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The Kid's Guide to Social Action: How to Solv... (Paperback)

by Barbara A. Lewis

★★★★☆ (6) 79 used & new from \$0.01

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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.

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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.

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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
333 East 38th St.
New York, NY 10016
1-800-486-4233
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.

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PROCLAMATION FOR KIDS

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 _____.



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