

Should you use a Youth Missions Provider

I love the youth minister (I'll use a woman for this example) that takes control of her youth ministry. She's usually great, relational, organized and the students and the parents love her. She affects many lives in her ministry.

But there's one thing "she" does that I just don't get – doing mission trips completely on her own. That means organizing the projects (in out-of-state communities), assigning crews to worksites, managing the purchase and delivery of supplies, arranging the lodging, figuring out the meals and getting someone to get the food and prepare it, and developing all the faith-building content and devotions. The youth minister does everything.

Plus... recruiting students to participate, getting adult chaperones, and arranging the transportation. It means setting the budget and collecting the money. The youth leader has to oversee the fundraising and train the adult volunteers. So... the youth leader does everything else.

I was a youth minister for 9 years before I started working for Group Workcamps and Group Week of Hope. And trying to figure out all those issues would have driven me crazy... or worse. For that reason I used someone else to help me plan everything – summer camp, winter retreats and mission trips. Some were better than others, but they all managed the important details that happened once I got my kids there. That freed me up, so I could deal with the things I knew how to deal with: working with students. This was especially important on a mission trip when so many things can "go wrong."

Even if you're like the youth minister described in the first couple paragraphs, there are good reasons why using a third party missions' provider is the way to go for a youth mission trip. I hope this doesn't sound selfish since I work for a missions' provider. But this is what I believe deep down and I've tried to describe it in 5 points for you. So... here they are.

1. Missions providers manage all of the details for the trip. Whether you do a domestic trip or international trip, figuring out all the projects and logistics and all the local details is a big deal--a *huge* deal! If you don't have to find the service projects, work through all the red tape to get everything set up, figure out the lodging and meals, and all the other specifics, all with an eye to you and your students' safety, it takes a huge load off your shoulders. You have enough work to do setting the vision for the trip, getting everyone signed up, collecting the money, raising funds, and all that stuff. It's better to "hire" someone else who's better positioned to get everything ready on the ground. You have a ton to do just to get everyone there.

2. Missions providers can assure your group is doing work that's genuinely needed. Sure you might think it's great to swoop into an area and lead a Vacation Bible School, but perhaps what the area really needs is to reduce the backlog of low-income housing projects such as painting or weatherization. Working with folks who have connections locally can mean you're providing better, more meaningful service to the community.

3. The best missions' providers create service experiences specifically for teenagers. There are some things that youth can do very well--maybe even better than adults! And there are some things that youth can't do very well--such as serious and/or technical construction. A good missions' provider will recognize this and help the people receiving the service understand better what's going to happen, *and* they can work with you and your group to help you understand the culture and other local issues. That makes for a more satisfying experience for everyone. An outsider like you or me probably wouldn't know all that.

4. Missions providers will be aware of any safety issues. Their experience in any one area is a good for your kids' safety. They can advise you before you leave of what situations you may face and what to do before you leave. Plus the better providers will address any potential safety risks before you arrive and have a plan for how to handle any potential dangers.

5. Missions providers know how important the experience is to faith development. In other words, they "plus" the mission trip for you so it makes a good experience great. Your students aren't just "free labor." Mission trips are huge at helping make faith in Jesus real to kids. God uses experiences where kids are "away" (like mission trips and camps) to get kid's attention. Good missions providers recognize that and provide the opportunity to connect the service experience to faith in Jesus. They have the professional skill to craft content that helps your kids get it.

Sure, you might be good at managing all those details, and maybe you even enjoy it. But even if you do, what if you were free to spend all that time with your kids instead of tracking down that one last detail for the day... The expertise and management provided by a missions' provider is money well spent in my opinion. It enables you to do what you do best...ministry with your students.

Jeff Thompson, a 17-year veteran of youth ministry, serves as Executive Director – Youth Missions on behalf of Group Cares (formerly Group Workcamps Foundation). His current role thrusts him into the nitty-gritty of leading one of the most powerful youth ministry experiences out there--the mission trip. Jeff's also a contributing writer for Group Magazine, a primary contributor to the blog youthmissionsinsider.com, a presenter at Simply Youth Ministry Conference, and helps create interactive program elements that bring thousands of youth and adults closer to God every year.