



WHAT TO EXPECT SERVING IN *Small Urban Communities*

YouthWorks has been facilitating mission trips for over 30 years now, and we are continually confronted with the fact that real service cannot happen outside the context of relationships. We desire for students, Adult Leaders and staff to learn that people matter, attitudes are important, and the posture of our hearts determines how we connect with others. The reality is that every community has a distinctive story, including both strengths and struggles.

Our hope is that through your time in this community you will:

- *increase your awareness of life in a small urban area*
 - *reflect on the impact you can have in your own community*
 - *deepen the way you think about God, your neighbors and yourself*
 - *connect with the people and places you serve, dispelling any stereotypes or fears*
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LIFE IN A SMALL URBAN COMMUNITY

Small urban areas are unique in that they can be a city that feels like a small town or a small town that resembles an urban area. The community could be relatively unknown to others in the greater United States, but it may be the largest town in miles. Life can be fast paced but at the same time not as rushed as in a large urban area. Small urban communities often face deep issues such as poverty, family issues and racial tensions. These issues often exist just beneath the surface and may be hard to notice at first glance.

As you serve in small urban areas, you may encounter cultural and ethnic diversity, various levels of poverty and the challenges that come from a lot of people living close together. But you will also experience how this unique blend creates community. Because of this abundance of factors, you'll find that the stereotypes you've held about certain kinds of people may not hold true. We invite you to join us as we continue to let go of preconceptions and interact with people as they are and not as we expect them to be.

As you prepare, ask your group these questions:

- What are some ways culture or ethnicity impact our faith, ministry and relationships?
- How is your culture similar or different to the culture of the community you will serve?
- What are some stereotypes you might have about the community you are visiting? How might these be misconceptions?

SERVING IN A SMALL URBAN COMMUNITY

At YouthWorks, we have learned that there are a number of typical reactions you and your group may experience as you step into this type of community. We share these with you so you know what to expect and so you understand that it's normal to have these feelings.

Time Sensitivity

Spending time with people might be valued more than being on time in a small urban community. As a result, things don't always run on schedule; community members may show up "late" to an event. This is not a sign of disrespect. When you meet someone for the first time, think about "visiting" instead of "meeting." Spend time getting to know people before you try to get things done.

In the Spotlight

Similar to a small-town setting, people will know you are in the area, so be very aware of the way your behavior can be perceived by others. Something as simple as driving too fast through town or being unfriendly at a store can reflect poorly on your presence in the community.

Access

Smaller communities do not always have ready access to the variety or quality of conveniences you may be used to in your home community. Things like health care facilities, places of business and internet connections are not always readily available. Check your expectations as you enter the community and be careful how you speak about the community when around others. Finally, don't assume that every amenity will be available to you.

We hope that this information helps as you continue to prepare for your trip. Please take time to talk with your group about expectations about the type of community you will be serving. Groups who have intentionally taken time to process and prepare before they go on their trip have more meaningful individual growth, team solidarity and community relationships.

Being Like Jesus in this Community

Even though the community you visit is smaller than a large city, it can still be a complex and dynamic place. It's easy for all of us to label a town and its people with all sorts of stereotypes. These labels feed our perceptions and influence how we approach people, situations and relationships. As you prepare, think about how you will approach each person and situation with the kind of grace that Jesus demonstrated to each person he met along the way. The following characteristics¹ are great examples of how your students and adult leaders can prepare their hearts for their mission week.

Serve with Humility

Jesus came to earth with the attitude of a servant. Jesus did not come as a powerful king, but as a powerless infant and later in life a carpenter. If you want to serve others, have a humble attitude. Become a servant focused on listening instead of speaking and learning instead of teaching. Come with a humble heart that is ready to jump in and serve wherever needed, whether it's cleaning a bathroom or listening to a life story. Come ready to put the needs of those you serve above your own.

Don't Depend on Privilege

Jesus had access to privilege and wealth, but he voluntarily chose poverty instead. Your time in this community may feel like poverty. The sleeping arrangements are probably less comfortable than you have at home, the food may not be what you prefer and the temperature may be uncomfortable. Our hope is that this week of service will remind you to depend more on Jesus by living outside convenience and, sometimes, going without.

Encounter Brokenness

Jesus stepped out of the order and harmony of heaven into the disorder and brokenness of Earth. You are called to do the same. You will encounter brokenness during your time in the community. God is calling you to be present among the brokenness, not to draw conclusions or judge. Instead, open your eyes wide to the needs around you, both in your YouthWorks community and back home.

¹Muriu, O. (2009, December 29). *Pace and place of missions today*. Urbana Conference 2009. Retrieved on January 28, 2011, from <http://www.intervarsity.org/page/urbana-09-audio>