



# Beat Michigan! Beat Cancer! Racing to Beat Ovarian Cancer

Written by Katie Benton, Barrington Elementary School, Upper Arlington City Schools — Upper Arlington, Ohio

“ You can't underestimate what 4th graders can do. We raised more than \$20,000. If our classes helped prevent one person from getting ovarian cancer, I am satisfied with what we did. ”

-- Margot, 4th grader at Barrington Elementary

## What?

### A few fast facts . . .

- ▶ Students and teachers wanted to help support ovarian cancer research at a local hospital.
- ▶ 50 fourth graders
- ▶ Teachers: Katie Benton, Bonnie Emery
- ▶ Curriculum Area(s): Social Studies, Science, Math, Language Arts
- ▶ Community Partners: Ovarian Cancer Alliance of Ohio, The Ohio State University James Cancer Hospital & Solove Research Institute

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## The Big Idea

*Fourth graders created a 5K Walk/Run and 1-mile Fun Run to raise awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer and raise money for research to find a cure. The idea for this project resulted from the recent loss of a student's mother to this disease.*

## Investigation

Every woman is at risk for ovarian cancer, regardless of age, heritage, and/or medical history. Approximately 90% of ovarian cancer cases are sporadic, with no discernible pattern of inheritance. Symptoms of ovarian cancer which are vague include: bloating or abdominal swelling, pelvis or abdominal pain, difficulty eating or feeling full quickly, unusual fatigue, urinary urgency or frequency, back pain, menstrual change, and constipation. Early diagnosis increases survival rates.



**This disease took the life of an Upper Arlington resident, Eileen O'Connor, in November 2008 when her daughter, Molly, was a 3rd grader at our school.** After seeing all the publicity for the *Race for the Cure* the next April, **nine-year-old Molly was inspired.** She recognized

that breast cancer received a lot of publicity and awareness, but that didn't seem to be the case for ovarian cancer. She also knew from her mom's illness that the symptoms were "tricky" (not easily recognizable), and **if more people knew about the symptoms, more lives could be saved.** She wanted her class to plan and host a race, like the

## Rigor, Relevance and Relationships

Service-learning has demonstrated the potential to provide a curriculum that is rich in rigor, relevance and relationships—three elements of learning that play a crucial role in the school improvement process, according to Bill Daggett and his associates at the *International Center for Leadership in Education*. Consistent with these elements, research clearly shows that students who participate in high quality service-learning experiences become more engaged in learning, more committed to their communities, and more empowered to make positive life and career choices.

*International Center for Leadership in Education, www.leadered.com*

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*Race for the Cure*, to **raise awareness of the disease** and to **raise money for ovarian cancer research**. Since Molly was in my class for both 3rd and 4th grades, her classmates knew about the difficulty of losing a loved one to cancer and were eager to support her idea as 4th graders.

**Dante L., a student in another 4th grade class, lost his grandmother to the same disease around the same time.** He wanted his class to participate in planning this event as well. Therefore, their **two classes**

**united and created an event** that the students named *BEAT MICHIGAN! BEAT CANCER!—Racing to Beat Ovarian Cancer*.

Columbus, Ohio is home to *The Ohio State University*, where more than 100,000 people attend each home football game in Ohio Stadium. The *University of Michigan Wolverines* are the Buckeyes' biggest rival—hence the name of our event, which took place two weeks before the Ohio State vs. Michigan football game. ▶

## Preparation

As a part of preparation, we established partnerships with the *Ovarian Cancer Alliance of Ohio (OCAO)* and *The Ohio State University James Cancer Hospital and Solove Research Institute*. **OCAO partnered with the students to distribute symptom cards and other materials in race bags for participants, to provide signage about symptoms, myths, and facts for runners to see while on the race course, and to staff a table with information available to the public.** The Alliance's community outreach coordinator also met with the students.

**RIGOR . . .** *Representatives from the James Cancer Hospital came to our school to talk with the students about cancer, the importance of research, and the mission/vision of the research institute. Both partnering organizations played key roles as they interacted with and educated the students before, during, and after the event.*

*-- Katie Benton*

toms of ovarian cancer. We also watched a video from *Stand Up 2 Cancer*, and we invited other guest speakers to our classroom.

In addition, we invited parents and community members to share expertise and knowledge on topics such as **event planning, biomedical research, starting a business, advertising, and marketing**. These experts helped the students prepare for the race and also gave them real-life career education.

The students came up with three goals for the project: **1) to raise awareness about ovarian cancer symptoms, 2) to raise money for ovarian cancer research, and 3) to show the community that 4th graders can make a difference.** Since these students had been together during the loss of both Molly's mother and Dante's grandmother, they were very emotionally engaged. **They experienced their fellow students' loss and grief and were all invested in doing something positive to help.**

We knew a little about ovarian cancer from Molly, but the students did additional research on the symp-

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**The classes brainstormed together and came up with all the jobs that would need to be done to make this a successful event.** We asked a professional race coordinator to meet with the kids to talk about what needed to be done. Kids then created and signed up for committees to carry out specific parts of the project. We formed committees to develop a logo, t-shirts, invitations, publicity, sponsorship, advertising, documentation, production, a fitness/training club, and more. The kids knew what needed to be done, and they were the ones who needed to do it. **Their enthusiasm and sense of ownership were incredible!**

In order to make this project inclusive, we organized an all-school Pep Rally to get everyone excited about the event, to give all the students a sense of ownership, and to increase participation. ▶

## Action

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Because our school is very near The Ohio State University's football stadium and the cancer hospital, our site was ideal for a *Beat Michigan! Beat Cancer!* fundraiser. The setting for the race included our elementary school and the middle school located right next door, as well as the surrounding neighborhood.

**On the race day, kids did a wide variety of tasks**—they set up the refreshment tables, put up the race signage, ran water stops along the race course, worked to register runners, and staffed tables where they sold buckeye necklaces and other products. In addition, some students ran a nail painting station where they applied teal nail polish, since teal is the color that represents the effort to conquer ovarian cancer. They staffed different race corners to cheer on walkers and runners, worked the start and finish lines to get people ready and to give out ribbons and prizes, and carried out a seemingly endless number of other jobs.

In addition to planning and running the race itself, the students made

**RELEVANCE . . .** *This project had an overwhelming impact on me. I was amazed at the enthusiasm and dedication of the kids. I was also floored by the success and lasting impact of the event. We never thought we would have that many participants or would raise that much money or that the event would be talked about for months afterward. I told my students never to underestimate what they could do—and that was the truth!*  
-- Katie Benton

football fan-related products (made out of buckeyes) and assembled raffle packages to sell at the race to raise more money for the cause. The project was an authentic learning opportunity for students. The kids planned and ran the entire event with limited help from teachers and parent volunteers. Students created an event in which the entire school and community could participate. They solicited sponsors to raise money for ovarian cancer research and got the word out about ovarian cancer symptoms. **More than 900 people participated in the event, and these 4th graders raised \$23,000 to fight the disease.** ▶

## A typical service-learning project includes five components:

**Investigation:** Teachers and students investigate the community/world problems that they might potentially address. Investigation typically involves some sort of research and mapping activity.

**Planning and Preparation:** Teachers, students, and community members plan the learning and service activities, and address the administrative issues needed for a successful project.

**Action:** The “heart” of the project . . . engaging in the meaningful service experience that will help students develop important knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and will benefit the community.

**Reflection:** Activities that help students understand the service-learning experience and think about its meaning and connection to them, their society, and what they have learned in school.

**Demonstration/Celebration:** The final experience when students, community participants and others publicly share what they have learned, celebrate the results of the service-learning project, and look ahead to the future.

**Assessment** is part of all activities to ensure that the learning and development that occur through service-learning can be measured, and to help diagnose student needs, provide feedback, and improve instruction.

*K-12 Service-Learning Project Planning Toolkit. Created by RMC Research Corporation for Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse*

## K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice

*Meaningful Service:* Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service.

*Link to Curriculum:* Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.

*Reflection:* Service-learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one's relationship to society.

*Diversity:* Service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.

*Youth Voice:* Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.

*Partnerships:* Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs.

*Progress Monitoring:* Service-learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability.

*Duration and Intensity:* Service-learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes.

*Source:* National Youth Leadership Council ([www.nylc.org](http://www.nylc.org))

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## Reflection

Reflection was an integral part of this undertaking from beginning to end. Students did **written reflections during and after the project**. Since we also received feedback from parents, community members, and the organizations we were supporting, the students were encouraged to ponder the difference that they had made toward finding a cure for ovarian cancer.

We **created a scrapbook to document the entire process** of the project, as well as a **DVD that showed the evolution of the event**. At the completion of our efforts, we had students decide on their own personal reflection projects. **Each student chose his/her type of response/expression, and the results were incredibly creative and inspiring**. These included dioramas of the event, letters to the editor, a letter to a friend, a video, top ten lists, poems, paintings, models, multimedia presentations, mobiles, books, collages, and more. ▶

## Celebration/Demonstration

**Students felt empowered as word of our event spread and people registered to participate**. We celebrated every few days by checking the number of registrants and to see how much this number had increased. We also celebrated each sponsorship as we received it. **The students demonstrated their new learning by verbalizing what they were doing, why they were doing it, and what they were learning from the experience**.

There was a lot of media coverage to celebrate. **Students felt that they were facilitating change, increasing awareness, and addressing an important issue**. At the end of the event, we celebrated together with a post-project check presentation and watched a highlight DVD of the entire project.

More celebration came when the students received several prestigious awards:

- The **Teal Spotlight Award for Community Service** from the *Ovarian Cancer Alliance*;
- The **Youth Community Service Award** presented by the *Upper Arlington City Council*;
- The **Annual Award for Philanthropy and Service**, presented by the *Central Ohio Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals*; and
- The **Barnum Award** from *Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus for Community Involvement*. This award allowed the kids to donate the prize money (\$1,000) to the *Ovarian Cancer Alliance* to continue to raise awareness of the disease. ▶

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## Assessment/Evaluation

The post-project **reflection pieces highlighted what the students learned and their passion for the project.** They learned a lot in many content areas and shared that knowledge with each other and many others outside our group in a variety of ways (see below). ▶

## Curriculum Connections/Standards

We covered so much! This service-learning project really extended our curriculum in a more rigorous and authentic way.

**Social Studies:** economics; map skills; social issues; citizenship

**Mathematics:** process-related/word problems; measurement; counting money; using spreadsheets; computation

**Language Arts:** speech writing; oral communication; letter writing; press release writing; invitations; posters; advertising; etc.

**Science:** careers in science; scientific research; disease process; genetics; healthy lifestyle choices; and fitness

In addition, kids also learned life skills: creativity, public speaking, time management, customer service, negotiation skills, collaboration, making decisions, meeting deadlines, and more. ▶

## 21st Century Skills

The *Partnership for 21st Century Skills* has identified the elements described in the sidebar on the right as the critical systems necessary to ensure 21st century readiness for every student. Though the *Beat Michigan! Beat Cancer!* service-learning project clearly demonstrates connections to many of the skills, the following outlines two skills in detail.

As an example of “**Creativity and Innovation**” and “**Leadership and Responsibility**,” one student took the project to an entirely new level. He sought out local businesses and made personal visits and pitches to

many of them to garner more event sponsorship. He was able to speak eloquently about the event, provide additional materials, and even make follow-up calls and visits. Because of his individual initiative, we reached several more sponsors and raised nearly \$1,000 additional dollars. ▶

21st Century Skills addressed and demonstrated by the *Beat Michigan! Beat Cancer!* service-learning project:

- ✔ Global Awareness
- ✔ Financial, Economic, Business, and Entrepreneurial Literacy
- ✔ Civic Literacy
- ✔ Health Literacy
- ✔ Creativity and Innovation
- ✔ Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- ✔ Information Literacy
- ✔ Media Literacy
- ✔ ICT (Information, Communications, and Technology) Literacy
- ✔ Flexibility and Adaptability
- ✔ Initiative and Self-Direction
- ✔ Social and Cross-Cultural Skills
- ✔ Productivity and Accountability
- ✔ Leadership and Responsibility

Source: *The Partnership for 21st Century Skills* ([www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org))

## So What?

### Results and impact . . .

- ▶ 1,500 service and learning hours contributed
- ▶ More than 900 people participated in the *Beat Michigan! Beat Cancer! 5K Walk/Run and 1-mile Fun Run*
- ▶ \$23,000 raised to support research to find a cure for ovarian cancer

## Now What?

### A Call to Action:

Now that you have read about the Barrington Elementary students/teachers and their efforts to help raise awareness of the symptoms of ovarian cancer and raise money to support research to find a cure, what could you and your students do to make a difference? Just like Katie, Bonnie and their kids, there are people everywhere making a difference. Let us know what you and others in your community are doing by posting your information on . . . [partnershipsmakeadifference.org](http://partnershipsmakeadifference.org)

To learn more about how to support cancer research, log on to . . .

Stand Up To Cancer:  
[standup2cancer.org](http://standup2cancer.org)

In addition, you may find these sites helpful:

Ovarian Cancer Alliance of Ohio:  
[ocao.org](http://ocao.org)  
The Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Hospital:  
[cancer.osu.edu](http://cancer.osu.edu)

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## Impact: Kids Using Their “Best Stuff” to Make A Difference

Since students were able to select how they wanted to participate (on what committees and in what roles), this allowed us to capitalize on the **special gifts and talents of those who were wonderful artists, writers, actors/actresses (public speakers), leaders, and mathematicians.**

The students really banded together because there was a lot of work to be done, and they were on a real-world deadline. They were **respectful of each other** and **appreciated the work of each committee.** They shared their successes and failures and supported each other throughout the process.

The students were proud to know **they made a difference and had an impact.** They were especially proud of raising awareness, raising money, and meeting their financial

goal—far surpassing it, actually! They were thrilled with the outpouring of support and the number of participants. The students were amazed that **their race drew more people than any other local first-time race** and that they **reached more people than the Ovarian**

**Relationships . . .** *Molly and Dante honored their family members and felt that they turned tragic events into something positive. This meant a great deal to them and to everyone else involved.*  
-- Katie Benton

**Cancer Alliance of Ohio had ever reached before.** They were proud of the awards and honors they received. They were **most proud of being told what a difference 50 fourth graders made both in their community and in the battle against ovarian cancer.** ▶

## Next Steps/Call to Action

I hope that these students were able to learn about planning an event and applying a plethora of organizational skills and other talents. I also hope that some of them will do a **senior year capstone project** similar to this and that they will continue to work on and create other service-learning projects throughout their lives.

I think **other people will realize that a project like this is “doable.”** It is a lot of work, but anyone can plan and execute such an event. Hopefully, teachers will consider an initiative like this if the opportunity arises. ▶

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## Other Insights . . . Reflections of the Teacher

This project had an overwhelming impact on me. I was amazed at the enthusiasm and dedication of the kids. I was also floored by the success and lasting impact of the event. We never thought we would have that many participants or would raise that much money or that the event would be talked about for months afterward. I told my students never to underestimate what they could do—and that was the truth! ▶

“ I have never seen students so passionate, determined, or proud when working on a project. This is something they will remember forever. The event they created was more successful than we could ever have imagined. It not only raised funds but raised awareness. ”

— Katie Benton, Barrington Elementary School

### Beat Michigan! Beat Cancer! Racing to Beat Ovarian Cancer Service-Learning Project Contact Info

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## What Ideas Can You Add?

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