



# Leaders Begin Here



It's a bright, warm Friday afternoon in the latter half of May, and the lakeside park in Grant, Mich., is busy with middle school and high school students.

They're not there, however, to play or soak in the sun. They're there to make a difference.



Hope sophomore Colleen Quick appreciates the lessons she learned about mentoring and leadership as she helped the Grant, Mich., students develop their service project through LdOut3. The younger students implement and manage the projects, so she took their lead on the day of the project itself and joined those who were helping clear the park's trails.

Along the shore, a couple of groups are painting picnic tables. Following a ridgeline, others are raking a thick carpet of leaves from the network of trails. In the woods on the other side of the park, several more are clearing underbrush—hard work this humid day—to extend that trail network. No adults assigned them the tasks, and no one is looking over their shoulders now. They saw the need, and have committed themselves to addressing it, themselves.

The work in the park matters, but behind the curtain the goal has been to make a difference to the students as well—and, weeks and months before, to a cadre of Hope students.

The project culminates the Grant students' participation in LdOut3, a leadership training program coordinated by the college's Center for Faithful Leadership. The first part of the name is short for "Lead-Out," with the "3" representing the program's focus on students at three levels: Hope students, 11th graders and seventh graders. The emphasis is on giving each of the groups leadership experience as they work together, in series, to create and implement a service project to meet a need within a church or community.

The effort begins with the Hope students meeting with the 11th graders for five weeks at the high school students' school or church, helping the high schoolers to learn principles of teamwork and leadership, and to identify the service project that they'd like to pursue. The Hope students then step out of the picture and the 11th graders take over, using what they've learned to work for five weeks themselves with the seventh graders, who finish the planning and make the project happen.

The idea is that all of the students will learn more about leadership—and see

themselves as leaders—if they're actually placed in leadership roles.

"LdOut3 believes if we give people the opportunity and proper tools to lead, they will lead," says Dr. Steve VanderVeen, who is director of the Center for Faithful Leadership and a professor of management. "And if we empower people to lead as a team, anything can be achieved."

Dr. Virgil Gulker, who works with the center as servant leader-in-residence, is the staff director for LdOut3. He noted that the program addresses two crucial and complementary needs: developing the next generation of leaders and, most important,

"I love to be a leader and open kids' eyes to help them realize they can be something and be successful in life and be role models to people."

— Ana, a high-schooler





High school and middle school students work together to improve a community park in Grant, Mich. They are participants in the college's "LdOut3" leadership training program, with the "3" representing a focus on students at three levels. Hope students meet with the high school students, teaching them leadership principles and developing a service idea tailored to the younger students' hometown, and then step back and letting the high schoolers take the reins in involving middle-school students from their area in making the project happen.

enabling young people to see themselves in those leadership roles.

In communicating with the 11th graders and seventh graders, he said, the message is, "We know that you are wired to be a leader, and we are going to position you in that role."

He has found that the young students rise to the occasion. "They don't disappoint us. It's kind of magical to see what happens when people achieve at the level that we anticipate for them."

LdOut3 began at one site on a pilot basis in the fall of 2009, and worked so well that the program was continued, and expanded this past spring to include four sites—in Grant, and at three West Michigan churches. The groups have pursued a variety of projects, from improving the park at Grant, to helping members with household projects at one church, to organizing a field fun day for children at another.

Reed Swift '11 began working with the program more than a year ago, and this past spring was a project director for the initiative, overseeing two of the four Hope teams. Swift noted that he was impressed repeatedly by how engaged the younger students became when given the chance, shifting from standing shyly to the side at the beginning to participating actively

by the end—and at the same time, doing so thinking not of themselves, but of others.

"The neatest impact is when we start to talk about the service project, and the kids start to talk about the needs in the community," he said. "Some of the dreams and ideas that the students come up with are really impressive. A lot of these kids just need someone to believe in them."

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— Austin Stauffer '10,  
LdOut3 alumnus

Austin Stauffer '10 has experienced LdOut3 from two perspectives. He participated in 2009 as a Hope senior, and also connected with the program this past year as interim minister for senior high youth and young adults at Fellowship Reformed Church in Holland, Mich., one of this year's four sites. He values the difference that LdOut3 makes to the younger students, but he also appreciates what he learned through the experience as a Hope student.

"Hope students learn just as much as the younger kids. You learn to deal with all kinds of people," said Stauffer, a communication major who minored in leadership. "By teaching the leadership process, I feel like you'd be pretty hard-headed not to learn something."

Sophomore Colleen Quick of Springfield, Ill., was part of the team of Hope students that worked with the Grant group across the spring semester.

"I really like the idea of mentoring," she said. "I'm passionate about leadership."

She, too, sees that she has learned as well.

"I definitely learned more about commitment," Quick said. "We learned a lot about teamwork."

The Fremont Area Community Foundation supported the Grant schools' participation with a grant to LdOut3, pleased with the many levels of benefits to the young students—leadership training, an emphasis on students helping each other, and working together. Not least of all, the foundation saw LdOut3 as an opportunity for young students to connect with college students and perhaps see a place for higher education in their own lives. In fact, in February the Grant group even visited campus for a day, some staying overnight with Hope students to learn more about college life.

"It really is an all-encompassing program, so it fits a lot of different aspects that the foundation hopes to reach with the different programs that we fund," said Amy Moore, program officer with the foundation.

The Grant project may have started something. Brought together by the students, the city and schools may find new ways to collaborate. And while the students were enjoying seeing their work shaping the park for the better, they were thinking about making a better future as well.

"I wanted to be a good leader," said Frankie, a middle schooler. "Sometimes, when you listen to people, you might be surprised what they have to say."

"I love to be a leader and open kids' eyes to help them realize they can be something and be successful in life and be role models to people," said Ana, a high schooler. 🐦

