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Serving Synergy: A Service-Learning Capstone

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Abstract

For my capstone project I chose to work with the non-profit organization Women's and Children's Alliance in Boise, Idaho. I worked with the community to provide much needed items. In order to collect donations I reached out to the community and received so much support that we were able to provide help to two other non-profit organizations the City of Lights, and Dress for Success. I was able to help organize my community to come together and provide a service to the more vulnerable in our community.

Keywords: Non-Profit Organization, Community, Service

Introduction to your Capstone Project

My capstone is about providing needs to the more vulnerable in our community. I chose to focus on the Women's and Children's Alliance. In reaching out to the community for help I received so many donations that I was able to donate to two other organizations the City of Lights, and Dress for Success. My capstone project was a great success. I was able to collect most of the items given to me by the Women's and Children's Alliance and help two other organizations at the same time. It was a lot of time and work put in but I felt accomplished as I drove up to turn in everything.

Section 1: Innovative Approach

For my capstone project I worked with the Women and Children's Alliance. I was given a list of items that they need/ want. I felt excited to help people struggling within my community. The Women and Children's Alliance helps provide a safe haven for sexually or physically abused women and families. They also provide needs and wants for these individuals since most individuals show up with nothing.

I was hoping to gather most of the items provided on the list but nervous that the organization only accepts new items. The alliance works with two other non-profit organizations that will take any items new or used. So, I was excited to discover nothing would go to waste. I was hoping to bring together different members of the community to donate for a good cause. In bringing awareness to the needs of those that surround us I hoped to unite some of the community. My capstone project depended on the community coming together.

My original approach is innovative in the sense that I used newer technology applications

to reach the community. I took taking advantage of neighborhood social networks that I had noticed more of our community using since Covid. I knew that this would be a fast way to reach multiple outlets. I was also hoping to go out in the community to grocery stores and make it easier for people to directly get the items my organization needs. I also utilized connections I have to get the word out.

The approach of getting out into the community and setting up a table at grocery stores was not working out. Covid has made options out in public more limited. So I went back and reached out to the community on the Nextdoor app. I said I would come to them and do the front door pick up. It changed everything. People were contacting me consistently and it was very time consuming but ultimately worth it.

Section 2: Emotional Intelligence

The project that I completed has brought me some awareness that I am a go-getter. I have had to change plans around to meet up with some of my audience but I did. I have realized that word of mouth was a great resource for me. I feel a sense of achievement that I made as much progress as I did. I had hoped with my original game plan that Covid would have relaxed by this time, I was wrong apparently. It has brought me an awareness that my community still wants to serve how they can. Covid has made life more limiting but it has not made us forget that people still need help. I wanted my organization to get everything they need.

My approach absolutely considered the emotional intelligence of my audience because I saw results. I was transparent with my audience about what the WCA is and how important their donations are. I had to change my approach in order to reach my target audience in a more tactful

way. I knew that the holidays were coming and I feel like it brings out the feeling of love for the community. I think that this time of year was perfect to ask for people to help families or individuals who have fallen on hard times. We also feel good about ourselves when we can help people. When we can acknowledge that an extra dollar might help someone more than ourselves, or that the food in our pantry could fill someone else's belly, and how we might not really need all the clothes or toys we have sitting around.

I know that this could be valuable to people in a few different ways. Making people aware of what ways to reach out and help others. I also think that being aware of what people like to donate the most is valuable. I have noticed used clothing is one that people have no problem with, new clothes not so much. I had people with extra hygiene products, we all have unused deodorant or toothpaste in our closets. Hygiene items are typically on hand items and people wanted to help so they just put it on their porch and I'd come and get it. I am aware with the approach I took I wouldn't get cash donations. I feel that my approach and what was donated will be the biggest value to people.

Section 3: Creative Thinking

In order to draw on my creative framework I relied on past experiences. I really wanted to be able to touch my audience so they would want to help. Covid is still making public reach and everyday activities restrictive. I know that the internet can play an amazing role in reaching the community. I used an application called Nextdoor to reach the community. I also used connections whether it was my mom's church email group, or reaching out to my family and friends. Women and children are a soft spot for people we want to help those in need but

especially women and children. That's the reason in advertisements about helping people in third world countries we are seeing mostly children and some women. We recognize the most vulnerable and we want to help. I listed reasons why to donate, I talked about why my chosen organization should be supported, and I listed the essential needs provided to me by the Women's and Children's Alliance. The responses and items I have received have been wonderful. Even if people didn't have new, they wanted to donate what they could.

In my opinion my approach is unique because I personally had to write to every person interested in donating or that had questions back and plan to meet with them. I had to contact and plan with each person that donated. There was no middle man on a single donation. I used connections I had as mentioned earlier but everyone would contact me back and I would speak with them. This took up a lot of time and I had to be diligent but I enjoyed that everyone got a thank you and was treated professionally because they do deserve a thank you for helping out people who have fallen on hard times.

Section 4: Your Innovative Solution

My project was to work with the Women's and Children's Alliance and collect donations. I was given a list of items needed the most and information on ways to donate. The outcome I was hoping for was to meet most of the things on the list. I planned to do tables outside of Fred Meyer and Walmart in order to collect donations. I was also going to use some people's connections such as church groups to get the word out. I realized very quickly that due to Covid restrictions made my original plan more limiting. I decided to just utilize social media because companies have too many restrictions or weren't getting back to me. I used word of mouth, and

the Nextdoor application for reaching people. Everyone mostly wanted to do front door pick up and that worked for me. I liked it in the sense that it made it more personal but it was a lot. I feel I showed innovation by adapting to my circumstance as I mentioned above and still being successful.

I feel that my ability to adapt to the situation shows innovation. I had to reach my audience during a time when social settings are so restrictive. I had to really go out of my way to spread the word. I knew that people were still socializing online and I really had to make it happen anyway that I could.

If I had more time, I would've reached out to grocery chains and asked for donations. I also would've liked to have it put in my daughters' school emails sent out weekly. I have seen some stuff like this put in them before. Those were the only other things I had thought of.

Section 5: Results

My stakeholders were able to receive much needed new items. The Women's and Children's Alliance runs off of donations. Without the benefit of donations this organization couldn't function. The ability to give vulnerable individuals new items I feel shows that they have support. They are not unknown by the community around them. The items aren't used and people decide they're done with them. The items have tags or are in boxes. There is a different feeling of getting something new versus something used. It shows they have worth and deserve a new and fresh start. The WCA's theme is butterflies and they talk about how a butterfly transforms and we don't realize everything that it has gone through to become a butterfly. The symbolism behind this is what I mean by a fresh start. To come out of a dark place and to be

something beautiful that the world loves. My stakeholders are not only usually arriving with nothing but they are seeking refuge. New toothbrushes, jeans, shoes, coats, books, pots and pans, soap, and anything else should be the last thing that these individuals have to worry about. The community is softening their hardship and in return we create a more unified community.

The impact of my project was positive. I was able to collect a few baby shampoos, conditioners, bottles, formulas, 1 electrical toothbrush, shaving cream, 2 purses, 1 woman's hat, 3 kid's shirts, 1 pair of women's shoes, 2 kids pant, 8 women's shirts, 1 bra, 2 women's jackets, 1 adult dress, and 1 pair of shorts. I feel my impact was a positive one because the women that took the items thanked me several times and gave me a bookmark.

I also collected numerous items for the City of Lights and Dress for Success. Dress for Success depends on work attire clothing for the needy who are applying for jobs. Without donations they could not provide professional clothing and accessories such as jewelry, purses, and shoes. City of Lights depends on donations of every kind for needy families. I made sure every item I received from the public was quality. I checked for stains, holes, and made sure the fabric wasn't thin or overly worn. Since my main focus was the WCA I was only reaching out to the public for what the WCA asked for. I loved that people wanted to donate even if they didn't have new items to give so it was nice to be able to give to more than one organization. I didn't count everything for those two organizations but I did take photos of it all. I was amazed with everything collected.

Section 6: Different Approaches

There are a few approaches I could've taken for different results. I could have reached

out to grocery stores for donations. I don't know if they would've helped to be honest but you never know. One idea I had thought of early on was putting posters in businesses or money jars. It's hard to really know what is going to produce the best results. I was in a time crunch and I felt strongly that the easier I made it for my audience the more donations I would get. Looking back it would've saved me time to do the donation jars but then again I don't know if I would've gotten better results.

I didn't have a lot of expectations going into it. I knew I was just going to execute my game plan and hope for the best. I tweaked things as needed and tried my best to collect what I could. I feel that overall my results were very positive. The bed of my truck was full and I felt a sense of accomplishment knowing that I had gathered that many donations in such a short amount of time.

Ideally, I would've liked to collect more items for the Womens and Childrens Alliance. I would've liked to have collected more bras and womens jeans. Those were the two items that she said they always needed. When I posted about my project I added every way to donate to the WCA including their Amazon wishlist link. There were a few questions about what items were needed the most. There was no way for me to track what was purchased in connection with me. I'd like to think there were more items than I brought in that were donated through that wishlist.

Section 7: Conclusion

I learned that if your first plan doesn't work out, that going back to the drawing board doesn't mean you failed. I learned an appreciation for certain things I have in my life. I have never had to wonder how I was going to cloth my daughter or lived in fear of someone hurting

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her or I. Becoming aware that there were multiple ways to accomplish my goal even if it meant more effort was a good learning moment for me. I had to decide how much this project really meant to me personally or if I just wanted to wing it. I learned more about myself than anything else to be honest. I became aware of not only the worldly blessings but support I have received in my life. As a single mom who has a backstory as we all do, I became more aware of how people in my family came to the aid of my daughter and I. I never didn't have a place to stay, I always knew that my daughter and I would be cared for by more than one person if it was needed. What a wonderful feeling to know when things don't turn out that you are not alone in the attempt to rebuild your life.

I believe the WCA benefited because they got a lot of donations. I also believe that the community benefited because they got to help vulnerable members of the community. People needed coats, shoes, hygiene products, masks, and children needed all these items also. I had multiple people say they've been wondering where to donate their goods or that they were grateful the items were going to be used where needed. I would like to think that all involved benefited in some way, especially my stakeholders.

I acquired better time management skills. I had to contact people back who wanted to donate in a timely manner, I had to arrange time to go pick up items, I had to go through all the items and sort what was going where or what was trash, and then I had to organize a time to go

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visit the three different organizations and turn it all in. My brainstorming skills or ability to adapt to change of plans increased.

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