Nonconventional Service Projects to Do with Teen Volunteers

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Why?

- Cutting paper is boring!
- Gets teens invested in the community.
- Good publicity for the library.

Projects: Low/No Budget:

- **TAB Faves Bookmarks:** Make a basic bookmark (I used Canva). On the front, do some artwork stating that the book is a designated TAB Fave, and on the back, leave space to write. Have teens write the title of the book and one spoiler-free sentence about why they like the book. Turn them loose in the library to plant their bookmark, or collect all the bookmarks and find the books on the shelf yourself later.

- **Placemats for Meals on Wheels:** Color, paint, or draw on large pieces of paper and run them through the laminator. Deliver them to a community organization that works with Meals on Wheels or find your local Meals on Wheels agency at www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org.

- **Paper Flowers and Cards for Nursing Home:** There are loads of templates for making paper flowers on Pinterest. Pick your favorite (find mine at https://bit.ly/2GSBnlY, but skip the wire and use pipe cleaners). No crafting experience necessary, and all you need is probably in your library's craft stash already. Bonus: Throw out some blank cardstock or construction paper and markers and have teens make cards for patients too.

- **Color for Project Color-A-Smile:** Visit colorasmile.org/volunteer and print off some coloring pages. Color and mail them!

- **Food Drive for Soup Kitchen:** Find the soup kitchen in your community and have the teens decorate boxes and posters to put in the library. Advertise to let your patrons know that you're collecting nonperishable items, hygiene products, etc. for that organization. The next month, the teens can pack up everything that was donated for delivery. My teens are doing this in March and April and repeating it with school supplies and backpacks in July and August.

Projects: Slightly Bigger Budget

- **Toys for animal shelter:** Buy a bag of catnip and a bag of batting/fluff and some felt. Use the template found at https://bit.ly/2DXwox7 to whip up some basic cat toys. (You do not have to teach anyone to sew. Hot glue works just fine.) More of a dog person? Collect old jeans or snag them at your local thrift shop and convert them into dog toys like the ones at https://bit.ly/2SMPJLV.

Projects: Pretty Decent Budget, Prep Time, and Patience:

- **Cookies for Heroes:** Not gonna lie, this took a *lot* of willingness on my part to make things happen off the clock. The teens wanted to decorate holiday cookies for our Township staff, Senior Center staff, police, firefighters, and EMS. I bought frozen cookie dough from Gordon Food Service, baked it in the commercial oven at my parents' church, bought frosting and decorating supplies, and got a local bakery to donate boxes. At their meeting, the teens decorated all those cookies, then I delivered them to every place on the list. This was a ton of work, but the teens had a blast and the recipients are still talking about how we brought them cookies.

- **Blankets for Children in the Hospital:** Hit your local fabric store at Black Friday and post-holiday sales, collect your 40% off coupons for Joann Fabrics and Michaels, and invest in fleece and a GOOD PAIR OF SCISSORS or a rotary cutter and mat. If you go to Joann Fabrics, they make no-sew fleece throw kits in all kinds of kid-friendly colors and patterns, and you can snag them on sale for $10-12. Cut the edges of the fleece into fringe and have the teens do the tying during their TAB meeting. Take your blankets home, wash them, dry them, and donate to your local hospital, or to Shriners' Hospitals for Children (Connect with your local Masonic lodge for a local drop-off point or visit shrinershospitalsforchildren.org for locations).

Questions, Comments, or Project Ideas? Contact Me!

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