

Milford Alternative High School, Milford, Connecticut: Operation Habitat

As part of Milford Alternative High School’s environmental science curriculum, two teams of students participated in service-learning projects to restore open spaces in their town. Each team spent one semester and approximately six hours per week on their service-learning project. The teams were led by a science teacher Annaliese Spaziano, as well as a landscaping professional, Vinnie Piselli. Together, they originated the Operation Habitat program.

The first team, composed of 14 students, worked on restoring a local park, which involved researching the social and geological history of the park as well as its ecological problems and how to solve them. The team created new trails for the park and put up trail maps. They also created a landscape design for an open space at a local elementary school.



Members of Milford Alternative’s Operation Habitat program (June 2004)

The major project for the 16 students in the second team was to create a demonstration garden for the town. The service goals for this project were to restore an overgrown public space and create a garden to educate local citizens on responsible gardening practices with native species and without the need of pesticides and chemical fertilizers. The learning goals for the students included 1) recognize native plants that attract wildlife, 2) learn and implement strategies to solicit community support, 3) practice successful teamwork strategies, 4) learn the names of native perennials and shrubs and 4) learn how to create a landscape design.

Students cleared the site chosen for the demonstration garden, which was part of the local Chamber of Commerce’s adopt-a-spot program. They designed the garden, researched and selected native plants that would attract birds and butterflies, planted them and spread mulch cover.

The students reached all of their goals and recently held a grand-opening presentation for the demonstration garden. In attendance were a state senator, Milford’s mayor and other dignitaries. In addition, the students are in the process of creating public service announcements to educate the citizenry on responsible gardening and have created a page on their school’s Web site that explains their project objectives.