

Why Are We Doing This?

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I believe that it was early summer, 48 years ago that I volunteered to work with the Appalachian Service Project (<https://asphome.org>) with a handful of friends. We had no idea what we were getting into.

ASP believes all people should be able to live in affordable, safe, and sanitary housing. Shelter is a basic human need impacting all areas of life for families. ASP addresses this basic need so families no longer need to worry about leaky roofs, soft floors, or unsafe porches and stairs. [from <https://asphome.org/about/>]

That summer gifted me with perspective. I was not and am not a stranger to Appalachia. My mother's family stretches from Knoxville to Boone. The smaller communities of Newport, Mountain City, and Shouns are filled with relatives and others who are accustomed to the beauty of those mountains. The people are rich and poor, educated and not, prideful and humble, and just like similar insulated communities all over the world. I've walked in the mountains, tasted fresh food and homebrew, and discovered that I am more alike than different from everyone. I discovered hard work and the dignity of living in and relying on a community. Not my own hard work – but rather what I witnessed was the everyday feature of the families with which we worked.

Today, almost 50 years later, I still see the resilience of communities and the value of introducing my own students to work they have often not even imagined. But now, I'm getting tired. I'm getting tired of week after week, year after year, still describing what so many don't want to see in their own communities. The basic need for safe shelter, for clean water, and for the respect deserving of everyone. At what point in our individual and community development do we

FORWARD

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come to insist that there are those who are undeserving of care. From what I can tell, every major religion still on Earth instructs us to care for others without condition. Public and private institutions of education guide us through critical exercises that challenge us to imagine solutions to the problems that plague our communities. But then at some point, our interpretations twist simple instructions to allow for exclusion. Living a good life does not have to be so complicated. It's just a matter of working to do the next right thing. There is a leader in my home community that instructs us to "breathe deep and love wide." Maybe that's enough.

Welcome to this, the 20th edition of the Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education. I'm glad that we've made it this far. Given the uncertainty of support for platforms such as this, I hope that there will be more. Before this edition, the JSLHE had published 160 articles from authors, researchers, and teachers representing institutions of higher learning from 21 countries. 160 manuscripts accessed over 41,000 times between 2016 (when access metrics began) and 2025. The work shared in this edition is exciting, instructive, and impactful. I hope that you'll enjoy the work of these authors as much as I have and, please, keep up your good work. Breathe deep, you're not alone.