



Mail Kits for Children

Community Service-Learning Activity 4-H LIFE (Living Interactive Family Education)

INVESTIGATE

- Investigate the issue or cause this project addresses.
- Understand why mail kits are needed and who needs them
 - A Mail Kit is a decorated box with writing supplies given to children of incarcerated parents.
 - Being separated from other family members is never easy. That's why it's important for children and their incarcerated parents or family members to stay in touch. Long distance phone calls are nice but are often too expensive. Mail Kits can help families begin letter writing and stay in the letter-writing habit.
 - There are 47,612 children of offenders in Missouri as of June 2007.
 - For more information visit: <http://mokidscount.org/stories/missouri-programs-children-incarcerated-parents/>
 - For more information about 4-H LIFE, a program for children/youth and their incarcerated parents, visit <http://4h.missouri.edu/4hlife>
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- To go deeper, scan media, perform interviews, conduct a survey, make observations, or share a personal experience.

PREPARE & PLAN

- Get to know 4-H group members and their interests, skills, and talents (see Adult Leader Guidesheet on Teambuilding).

- What equipment, materials, know-how, and steps are needed for your project?
 - Large shoebox or plastic file box, stationary, assorted note cards, postcards, envelopes, pencils and pens, colors and markers, postage stamps, small spiral bound notebook, and a copy of the sample form letter. An optional item would be a diary or journal for the older children to encourage practice in writing and for a place to write down daily activities to refer to when writing a letter.
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- Create a plan for how you will get things done – what role each group member will play, timeline, community partners (see Adult Leader Guidesheet on Action Planning).
 - The project will take one to two hours to shop for supplies and time to decorate several shoe boxes.
- Set a SMART goal for your project (see Adult Leader Guidesheet on SMART goal setting).

Note: Do **NOT** include stickers. Some correctional centers will not accept a letter (even from a child) if the envelope or letter includes stickers.

ACT

1. Choose a time to introduce this activity to your 4-H club or community group by explaining why it's important for children to be able to write to an incarcerated parent.
2. Depending on the ages of the club members, ask for volunteers to shop for the needed supplies.
3. Set a date and time to assemble the Mail Kit.
4. Make copies of the sample letter to add to the Mail Kit (see attached). Some family members may not be able to think of anything to say so they can “fill in the blanks” of the copied letter until they become more comfortable with writing letters.
5. Add a “Just for You” label to identify your club/group to the families who will be receiving the Mail Kit (see attached).
6. Donate the completed Mail Kits by contacting Lynna Lawson at lawsonl@missouri.edu or 573-631-6467.

REFLECT

- Explore your group's thoughts and feelings about the project (see Adult Leader Guidesheets on Reflection and Continuing Support).
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- What did you learn about yourself, your club, the issue, and the people you served?
- What do you plan to do next?
- How might you use some of the skills you learned in other areas of your life?
- What skills did you learn from this experience which can you can also use in college and/or your career?

COMMUNICATE & CELEBRATE

- How can you share what you did and learned with others?
- In what way would your group like to celebrate finishing your project?

Day _____

Dear _____,

Hi! How are you? I am _____. You might like to know that _____

_____.

The weather here has been:

sunny rainy windy snowy cloudy

warm cold foggy hot stormy

So I have been _____

One thing that happened to me was _____

I felt really _____ about it because _____

Something you might like to know about _____

Before I go, I just want to say _____

I hope you _____

Love,
