

"The liveliest practical civics book for young students in print." —Ralph Nader

**REVISED
EXPANDED,
UPDATED
EDITION**

The Kid's Guide to SOCIAL ACTION

Barbara A. Lewis

free spirit
PUBLISHING®

**How to solve the social problems you choose—
and turn them into positive action**

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.....→ **Praise for *The Kid's Guide to Social Action*** ←.....

"A tremendously useful, well-organized, and inspiring book!"

—Children's Television Workshop

"A wealth of information for kids who want to change things."

—*ALA Booklist*

"The liveliest practical civics book for young students in print."

—Ralph Nader

"If you've been wondering about how to prepare future leaders of our nation, here's a place to start."

—*School Library Journal*

"A great handbook that paves the way for successful, meaningful community projects orchestrated by kids."

—*Chicago Sun-Times*
(Book Week)

"If you want to change the world and are wondering how, grab a copy of *The Kid's Guide to Social Action*. . . . You can make a difference."

—*Kids' Wall Street News*

.....→ **Awards received by *The Kid's Guide to Social Action*** ←.....

"Best of the Best for Children"

—American Library Association

"Books for the Teenage Selection"

—New York Public Library

"Outstanding Children's Book, Reading-Magic Awards"

—*Parenting Magazine*

"Children's Book of Distinction Award"

—*Hungry Mind Review*

.....→ **Seen On** ←.....

CBS "This Morning"

CBS "Raising Good Kids in Bad Times"

CNN "Newsroom"

CNN "Headline News"

THE KID'S GUIDE TO SOCIAL ACTION

**How to solve the social problems
you choose—
and turn creative thinking
into positive action**

Barbara A. Lewis

Edited by Pamela Espeland and Caryn Pernu



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To kids everywhere.
May you be both *seen* and *heard*.

And to Larry, a man of action, who knows
how to get things done.

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..... INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been sprawled on the carpet, munching chips, while watching a TV reporter discuss a problem in the news? You may have said to yourself, “I know what I’d do if I were in charge.” You saw the solution clearly—somewhere between the time when you dipped a chip in the salsa and crunched it between your teeth. And yet, you wondered, who would listen to you?

You might be shocked at the number of people who would not only listen to you, but also act on your suggestions. Kids around the world are tackling mountains of community problems. And adults are standing with hands on hips and gaping mouths as they witness kids pushing through laws,

cleaning up vacant lots, collecting a billion tons of newspapers to recycle, even making pets out of endangered protozoa. These aren’t superkids with magical powers. They’re regular kids, just like you.

The Kid’s Guide to Social Action can help you transform your creative thinking into actions that make a difference in your neighborhood, your town or city, your state, your country, and your world. And it’s written for kids so even adults can understand and use it. But this isn’t a book of lesson plans. It isn’t a book of ready-made projects. It won’t tell you what to do. It *will* give you the skills you need to solve the social problems you choose.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK ◀.....

You can dip your toes and wade through different sections, or you can dive in and swim from cover to cover. It’s up to you. But it may help to know that this book is divided into five main parts.

PART ONE: LIFE BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Meet the kids from Jackson Elementary School in Salt Lake City, Utah, whose efforts resulted in the cleanup of a hazardous waste site, the passage of new laws, the planting of hundreds of trees, sidewalk improvements, and anti-crime efforts. Learn how you, too, can create projects that make a difference.

PART TWO: POWER SKILLS

Master the social action skills you need to accomplish your projects. Learn how to write letters, search the Internet, create surveys, pass petitions, picket—even get TV coverage and raise big bucks. You’ll see samples of student work and pictures of real kids in action.

PART THREE: WORKING WITH GOVERNMENT

Grown-ups aren’t the only ones who can change laws or have an effect on our court system. Kids are doing it, too. Learn how to lobby—how to convince your legislators to vote for your bill. Read about some exceptional kids who are serving as jurors and judges in youth courts.

PART FOUR: RESOURCES

This part points you toward more information—important telephone numbers and addresses and Web sites, groups you may want to join, places to apply for awards, and more. Learn who to call, where to write, and how to get the recognition you deserve.

PART FIVE: TOOLS

Petitions, surveys, news releases, and resolutions—these are just some of the tools of social action. In this part, you’ll find the forms you need to put your best foot forward. They’re ready for you to photocopy and use.

Throughout *The Kid's Guide to Social Action*, you'll read about other action "bench pressers" who have accomplished everything from cleaning up hazardous waste sites to building a school for child laborers in Pakistan. You'll meet Amber Lynn Coffman, who mobilized kids across the nation to join her Happy Helpers for the Homeless organization, and Porfue Xiong, who volunteers as a translator for Asian immigrants navigating the U.S. health care system. Some kids, like the Conflict Busters in Franklin, Nebraska, are working on projects to improve their school; others, such as Kids Against Pollution, are working on an effort to amend the U.S. Constitution.

All of these kids are heroes. But they're also ordinary kids who just want to design a better future.

SOCIAL ACTION: WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU?



Social action includes those things you do that extend beyond your own home and classroom into the "real world." These things aren't required of you. You don't *have* to do them. You do them selflessly, to improve the quality of life around you.

The real world is chock-full of real problems to solve: real letters to write, real laws waiting to be made, real surveys to analyze, real streams needing monitoring, scraggly landscapes in need of artistic attention.

Isn't it exciting for you that all these problems haven't already been solved? Could you think of anything more boring than growing up in a world where every-

If you have a social action story you'd like to share about yourself or someone you know, write it down and send it to:

Barbara Lewis
c/o Free Spirit Publishing Inc.
217 Fifth Avenue North, Suite 200
Minneapolis, MN 55401-1299

If possible, include a telephone number where you can be reached. Your story may be used in future books or articles.

"Parents can only give good advice or put [their children] on the right paths, but the final forming of a person's character lies in their own hands."

Anne Frank

thing had already been done, and there was nothing left for you to do?

Solving social problems will bring excitement and suspense into your life. Instead of reading dusty textbooks and memorizing what other people have done, you'll create your own history with the actions you take. And here's a promise to you: As you reach out to solve problems in your community, you'll be helping to design a better future. You'll also be learning to take charge of your personal life. You'll become more confident in yourself, because you'll prove to yourself that you can do almost anything.



WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?



This is the Age of the Kid. The world needs to see your work and to hear your voice. And *you* need to start asserting and enjoying your rights.

Think about it. There have been many social movements to define and strengthen adults' rights. For example, you've probably read about the women's rights movement. Before it got started and grew strong, many people thought that women weren't smart enough or interested enough to take social action, do certain kinds of jobs, even vote in elections. Other rights movements are working to increase opportunities for people who have long been discriminated against. There's an animals' rights movement underway.

But what about *kids'* rights? For years, kids were told to be "seen and not heard." That's not so true anymore. Or is it? Has your country ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child? This treaty is the first binding international agreement to set minimum standards to protect the full range of human rights for children—civil and political rights, as well as economic, social, and cultural rights. As of 1997, only two nations have yet to ratify this convention: Somalia and the United States.

.....► Check It Out ◀.....

To find out more about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, contact UNICEF:

UNICEF
125 Maiden Lane
New York, NY 10038
1-800-367-5437
www.unicef.org

"One of the virtues of being very young is that you don't let the facts get in the way of your imagination."

Sam Levenson

Does your community listen to kids? Are kids represented on local committees or school boards where you live? Do your senators ask your opinions before making or changing laws?

Do you find it insulting that most adults think you're only interested in video games and loud music? Are you tired of adults making most of the big decisions that affect your life? Kids are probably the most *unrepresented* group in the world. Now, some adults might disagree and say that your parents represent you. But there was a time when women were told that their husbands represented them. What's the difference?

No one can represent you better than you. You have a fresh view of life. You don't know all the reasons why something *won't* work. You're willing to try new things. You come up with new ideas. And you have your own opinions.

But your opinions won't be presented to the public unless *you* get out there and do it. Of course, you'll still want to schedule a few video games in between, and take time for music and other things you like to do. When you start working for social change, you don't stop having fun.

Maybe you're not interested in solving *big* problems. That's okay. There are many ways to make a difference, and *The Kid's Guide to Social Action* will introduce you to quite a few. If you're one of those kids who wants to change the world, this book is for you. Or if you're just one of those kids who gets the uncontrollable urge to stand up in a movie theater and shout, "I've had it with the next person who throws an empty popcorn cup or sticky wad of gum on the floor!"—this book is for you, too.

CREATE YOUR OWN FUTURE

Whereas, You are capable of thinking and solving real problems, you should not allow adults (or anyone else) to put you down. Don't pay attention to those who say you can't succeed if you're poor, uneducated, or disabled, or because of your ethnicity, sex, or youth. Don't get trapped by those chilling excuses. They can make you numb. You *can* succeed.

Whereas, You can make a difference in the world, don't listen to those who insist it's too late to breathe fresh air, control neighborhood gangs, save the rain forests, save the whales, combat drug abuse, and create world peace. It's only too late when *you* stop believing in the future.

Whereas, You can find your own problems and design your own solutions, be suspicious of anyone who "gives" you a problem to solve or wants you to resolve a pet project. Decide what *you* want to work on, and then invite others to join *your* team.

Whereas, You should *not* feel responsible for solving all the world's problems while you're still a kid, neither should you feel excluded from creating solutions. Don't be swayed by people who say you're "too young," that you should spend these years dreaming and just being a kid. Remind them of how it feels to be powerless. They will remember. The ability to solve problems doesn't belong just to adults—and the ability to dream doesn't belong just to kids.

Whereas, You have a right to shape your future, don't wait for someone else to do it for you. Speak up. Speak out. Design a world you want to live in. Don't wait for luck to create it. Luck is just another word for work. The world needs to see your works and to hear your voices. *Now, therefore, be it*

RESOLVED That this year and every year shall be proclaimed as:

THE KID'S YEAR FOR SOCIAL ACTION

for all kids who believe in themselves, each other, and the future. Don't *allow* life to happen. *Make* it happen!

SIGNED AND SEALED this ____ day of _____.

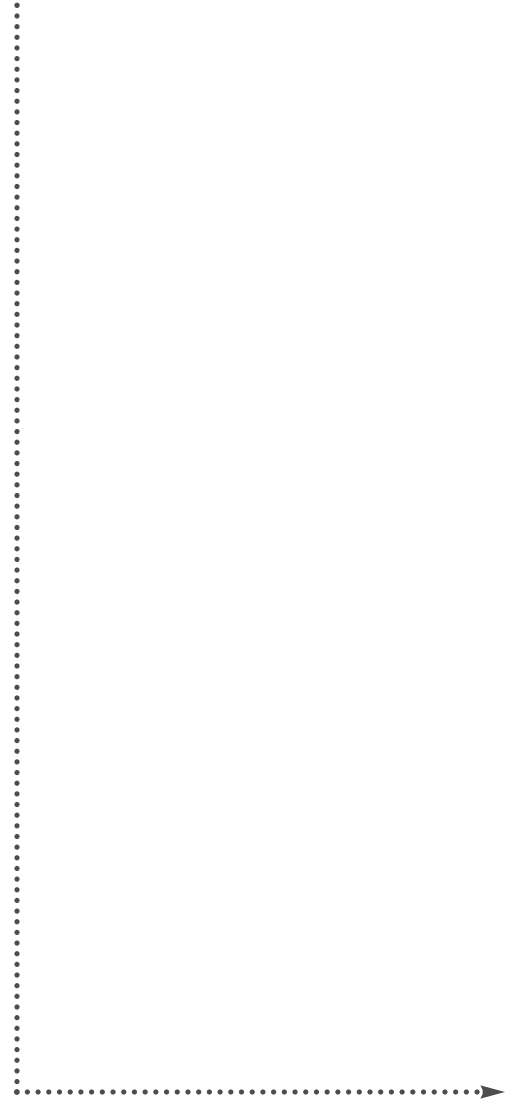
Signature



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Part 1

LIFE BEYOND THE CLASSROOM



KIDS IN ACTION



Courtesy Paul Barker, Deseret News.

Jackson Elementary

Jackson kids survey the neighborhood surrounding the barrel site.

Salt Lake City, Utah. Black dots representing possible hazardous waste sites were sprinkled across the large wall map of Salt Lake City like flecks of pepper. I had hung the eight-foot map on the blackboard so my students could see it easily. They discovered that one of the sites was located just three blocks from our school.

"That old barrel yard?" 11-year-old Maxine asked, shocked at how close the site was to us. "Kids climb all over those barrels!"

"I bet there are at least a thousand barrels in one pile," added Chris. He grabbed a marking pen and circled the spot.

We were studying the importance of groundwater, the underground liquid cities pump up for people to drink. We had learned that hazardous waste can leak down to contaminate the water. I had planned the unit for my academically talented sixth graders at Jackson Elementary, where I teach special classes of fourth through sixth graders. I had no idea I was unleashing a tiger.

As it turned out, Chris had underestimated: The site held 50,000 barrels that at one time had contained everything from molasses and flour to dangerous chemicals. Now, after a recycling business had stockpiled them for more than 40 years, many were rusted and corroded. Residues left in the barrels had long since dribbled out onto the hard dirt.

As the sixth graders threw themselves into finding out if the barrel yard had contaminated the groundwater, the fourth and fifth graders caught their enthusiasm. We now had 34 kids tackling the problem. This was as exciting to them as unraveling a mystery, since it was *their* neighborhood.

I made preliminary phone calls to the health department to alert staff that students would be calling to ask what they might do to help. "There's nothing children can do," one health department official told me. "They'll be in high school before they see any results."

When the kids called health officials, they were shooed away like pesky flies. But since I teach students to solve problems, they didn't give up. They just looked for new solutions.

Their next idea was to conduct a door-to-door survey of the neighborhood, informing residents of the dangers of hazardous waste and searching for wells so they could ask health officials to take water samples.

These two strategies didn't work, either. Surveying a four-block area that included several abandoned houses and warehouses with wooden planks slapped haphazardly over jagged window glass, the children discovered only a few wells, all cemented over. But what surprised them more was the "I don't care" response of the locals.

Before returning to school, we paused outside the barrel site fence. Covering three blocks, the steel mountain of drums blocked the children's view of a community sports arena, the Mormon Temple, and the Wasatch mountains in the distance.

"Look," Maxine said, pointing. "Some of the barrels are orange and yucky."

"Rusted," Chris said.

"And some have big holes."

"Corroded," Chris corrected.

"Look at all the orange color in the dirt," Heather said, "and black, too. I wonder if anything leaked out of the barrels?"

Maxine bent down. "The fence has lots of holes in it," she said. "Bet I could climb through one."

The "protective" fence sagged in spots like stretched-out potbellies. In a later survey of the school's students, 32 children would admit to having played on the barrels.

While we were at the site, some of the kids decided to stop at the barrel yard's office. A worker told the kids to bug off, that there weren't any problems at the site.

But my kids weren't convinced.

To learn more, they began reading articles on hazardous waste in such magazines as the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*. Sound like hard reading? You're right. But the kids devoured the articles, because they wanted answers to their problem.

An environmental consultant, health officials, and Salt Lake City's emergency hazardous waste cleanup team came to our class to lecture. Health officials said that even one cubic inch of dangerous

chemicals could leak down through the soil and contaminate groundwater.

Shauna called the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) national hotline to ask for help. Other students wrote to the agency's regional office in Denver. Another called the local power company, which owned the land where the barrels were stockpiled.

TV and radio stations and newspapers covered the story of the students' quest.

But things didn't start changing at the barrel yard until the students visited Palmer DePaulis, mayor of Salt Lake City at that time. Luckily for the kids, the mayor had been a schoolteacher. He listened to them. Then he amazed them. He promised to work toward getting the mess cleaned up within 18 months! The kids struggled to walk instead of run out the door.

Once outside, they slapped hands and showed off with a few flips and cartwheels on the front lawn.

Within a few weeks, changes began at the barrel site. Under all the public pressure from people the children had contacted, and the coverage in the media, workers started removing the barrels.

In early June, 1987, just a few months after the kids had begun their campaign, researchers from the Denver EPA office came to Utah to check out the site. Although the sixth graders were enjoying their graduation party, many chose instead to scramble over to the barrel site to watch the EPA dig wells to check the water.

The kids came in dresses and pressed pants, straight from the dance. The girls twirled around,

.....➤



.....➤ Jackson kids at the barrel site, where 50,000 barrels were stockpiled. Some contained residues of hazardous waste.

Courtesy Paul Barker, *Deseret News*.

catching the breeze in puffed-out skirts, then arm-wrestled with the boys. Heather won.

"We did it!" they shouted.

Results of the test were promised within nine months.

While the Kids Waited

The kids were proud of their work, and they waited anxiously for the test results. But their pride faded when they learned that the owner of the barrel yard had suffered a heart attack and was in intensive care at a hospital. To make it worse, one of his workers said that the pollution dispute had probably helped to cause his heart attack. "Don't you know that this man has contributed thousands of dollars to the local children's hospital, Little League teams, and other charities?" the man scolded. "We're not contaminating anything. By recycling, we're cleaning up the environment."

If you're confused, so were the kids. They learned that things are seldom all right or all wrong. They thought about this through summer recess. They leaned on the fence by the barrel yard and watched the removal of the barrels by truck and train. The piles shrank. Bare patches appeared on the dirt. Within a year, all the drums would disappear, leaving only the stained soil behind.

In the meantime, I received three phone calls from an anonymous man (not the barrel yard owner) threatening legal action if the kids persisted on the project. Nothing ever came of the threats, but the school district promised legal help if we needed it.

When the kids returned to school in the fall, I expected them to have given up their hazardous waste crusade. After all, how interesting can "garbage" be? I was wrong. Even the old sixth graders (now mature seventh graders) returned to brainstorm new strategies with the younger children.

Some of the kids were still concerned about the barrel yard owner. Was it really their fault that he was in the hospital? Did winning always mean that someone else had to lose?

I called the barrel yard and learned that the owner was in stable condition.

"Who besides you has rights that need to be protected?" I asked my students.

"The barrel yard owner," Chris said. "What's going to happen to small business owners like him who can't afford to clean up their messes? They could lose their businesses, and then only the big guys would be around."

Heather jumped up. "But we have a right to know what's in that dirt. We're living by it."

The other children agreed with Heather.

"Then who should be responsible for cleaning up hazardous waste?" I asked.

"Maybe the health department," one child said.

But a spokesperson for the health department had already told us that their agency didn't have any money.

"Let's earn some money to help everyone, like small businesses and people like us," someone suggested.

"And give it to the health department," another added.

"Let's clean up all the hazardous waste in the state!" Kory suggested, swinging his arms and knocking a stack of magazines to the floor.

"Get real," Chris jeered. "That would cost too much."

But they didn't give up the money idea. They held a white elephant sale and sold all their old mini-cars, doll furniture, and games. They raised \$468.22—probably about enough to clean up one square foot of toxic mess.

Heather, always the philosopher, remained optimistic. "It's okay," she said. "It's a start."

The Results Are In

By Christmas, the long-awaited EPA test results came in. Heather tore down the hall, waving a large manila envelope. "The health department just brought this to the office and asked for me!" Her cheeks glowed.

We flipped through the pages together. The report indicated that harmful chemicals, solvents, coal tars, pesticides, and heavy metals had polluted the soil and groundwater at the barrel site. It listed such substances as benzene, toluene, lead, zinc, and copper. Translation: Both the ground-water and soil were polluted.

We didn't know it then, but the site would soon be recommended for the Utah National Priorities List. This meant that it would be given top priority for cleanup. Because Salt Lake Valley drinking water is collected from several sources and mixed, our neighborhood toxic waste site threatened over 477,000 people!

The Next Step

Although the kids had won that battle, they didn't stop there. They mailed 550 letters to businesses and environmental groups, asking for donations for

hazardous waste cleanup. Including the money they chipped in themselves, the students raised about \$2,700. They wanted to give it to the health department to help clean up polluted sites.

But they couldn't. The law wouldn't let them.

"Let's just change the law then!" Kory said, punching his fist in the air.

The kids had read about the national Superfund, designed to help clean up abandoned toxic waste sites. Utah had no such fund and ranked near the bottom of all the states in environmental programs. So the students worked together to initiate Utah's first Superfund law for cleanup of hazardous waste. The kids called the legislators on the phone and testified before a legislative committee and the Utah Senate. They passed out flyers to all the legislators, trimmed in red crayon.

On the day of the vote, the kids sat on plush couches at the State House, trying to look grown-up and proper. They crossed their legs and folded their hands—but within two minutes, they were bouncing on the cushions. Then they rushed to the window. In the distance, they could see the barrel site where it had all begun almost a year before.

The lawmakers passed the bill without one vote against it. Because they weren't allowed to clap in this formal setting, the children grinned, mouths open in silent cheers, arms waving wildly.

"No one has more effectively lobbied us than these young kids," one senator said. "And they didn't even have to buy us dinner."

"These children did something we couldn't do because Superfund is such a political issue," said Brent Bradford, a director in the health department. "They've raised the level of awareness of the whole valley to hazardous waste issues."

The kids were invited to speak at universities, education seminars, and community groups. They were featured in many national magazines and newspapers, and received over 25 local recognitions and nine national awards. One of the kids' dads built a trophy case for the front hall of Jackson Elementary to show off their awards.

Passing On the Spirit

But that wasn't the end of the Jackson kids' story. When the original kids went on to junior high, new children came up with projects of their own. They graduated from garbage to sidewalks and trees. Another project brought \$10,000 worth of sidewalk repairs into their neighborhood, and the kids have campaigned for more neighborhood improvements.

Like many other kids' groups across the nation, the Jackson kids turned their focus to trees. They learned from the University of Michigan's *Forestry Update* that a single tree, in its average 50-year lifetime, will contribute \$62,000 worth of air pollution control. Dubbing themselves "Leaf It To Us," the younger kids decided to think big and applied for two city grants—money to use for their tree planting.

One day Audrey Chase, a fifth grader, had an idea. "Why don't we find money and make our own grants for kids all over the state to plant trees?" The Jackson kids contacted the governor, the state forester, and national forestry people. With the help of Richard Klason, state forester, they found some national money for grants for children in Utah.

Not to be outdone by previous Jackson hot-shots, the new kids tackled the legislature again. This time, they pushed through a law creating \$10,000 for grants for kids in Utah to plant trees. The law has been renewed every year since 1990. Over \$175,000 worth of trees have been planted by kids in the state.

The children brainstormed even bigger ideas. They worked with Utah Senator Orrin Hatch to create a national fund for trees. The kids circulated a petition and collected 1,500 signatures from kids around the nation to support their idea. Audrey flew to Washington, D.C., to deliver the petition and to lobby senators in person.

Although Congress didn't write a special bill for the students, legislators inserted the idea to make money available for kids to the America the Beautiful Act of 1990 (technically called The Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990—S2830). This money was dispersed to all the states and made it possible for kids and youth groups to apply for federal grants of money to improve their neighborhoods.

The Legacy Continues

This legacy of social action has continued at Jackson Elementary. A few years later, students decided to fight crime in the area. They surveyed the school and found out that one-fourth of the children had been chased with knives or weapons and that one-fifth of the kids or their family members had been threatened with guns in the area. They discovered that the kids thought the three worst crimes in the area were drugs, gangs, and child abuse.

.....►

Armed with this information, the kids went to work. They gave speeches and hosted an anti-crime night with their parents. They lobbied the police department and got their help in measuring off a Drug-Free School Zone and painting over graffiti.

Inspired by earlier Jackson kids, the new group successfully lobbied for three tough anti-crime laws in the Utah legislature, making stiffer penalties for graffiti, drive-by shootings, and possession of weapons near schools.

One day the kids discovered that across the street from Jackson, a house had become a headquarters for drug dealing. The kids got mad. They wrote letters to the city complaining about it, and city officials ordered the house to be bulldozed. The children then helped build a new low-cost house for a family. Patrice giggled and said, "Just think—I helped build this house."

Hearing stories of child abuse, Jackson students decided they needed to work to make life safer for kids. They worked to amend a child-abuse law, allowing teens to be trained to advocate for abused kids in court. They wrote a public service announcement for TV, and also had the slogan put on a billboard. Written by Moleni and illustrated by Andrea, the billboard read: "You always lose if you choose to abuse."

After several years of trying, the kids finally realized a dream to create a hotline for kids who

had been abused or wanted information about child abuse. It was hard. "Lots of people told us why it wouldn't work," Amanda said. Many people turned them down. Finally, their principal, Marilyn Phillips, suggested that they apply for a grant. They followed her advice and got the hotline, as well as 25,000 stickers displaying the phone number—enough for all the children in the Salt Lake City school district.

What Can You Do?

Now, you're probably saying something like, "Yeah, but those Jackson kids are hotshots. I'm just a regular kid. I can't do all that." If you're a disbeliever, let me assure you. I'm their teacher, and I'll tattle on them. They sometimes forget assignments. They lose papers. Their bedrooms aren't always clean. They're kids just like you, kids with dreams, kids who care. They're not rich or unusually clever. In fact, their school has had the lowest income per capita (per person) in the Salt Lake City school district.

But one thing they do have is courage. They don't give up easily. They're interested in the future, because they plan to live there. They're not afraid to tackle hard things that other people say can't be done.

As Heather said, "Big things happen in small steps."

**"Whatever you do may seem
insignificant, but it is most
important that you do it."**

Gandhi

10 TIPS FOR TAKING SOCIAL ACTION

**"Luck is a matter of preparation
meeting opportunity."**

Oprah Winfrey

You've read about the Jackson kids. Anything they can do, you can do, too. Here are ten steps that will lead you to your goal.

1 Choose a problem. Look around your neighborhood. Are there any areas that look neglected or need improvements? Are there places that make you feel unsafe? Places that smell awful? Any problems with drugs, crumbling buildings, homeless people, hungry children, dangerous street crossings, grungy landscapes?

This is one good way to begin. You could also find a problem by thinking about a subject you have studied at school or in a scout troop. For example, if you have just finished a unit on mammals, you might ask yourself, "What kinds of problems do animals have or cause in real life?" If you can't think of anything, you might call your local humane society, animal shelter, or research clinic.

The hard part won't be finding a problem. (For some suggestions, see page 16.) The hard part will be choosing only one problem at a time.

2 Do your research. If you choose a problem from something you have studied at school, you already have valuable information to use. But try some new ways of researching, too.

Survey your school or neighborhood to find out how other people feel about the problem you want to tackle. Telephone officials for information, then interview them over the phone or in person. Write letters. Read magazines and newspapers. Check out the Internet to find information or allies. If you happen to be a veteran couch potato, flip the TV to a news channel.

In Part Two: Power Skills, you'll learn more ways to do research.

3 Brainstorm possible solutions and choose one. Think of what you might do to solve your problem. Brainstorm everything you can think of. Sometimes the zaniest ideas turn out to be the best.

After you have made a long list of potential solutions, look at each one carefully. Choose the solution that seems the most possible and will make the most difference. For example: We will help young people learn to read by volunteering as tutors in the elementary school; we will help reduce crime in our area by organizing a neighborhood watch program.

4 Build coalitions of support. A *coalition* is a group of people working together for the same goal. Find all the people you can who agree with your solutions. Survey your neighborhood; ask teachers, city officials, newspapers, legislators, other students. Call state agencies that deal with your problem. Send email to connect with businesses and nonprofit organizations interested in your issue.

This is *very* important to do. Organize all these people. The more people you have on your team, the more power you will have to make a difference.

5 Work with your opposition. For every good solution, there are people, businesses, and organizations that might oppose the plan. That's why it's important to ask, "Who or what might make it hard to carry out our plan?" It's important to identify possible barriers before you run into them. You don't want to be taken by surprise. Brainstorm with your coalition of support to help you identify who might

object to your solution. Teachers and other experts can help as well. Then make plans to overcome others' objections.

You might be tempted to think of the people who oppose your solution as "bad guys." But it can be more useful to see them as people with different needs and opinions. Get to know your "enemy"; you might be surprised how far you can get by working together, and how many ideas you agree on. Not all the time, but in many cases, you and your opposition can both win—or at least accomplish more by compromising.



6 Advertise. Here's good news: Television, radio, and newspaper reporters love stories of kid action. TV and radio stations usually offer free air time for worthy projects.

Call and ask to speak to a reporter who covers educational issues. Or you might write a letter. Be sure to include a phone number (yours?) the reporter can call for more information. Or send out a news release.

Don't forget small community newspapers, even church bulletins. They can help you advertise, too.

If you let people know what problem you're trying to solve, and what solution you propose, you'll suddenly find all sorts of people who want to climb aboard.

7 Raise money. After letting people know about your project, you might try to raise funds to support it. This isn't essential, and many wonderful projects can be tackled without this step. But sometimes you have more power if you put money where your mouth is.

8 Carry out your solution. You have your lineup of team players, and you've advertised to let people know the problem you plan to solve. Now DO IT!

Make a list of all the steps you need to take. Give speeches, write letters and proclamations, pass petitions, improve your neighborhood or school (or you might just try to spiff up your own backyard).

9 Evaluate and reflect. Is your plan working? Are you congratulating yourself on your coolness, or do you feel more like you have a migraine headache? It's time to evaluate your project and its progress.

Have you tried everything? Should you change your solution? Do you need to talk with more people? It's up to you. You're in charge.

Reflect on what you've learned. What have you actually accomplished? Write, draw, or dramatize your experiences; express your reactions to the service you have performed in an imaginative way.

10 Don't give up. Unless *you* think it's time to quit, don't pay too much attention to folks who tell you all the reasons why your solution won't work. If you believe your cause is really important, keep picking away at it.

Problem solving means weeding out all the things that don't work until you find something that does. Remember, a mountain looks tallest from the bottom. Don't give up. Climb!

WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?

Maybe you already know a problem you want to solve. Or maybe you're truly stuck on finding an issue to pursue.

On page 16, you'll find a list of areas from which you might brainstorm a problem. But first, let's review the Four Rules of Brainstorming:

1 Brainstorm with a friend, your family, a group, or a class. The more brains you have to storm with, the more ideas you'll have. But you can also brainstorm alone.

2 Everybody tries to come up with as many ideas as possible—from silly to serious, and everything in between.

3 All ideas are acceptable during brainstorming. Write all of them down now, and make your choices later.

4 Nobody criticizes anybody else's ideas. Period. No exceptions!

You can brainstorm on blank paper, a chalkboard, a flip chart, a computer, or anything you choose. On this page and the next, you'll find examples of two filled-in brainstorming forms. The first is for writing down ideas. The second is for choosing an idea to work with, then making a plan of action.

If you like these forms, you'll find blank ones on pages 177 and 178 that you can copy and use.

..... BRAINSTORMING I: COME UP WITH IDEAS

	That makes me think of:	more WILD & crazy ideas—Keep going
<p>idea - ideas</p> <p>pollution</p> <p>air land water garbage</p>	<p>factory stacks</p> <p>car exhaust</p> <p>drinking water</p> <p>hazardous waste</p> <p>landfills</p>	<p>dioxin gas masks</p> <p>solar powered cars</p> <p>scrubbers on stacks</p> <p>lead in water pipes</p> <p>midnight dumping</p> <p>bacteria, germs</p> <p>fertilizer</p>
<p>idea - ideas</p> <p>broken up sidewalk</p>	<p>sidewalks missing-8th West</p> <p>lack of city money</p> <p>neighbors don't care</p>	<p>walk in streets</p> <p>elderly trip and get hurt</p> <p>people move away too fast</p>
<p>idea - ideas</p> <p>grafitti drugs</p> <p>abandoned buildings vandalism</p>	<p>gangs</p> <p>the old paint factory</p> <p>the corner at 6th West night time</p> <p>neighbors don't watch</p>	<p>railroad station hides it dropouts</p> <p>lights broken or missing</p> <p>don't know each other</p>

..... BRAINSTORMING II: CHOOSE YOUR MAIN IDEA

At this point, you have many ideas, some of them crazy. Now you should choose an idea to work on.

Ask yourself questions.

For example: Which idea might make the biggest difference? Which idea might have the best chance to succeed? Which idea might benefit the most people? Which idea might cost the least to do? Which idea do I like the best?

QUESTIONS

1. Which idea might be the most possible to do? _____
2. Which idea do I like the best? _____
3. Which idea might help the most people? _____
4. Which idea might cost the least for us? _____
5. Which idea might help us learn the most? _____

Choose one basic idea to work with:

We will encourage sidewalk repairs in the Euclid area

Now list the steps to carry out your Plan of Action.

For example: Give speeches at the community council. Write letters to the mayor. Write a news release for TV and radio.

Then write down who will be responsible for each step, and when.

PLAN OF ACTION

Activity	Who Does It?	When
Photo survey of sidewalks	All of us	March 10
Call City Council	Gwen	March 7-11
Write speeches	Gwen, Sara, Donny, Dung, Errin	March 12-13
Speak to Mayor and City Council	Gwen, Sara, Donny, Dung, Errin	March 18
Call engineers	Sara	March 19
Write news releases	Donny, Errin	March 19
Meeting with engineers	All of us	March 30

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? ←.....

Unfortunately, problems in need of solutions are easy to find. Reading the newspapers, watching the news on TV or listening to the radio, surfing the Web, reading books or magazines, or talking to people in your school and community can all help you identify problems that need to be tackled.

Here's a list of topics that might get you jump-started. Ask yourself, "What's the problem?" for each of these topics. Decide which ones you might want to work with, or brainstorm topics of your own.

Community Concerns

- Schools
- City growth and development; land use
- Vacant lots, abandoned buildings
- Beautification projects
- Animals and wildlife
- Libraries
- Literacy
- Parks and recreation
- Sports and athletics

Social Concerns

- Families
- Child care
- Friends and social relationships
- Population
- Immigration
- Diversity
- Clothing
- Homelessness
- Public health, mental health
- Nutrition and hunger
- Substance abuse (alcohol and other drugs, smoking)
- Volunteerism
- Support systems for children, the elderly, etc.
- Poverty
- Employment, unemployment

Governing Agencies

- Transportation
- Law enforcement and justice
- Education
- Business and labor
- Lawmaking agencies and governments
- Social agencies
- Elections and voting
- Court advocacy

The Environment

- Energy production, energy use
- Natural resources
- Wildlife
- Hunting and fishing
- Pollution (air, water, land)
- Weather
- Garbage and recycling

Technology

- Communication
- Information access
- Satellites and space research
- Medical research
- Industrial advances
- Inventions and projects
- The future of technology and space

Value Systems

- Money
- Economic growth
- Human rights
- Children's rights
- Ethics (morals and beliefs)
- Religion
- Censorship
- Trade
- Working conditions

Public Safety

- Peace
- Weapons and gun control
- Safety and accidents (including industrial)
- Terrorism
- Disasters (earthquakes, floods, fires, storms, etc.)
- Disease
- Crime

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