report:**

Jason S. Bentley

### **Background:**

West Virginia Wesleyan College uses a series of four trips, one occurring during each year of the program, that helps to expose and education an individual about the conditions in the world, especially relating to poverty.

### ***What Makes This Unique***

The First-Year Trip to McDowell is thought of as an eye opening experience for students to visualize the real meaning of poverty. In subsequent years, students do a trip that builds on the learning in the first year, delving more deeply into issues of poverty, hunger, and housing. This implementation of the First Year Trip promotes a strong level of student leadership.

### **How it Works:**

**1. Site Selection:** Choose a site that meets the needs of your individual program and one that can be flexible to dates and times. It is especially helpful that now the staff knows the strengths of our program, the leaders that return know the site and that makes for a stronger relationship.

WVWC chose Big Creek People in Action due to:

1. Mission: assisting local youth in reaching higher education goals and assisting the community in service projects.
2. Proximity: McDowell close to WVWC (4 hours).
3. Staff support: able to build relationships with staff at Big Creek People in Action.
4. Student enthusiasm for site after initial visit.
5. Bonner Foundation Bonner Partner connection.

**2. Pre-Trip Orientation:** The pre-trip activities include learning about the situations and problems that arise in McDowell County. McDowell County is in the top five poorest

counties in the United States today Topical studies on homelessness, poverty, drug-wars, coal mining, education, and natural disasters prepare the students for their service. After the students have a mental picture of what McDowell looks like, they begin to talk and try to understand how people are living in these situations. Students have opportunities to talk about what they feel before the trip so to see the impact the trip has on them and their feelings.

### **3. Trip Schedule:**

**Orientation:** The trip consists of a first day orientation of the Caretta Community Center. The work begins the second day and consists of home repair, cleaning houses and working in the community center. Splitting the students in to approximately four different teams (20-25 students total) with student leaders in each group helps spread out the work and increase the experience.

**Work Sites:** The different teams work at the site and interact with the family and possibly work side-by-side with the family that is in need of help. The best part of the trip is being able to talk to the families and really getting to know them. For lunch, everyone in the work team would sit down and hear stories from the family and be taken into their houses to learn about life in southern WV.

**Reflection:** At the end of the day, each group goes back to the reflection period telling a special part of the day that has touched them. The reflection at the end of the night allows many of the emotions and feelings of the students to come out.

**Resulting Action:** Students come to McDowell and “feel sorry” for the people who live there. They notice the major generational poverty problem, but the goal is to have them leave as students and citizens that speak up about poverty and will be an advocate for these social issues through voting and public policy. McDowell County allows students to see these problems and then be able to make that a part of their choices that they make every day. These students will become advocates to end poverty and to bettering the lives and the communities of McDowell County, West Virginia along with other poverty stricken areas around the world.

### **Recommendations:**

- Usually, there will be another group from a different school that will be there to help in the community. Being able to work with a different group while trying to work on the cohesion of your group can sometimes be difficult.
- Plan ahead
- Plan cultural activities... Rough n Rowdy Brawl, Liberty Bluegrass Hall, Rocket Boys in Coalwood, WV and Coal-mining and Bluegrass/Folk music

### **Supplementary Documents:**

**Book: Understanding Poverty by Ruby K. Payne**

#### **Web:**

[http://ali.apple.com/ali\\_sites/ali/exhibits/1000753/Learning\\_Activities.html](http://ali.apple.com/ali_sites/ali/exhibits/1000753/Learning_Activities.html)

<http://www.wvkidscountfund.org/links.htm>

[http://shepherd.wlu.edu/PDF\\_files/Big%20Creek%20People%20in%20Action.pdf](http://shepherd.wlu.edu/PDF_files/Big%20Creek%20People%20in%20Action.pdf)

<http://www.statehealthfacts.kff.org/cgi-bin/healthfacts.cgi?action=profile&area=West+Virginia&category=Demographics+and+the+Economy&subcategory=People+in+Poverty&topic=Poverty+Rate+by+Age>  
<http://www.extension.psu.edu/workforce/Materials/Bridges/Overview.pdf>  
<http://opioids.com/oxycodone/oxycon.html>  
<http://www.wvha.com/Press%20Room/reports/proceedings/page2.htm>  
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPRS/0,,menuPK:384209~pagePK:162100~piPK:159310~theSitePK:384201,00.html>  
[http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/frontdoor.cfm?issue\\_type=welfare](http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/frontdoor.cfm?issue_type=welfare)  
[http://ali.apple.com/ali\\_media/Users/1000059/files/others/test\\_knowledge.pdf](http://ali.apple.com/ali_media/Users/1000059/files/others/test_knowledge.pdf)  
<http://www.ncsl.org/programs/health/oxycontin.htm>