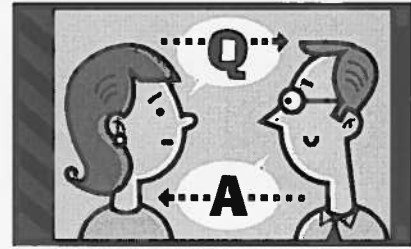## Research the Problem

2

Students find out important details about the problem they've chosen, including what, if anything, is already being done about it.

I. Now that you've decided on a problem you want to work on, you need to gather more information on it before you design and carry out a service project that addresses it. With your group, brainstorm a list of questions. Here are just *some* of the questions that you will want to include:

How widespread is the problem?
Who does this problem affect and in what ways?
Who else has tackled this problem? Where? What did they do? With what results?
Is anything being done on this problem now?
Are there people or organizations that could help the group address this problem?

II. Type them up leaving enough space for you to answer the questions, and answer the questions that you can.

III. Identify the answers that are still missing, and generate ideas about where to look for the answers. Some ideas include: site visits, adults you know who have some knowledge of the problem, libraries (school and public), the Worldwide Web, agencies and organizations concerned with this problem that you can call or e-mail. Write out this information.

IV. Divide your group and questions up. Then assign each group member the task of answering certain questions. Add to your typed list of questions the name of each person responsible for answering each question. Make copies of this for each group member and for your instructor.

V. At the designated time, report back to your group with the information, and add this to your master question and answer document.

VI. With your group, review the question and answer document that you created. You may find that some significant gaps still remain, and/or that your research has generated questions that you had not thought of earlier. If so, discuss these remaining questions. If no one in your group can answer, assign group members to find the answers for homework.

Your research may have generated new perspectives/ideas about the problem. If so, discuss the enlarged picture that you now have of the problem you've chosen. Take notes.

VI. Determine if your group is still eager to work on this problem. If not, you'll need to go back to the list of options you generated in Step 1, choose another problem, and answer the key questions about *it* before you proceed.

VII. Add key points from the research done by your group to the short description of the problem your group came up with in Step 1. This will be your group's "Problem Statement." See the example "Problem Statements" which includes key points from research.

The fragrance always remains on the hand that gives the rose. — *Gandi*

Example "Problem Statements"

➢ **Problem A: The lake in our town is so polluted that nobody swims there any more.**
Key points from research:

- There is now a ban on swimming enforced by the City Health Department.
- Part of the problem is people illegally dumping garbage near the lake shore.
- A newspaper story six months ago identified the harmful chemicals in the lake as mostly coming from household fertilizers and pesticides.
- The city has done nothing about trying to control either the dumping of garbage or the leaching of household chemicals into the lake.
- Many people living near the lake feel frustrated and angry about the situation but nobody has done anything about it yet.
- There are environmental groups in the city that might be able to help us do something about this problem.

➢ **Problem B: The AIDS epidemic in Africa has created thousands of orphans who are very poor and sometimes sick themselves.**
Key points from research:

- AIDS kills 6,000 people per day in Africa – more than wars, famines, and floods.
- There are now 12 million kids in Africa orphaned because of AIDS.
- 470,000 children die of AIDS in Africa each year, most of them infected by their mothers.
- Many children in Africa have to drop our of school to take care of other family members because of AIDS.
- Most people with AIDS in Africa cannot afford the medical care and drug treatment they need.
- Other nations are contributing some money to help, but it is not nearly enough.
- Many people and organizations are trying to help, for example, the "Q" Fund for AIDS (see page 101 in *Voices of Hope* for the story of Chellie Kew).

➢ **Problem C: There's no safe place in our community for people to gather and for kids to play.**
Key points from research:

- Parks are the most important places in our community for people to gather and for kids to play.
- There are six parks in our community and all of them are shabby and run-down. There aren't enough trash bins and the few there aren't being used. Most of the flowers and plants have died.
- The city's budget for maintaining parks was cut drastically two years ago and nobody in City Hall seems interested in doing anything about it.
- Many people say they are afraid to use the parks; they say it's dangerous to be there, especially at night.
- At least some of the people living near a park say they'd be willing to help clean it up, if somebody would organize the effort.
- A few individuals have done park clean-up s or planted flowers over the last year or so, but there's been no large, organized effort. People seem discouraged.