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Supporting a Community of Pets

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Abstract

This capstone project highlights a community's efforts to support in-need pets, particularly dogs and cats, as well as their owners. For this project, I organized and executed a multiple-week food drive focused specifically on collecting pet food. The objective of this project was to help diminish the rate of food insecurity found in pets within the Boise community, as well as bring a fresh sense of hope to pet owners who may be facing financial hardship or other personal challenges. Over nearly a month's time, my pet food drive was able to raise over 750 pounds of food for those in need, and all of the collections were donated to a local St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry to be distributed. With the help of many selfless donors, we, as a community, have had the opportunity to help support dozens of pets, individuals, and families because of this project's creation.

Keywords: charity, innovative, community-based

Section 1: Introduction

As someone who is passionate about animals, I was certain I wanted my capstone project to positively impact animals within my community in some way. Throughout Boise and the surrounding towns, there are many dogs and cats facing food insecurity on a frequent basis, sometimes going multiple days without any food at all. Acknowledging this, I was inspired to take action and stand up for those without a voice, hopeful to not only support them but their owners as well. I have worked in pet nutrition for over two years now and have been a witness to a number of challenges pet owners face, especially when it comes to quality food prices. They seem to continue rising, and it has become increasingly difficult for certain pet parents to feed their animals nutritious and well-balanced meals. Without proper nutrition, it's without a doubt that these animals would face health obstacles if this continued.

Upon researching for project inspiration, I landed on the idea of organizing a food drive, but simply leading a food drive didn't seem to fulfill all of my hopes for the project. That was until I decided to pair the idea with my passion for animals, and the goal of creating a pet food drive was born. From there, I gathered information from multiple sources, both online and in person. I constructed a detailed breakdown of the pet food drive and created a schedule that I was hopeful would bring success. I met with my manager, Chloe, and the Store Owner, Jen, to discuss details and logistics, as the collection location was located at my current workplace, Bark n' Purr. After much planning and consideration, my pet food drive had begun, and the first few donations were given.

Over the weeks that followed, a stream of donations came in consistently, and I was excited to see the support from others in the community. Nearing the end of the fourth week, I

brought my pet food drive to a close and began preparing the collections for donation. Once completed, I loaded the back of my colleague's pickup truck with all the pet food and delivered it to the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry off of Overland Road in Boise to be distributed to those in need. Following this, I sat down with the Manager of the food pantry, Brandon Weast, and interviewed him, eager to learn more about how my donations would impact the community. My project had finally come to an end, and I was thrilled with the results.

Section 2: Elements Coming Together

Innovative Approach

When initially narrowing down my project's specifics, I came to the conclusion that either I have a food drive specifically for pet food OR I organize a raffle giveaway with eye-catching prizes at my workplace, Bark n' Purr, and use the funds to buy food for donation. After much consideration, I decided to lead a pet food drive, as I felt this decision provided a greater opportunity to find the most success. The approach I decided to take was a service-learning method, and I landed on a goal of collecting and donating at least one thousand pounds of food over roughly four weeks.

In order to ensure the success of my project, I knew there were several different perspectives that needed to be considered. Anyone can collect a bunch of pet food and then donate it, but my goal was to collect nutritious and well-balanced food for both dogs and cats. With that said, it was crucial for me to look at my project from a pet's perspective, and genuinely consider what is most optimal for their health. While I'm certain a number of pets within my local community are facing food insecurity in some way, I don't believe providing them with poor-quality food was the best solution. Doing so could create additional challenges for their owners down the road. Rather, my hope was to collect as much quality pet food as possible, in hopes of ensuring the well-being of these animals.

Acknowledging my project from an owner's perspective was equally as important as seeing it through the eyes of their animals. While I'm sure most owners who are facing challenges related to feeding their pets would gladly accept anything that is offered to them, I would argue that many wouldn't want to feed their pets the fillers and by-products many of the

poor-quality pet food brands manufacture. Instead, I suspected that they would be considerate of their animal's well-being, intending to feed them a well-balanced diet that would fully satisfy their nutritional needs. With a greater knowledge of the negative effects poor-quality food could have on their animals, I'm certain most, if not all, owners would prefer feeding their dogs and cats something much more nutritionally worthwhile.

Lastly, it was necessary for me to consider the perspectives of those who own and work at the place where I donated all of the collected food, the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry. As one could assume, most of the individuals who work at this food pantry have an interest in giving back and supporting their community. With my project in consideration, I was sure these individuals would want to provide those in need with any type of pet food they could offer them, regardless of the product's quality. However, I would argue that with greater consideration, these individuals would be more selective of what types of foods they provide to those who come to them. After much consideration, I gathered that the owners, employees, and volunteers of the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry would want to provide the best possible products for those they serve, and, knowing this, it was my aim to help them achieve their goal.

Emotional Intelligence

I believe the work I completed for my capstone project did well to fully consider the needs and desires of myself and others, particularly my stakeholders. As the leader of my project, it was necessary for me to take my stakeholders into account, and recognize what they hope to take away from the food drive I'm organizing. As a result, I have put myself into each of my stakeholder's shoes and believe I have done my best to understand their perspective, acknowledging what they're feeling and thinking. On top of that, I believe I've shown support

and appreciation to everyone who was involved with my project and was mindful of how my project may have influenced or affected them. Similarly, I took my interests into consideration and ensured that the work I was performing successfully met the assignment expectations. Not only that but I also made sure that my project was something that I felt was worthwhile and brought me a solid degree of satisfaction and fulfillment. I have reflected on my emotions and thoughts throughout the project countless times, and I made sure to seek feedback from others when I'm not entirely certain about a situation or decision.

I believe the approach I took on my project and the recommendations I made adequately consider the emotional intelligence of my audience. I believe the most significant thing that has helped me ensure this is constantly seeking feedback from those involved. As someone who believes they are fairly well-educated on emotional intelligence, I have learned the importance of listening and have found myself actively practicing better listening skills since my project's beginning. I feel that I did well in collecting feedback from my stakeholders, not only considering what aspects they believed needed adjusting but acknowledging how they shared their opinions, specifically tuning into their emotions.

Additionally, I believe the research I've conducted for this project is valuable to others because it offers a better understanding of why I've chosen this particular project for my capstone. I believe it offered others more insight into why providing for those in need is worthwhile and how they might be able to make change in their own communities. My research, in addition to other information I've analyzed, did well to inform others of the discoveries I made and provided them with a heightened degree of knowledge about my project's topic. This, in my belief, was particularly valuable to others because it offered others information that could

be useful if they were to carry out a similar event, guiding them to find a meaningful reason as to why they might choose to participate in this type of charitable work.

Creative Thinking

Above all else, I knew going into this project that I wanted to take an unconventional route and break the pattern of what many have already done. As someone who enjoys serving others, I wanted to ensure that my project and its outcome would impact others in a positive way. With that in mind, I paired that goal with my passion for animals and that allowed me to begin painting a picture of the exact type of project I wanted to pursue.

As far as how I landed on all the details included in my project, I gathered inspiration from others who have taken on similar projects. In addition, I collected tips and advice for how to best organize and lead a pet food drive from my online sources and in-person colleagues. I knew experimentation and feedback would be necessary aspects of my project, especially because everything I was learning about food drives was new to me. Since the start of my project, I have remained open to new ideas, both from myself and from others, and have strived to refine concepts through creative thinking. On top of that, when challenges arose, I did my best to adapt my creative approach and stay flexible. I think one of the biggest downfalls of failed projects lies in a lack of openness, and I am happy to say that I've held true to remaining open-minded all the way through.

While I don't believe my goal of organizing and running a food drive was particularly unique, I think my underlying focus on who my work was benefiting is quite special. As someone who only shows compassion toward animals and strives to act with a full heart in everything they do, I knew I wanted my capstone to impact those who are voiceless and don't

always have a choice. I believe the approach I decided to take was unique because I did not plan on donating the collections to a pet-specific organization, such as a shelter or humane society. Instead, I chose to donate all the food to a food pantry. By doing this, I not only positively impacted in-need animal's lives, but I also supported pet owners who are facing economic and personal hardship. Choosing to donate my food drive's collections to the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry allowed me to make a larger impact in the community, supporting both animals and humans.

Innovative Solution

As described, my project centered around organizing and leading a food drive focused specifically on collecting pet food for in-need dogs and cats. Additionally, the donations collected from the food drive have been donated to the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry to assist owners in the Boise community with providing nutrient-rich food to their dogs and cats. By donating the collections to a local food pantry, I have not only directly served a worthy organization, but I have also supported individuals who are facing personal and financial challenges within the community. I have worked closely with Jen, the owner of Bark n' Purr, as well as the Store Manager, Chloe, to create a space where others could bring their unwanted pet food for donation, knowing it would go to a good cause.

Through this project, I have been able to help reduce the amount of wasted pet food within the community and ensure that dogs and cats who are facing food insecurity are receiving what they need to thrive. The project that I developed sought to challenge the status quo by bringing a unique twist to the traditional idea of a food drive, and I am thrilled knowing how much value it brings to those in need. The solution I developed embodied innovation due to the

uniqueness of my targeted audience. When I had initially considered organizing a food drive for this project, I realized that I needed to challenge the conventional idea of what a food drive is and take a more unconventional approach. With that in mind, I landed on the idea of taking the collections to a local food pantry rather than simply taking them to an animal shelter or humane society. By taking this innovative approach, I believe my project was able to bring a greater amount of change to the community, not only helping to support in-need animals but supporting their owners as well, an aspect of pet food charity that I feel is often overlooked.

When it comes to why certain owners are unable to properly support and care for their pets, I believe others don't always consider what they may be going through or battling. It's typical in situations like these that the owner gets a bad rap and they are seen as the "bad guy". Yet, that is not always the case. The individuals I sought to support are owners who care deeply about their pets but are simply caught in a difficult situation. These owners are among the many who genuinely love their four-legged friends and do all they can to appropriately provide for them. They are merely in the process of overcoming challenges, and I am thrilled to have been given an opportunity to help support both them and their pets.

Section 3: Results

In regard to how I measure the impact of my pet food drive, I took two distinct approaches, one through calculating the total weight of the collections and the other through verbal feedback. As described above, my initial goal for my pet food drive was to collect at least one thousand pounds of food, regardless of the form (dry, canned, raw, etc.). While I, unfortunately, did not manage to meet that goal, I was able to bring in a hefty amount of donations, which I am ecstatic about. Over the course of roughly four weeks, my pet food drive was able to bring in exactly 762.2 pounds of food. These donations consisted of 7.2 pounds of canned cat food, 11.7 pounds of canned dog food, 627.8 pounds of dry dog food, and 27 pounds of dry cat food. Additionally, there were two bags of cat urinary supplements donated, along with 88 pounds of cat litter. To break this down even further, there were a total of 92 products donated, 47 of which were dry food.

The verbal feedback that I collected for my project was in the form of an interview with the Manager of the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry Overland location, Brandon Weast. After delivering all of the donations to the food pantry, I was able to sit down with Weast in his office and ask him a few questions about the donations I brought and how they would impact the Boise community. My interview with Weast consisted of five specific questions, and I was extremely satisfied with the answers he provided. Weast gave detailed responses to each question and seemed to genuinely care about the work he was doing at the food pantry to help others. During our interview, Weast stated, “We always say don't judge a book by the car” (B. Weast, personal communication, November 18, 2023). This response stood out to me in particular because of the underlying truth that it holds. Weast mentioned that many of the volunteers he works with make

comments about the types of car individuals in the donation pickup line are driving, perplexed as to how they could need food if they're driving a Mercedes Benz, Bentley, or any type of luxury vehicle. Yet, Weast reminds the volunteers that that person's situation is unknown to them, and they could have just lost their job that morning. That quote, along with Weast's other responses, allowed me to gain a better understanding of the realities of hardship, and I am glad to have been informed by the knowledge that he's gathered through his experiences.

Considering how my project impacted my stakeholders, I believe it has been a valuable experience for all of those involved. As a stakeholder myself, it has not only positively influenced my leadership skills, but has also fostered a greater knowledge of teamwork and empathy. I believe my project met all capstone requirements successfully, and the results and feedback I received have helped bring together a worthy final piece. Additionally, my project has benefitted the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry by allowing its owners, employees, and volunteers to see a positive change in those they support within the Boise community. Although the actual pet food collected has likely not directly impacted them, the collections I donated have helped other individuals and families meet their needs, reducing stress and bringing a sense of positivity to the organization as a result.

Most importantly, the donations I delivered have provided quality food to in-need dogs and cats in the Boise community, reducing the rate of food insecurity. All of the food that was donated is complete and balanced, packed with nutrients that will help ensure the health and vitality of the animals who it's going to. I believe that my project has helped these animals recognize that there are people who care deeply for them, despite not having any direct connection to them. On top of that, in-need animal owners have, and will continue to, receive

numerous benefits from my project, including an encouraging sense of comfort knowing that the Boise community is here to support them. I am hopeful that these donations have helped to relieve stress from personal and financial burdens and allowed these individuals to worry less about how they will provide their pets with their next meal. The large amount of pet food that my project has collected will help support them over the next month, according to Weast's experience, and I am hopeful that the donations will inspire action among many, positively influencing their future decisions.

Section 4: Conclusion

Comparing the results my project actually achieved to those I anticipated, I feel a bit shy of my goal. Embarking on this project, I set a goal of collecting over one thousand pounds of pet food, and I only ended up surpassing 75% of that goal. Despite this, I am immensely happy with the outcome of my project, especially with the amount of dry dog and cat food that was collected. Reflecting on my results, I am honestly surprised at how many donations a four-week pet food drive was able to yield. Going in, I knew my goal of one thousand pounds was an ambitious one, but now taking into account the actual results that were achieved, I am astounded by what I was able to do. Not only does this indicate that more donations could be gathered in a longer period of time, but it also shows that the Boise community is genuinely here for each other.

Although I am thrilled with the outcome of my project, there is always room for improvement. Considering this, I would attempt to be more open to outside collaboration, specifically to increase the number of donors. Despite having collaborated with several members in my current workplace, I believe I could have increased the amount of donations received if I were to work with other businesses within my community. While it would've taken additional effort and time, organizing more collection locations throughout Boise would have likely yielded a higher number of donations.

Completing this project has been an eye-opening experience, and I believe I have grown both personally and professionally because of it. I have developed a greater appreciation for my community, and I have learned so much about the realities of hardship. I also believe that I've been able to improve my leadership skills and become more in tune with my hope of leading

others with an underlying sense of compassion. Furthermore, I feel as though I have developed a better understanding of collaboration, and how I can optimize my strengths with the strengths of others to find a more workable and worthwhile solution. I hope my work on this project helps inspire others to take action and make a difference in their communities, regardless of the situation they may be facing. Change is needed in countless communities around the world, and all it takes is a strong idea and a touch of motivation to be on the path to transformation.

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