



Leader's guide:

**Small actions,
big difference**

(Morning prayer session)

Proverbs 22:6

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old, they will not turn from it.

Activity aims:

- To reflect on the SVP Summer Sleep in which the children have just taken part.
- To understand that even small actions can make a difference and create change for a better world.

You will need:

- Opening and closing prayer (1 per child)
- The Starfish Story worksheet (1 per child)
- A large piece of paper to create an ocean background to display children's starfish. A roll of white wallpaper is ideal for this activity if it's a large group.
- Pens/pencils/paints/decorations



St Vincent
de Paul Society

England and Wales

Turning Concern into Action



Procedure:

- This session can be delivered the morning after the SVP Summer Sleep, either with a group or with an individual child.
- Begin with the opening prayer. Read the prayer out loud together.

Opening prayer

Heavenly Father,

We give you thanks for the new day you have given to us today. A fresh start, where opportunities to show kindness and help others will be all around us.

Thank you for watching over us during the SVP Summer Sleep. We pray that those who are homeless feel the love and warmth of your Holy Spirit and receive the help and support they need to live their life to the full.

Amen

- Explain to the children that they are going to listen to a story about starfish. As you read, you could ask them to mime some of the actions in the story. For example, opening and closing both hands when they hear 'starfish', throwing action for 'throwing starfish'. Make it as interactive as you wish.



The Starfish Story

Adapted from "The Star Thrower" by Loren Eiseley (1907-1977)

Once upon a time, there was an old man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach every morning before he began his work. Early one morning, he was walking along the shore after a big storm had passed and found the vast beach littered with starfish as far as the eye could see.

In the distance, the old man noticed a small boy approaching. As the boy walked, he paused every so often, and as he grew closer, the man could see that he was occasionally bending down to pick up an object and throw it into the sea. The boy came closer still and the man called out: "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?"

The young boy paused, looked up, and replied: "Throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can't return to the sea by themselves. When the sun gets high, they will die, unless I throw them back into the water."

The old man replied: "But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I'm afraid you won't really be able to make much of a difference."

The boy bent down, picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned, smiled, and said: "It made a difference to that one!"

Reflection

- After reading the story, reflect on the meaning of the story and its link to what they have been doing.

Sometimes it's easy to look at everything that is going on in the world and say to ourselves, "Nothing I can do will change this," but as we heard in the starfish story, even the smallest thing can make a difference. We must not let the opportunity to turn concern into action pass us by without doing something. You have already done just that by taking part in the SVP Summer Sleep.



By sleeping for a night on the floor without your pillow, you have picked up another starfish and made a difference.

You have shown your support for the homeless and raised money to help the SVP continue their good work in supporting those most in need in our community.

How was your night?

What was easy and difficult about sleeping on the floor with no pillow?

What has this taught you about those who are experiencing homelessness?

Now let's think about some other small actions we can take to make a difference in our world.

- Invite the children to think about five small actions they could do to make a difference and write these on the arms of the starfish.





Write your actions on each arm of your starfish.

1. A small action to take care of yourself.
2. A small action to make a difference at home.
3. A small action to make a difference at school.
4. A small action to make a difference to the community.
5. A small action to make a difference to the world.

- Together as a group, using the large piece of paper (if this is a large group, a roll of white wallpaper is a great idea for this), decorate the paper to resemble the ocean and beach.

Decorate your starfish and then we'll stick them on the ocean background to join the other starfish. You could continue to do this activity at home. Watch how your ocean picture will fill up with starfish, each denoting 'small actions, big difference'.

- The children can then share what they have written and stick their starfish on the ocean background.
- Once the picture is complete, read the following scripture to the children and explain its meaning using the notes below.

Scripture

You are the light that gives light to the world. A city that is built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵And people don't hide a light under a bowl. They put the light on a lampstand. Then the light shines for all the people in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, you should be a light for other people. Live so that they will see the good things you do. Live so that they will praise your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:14-16

The Bible says you should be a light for other people. That light is the actions you have written down on your starfish. Now it's time to put those words into action. By doing so, you'll be showing your love and faith to all those around you. Others will see Christ in you.

- Display your ocean picture in a prominent place and invite the children to join you in saying the closing prayer.



Closing prayer

Lord,

Just like the child in the starfish story, we are ready to go out into the world to do small things to make a difference. We might be young, but there is so much we can do to take care of the world you have given us and the people in it. Continue to be by our side in everything we do and help us to show other people who you are through our actions.

Amen