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Feminine Hygiene Kits for Girls/Women Worldwide

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Multidisciplinary Studies Capstone

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Abstract

Through research and personal experience I found that there is a disparity for girls and women throughout the world when it comes to a natural occurrence for females, called menstruation. For the sake of brevity, I will use the general term “girls” though I mean to include women, also. In many countries girls don’t understand this monthly feminine process and don’t have the proper equipment to use. In many countries girls are taught wives’ tales on why women menstruate. Because of this they perpetuate the falsehoods to their girls and this leads to insecurities and shame. They also do not have the products needed to absorb the blood and to keep their bodies clean, therefore, they stay at home using primitive means or sometimes no means to absorb the blood. They sometimes sit on discarded cardboard to soak up the blood, or they dig a hole in the floor of their huts and sit upon the hole to catch the blood. Because they have no feminine hygiene products they must stay home and that causes loss of schooling and work. As part of my project I want to provide information, education and make personal hygiene kits for these women and girls to be able to use so that they can continue with their lives without interruption. These girls, world-wide, need help and they need to be taught how to help themselves so that they are not held back. My capstone project is to bring reproductive education and feminine hygiene kits to 25 girls in Venezuela.

Keywords: Multidisciplinary Studies, feminine hygiene, menstruation, maturation education, puberty education

Introduction

I have realized that girls around the world do not understand the reason for menstruations. They do not have the proper education about their bodies. They do not have means to care for their bodies during this monthly occurrence and will miss school or work; therefore, they fall behind or lose money or positions at work. A study done in Uganda stated, “The proportion of girls reporting anxiety about next period decreased from 58.6% to 34.4%, and reported use of effective pain management increased from 76.4% to 91.4%”, (Kansiime and et al., 2019). This shows the importance of educating girls will decrease much stress from their lives. My project is to make 25 personal hygiene kits which last from three to five years for the girls to use so that they can continue with their daily lives. These kits will be sent to Venezuela to be distributed. They will be taught how to care for themselves during their menstruations. In an article about the growing need for feminine hygiene products, it said, “Access to clean, reliable materials to absorb menses, supportive sanitation infrastructure, and biological and pragmatic information about menstruation were highlighted as core challenges. Studies suggested that these challenges negatively impacted school participation, health, and well-being”, (Hennegan and et al., 2019). I want to bring this awareness of the need to people in America so that they can help by creating more kits or by donating so that others can make the kits. The hygiene kits contain 8 liners that are made of absorbent fabric, and that have a colorful print to hide stains, two shields, two pairs of panties, a bar of soap, a wash cloth, instructions in a colorful backpack. The liners and the shields are constructed of 100% cotton to be comfortable and long lasting, while having a layer of waterproof fabric so that the blood will not leak through.

Section 1: Innovative Approach

I am bringing together differing perspectives in order to solve this problem or to make these kits, by bringing together the leadership skills that I have developed in my leadership classes, and in my Multidisciplinary Degree (MDS) classes that I took at Boise State University, (BSU). I have been able to skillfully present the needs of these girls for education and feminine hygiene products to women of America. I have been able to convince these women to use their talents, time and money to help support females across the globe, but in particular for this project, the women of Venezuela. Through social media and in-person talks I've been able to bring awareness to this great need. The women who I have encouraged to join in this campaign are from vastly different backgrounds, some are from the same religion, some are not religious, some are talented in craft-making and some are not. I was able to convince them that all can participate in one way or another to help our sisters from across the globe with whatever we can use. I was able to share with the potential helpers the words of Lorrie Healy, the leader of the chapter of Days for Girls, Rogers, Arkansas, when she said, "When the girls in Venezuela get to take their own personal hygiene kits home, they hug the kits and some have cried. They feel so loved that someone took the time to make these kits for them" (Lazarte, 2021). Bringing diverse women together for a great cause has helped me to use my best communication and innovation skills. I have had to find a place where all can gather together to construct the kits.

One day while I was working on making these kits, the leader of the organization was lamenting about how long it takes to cut out the pieces of fabric and the waterproof material for each pad. We decided to try to find a less time consuming way and came up with using a die-cutting machine. This has been such an asset to our work. I have a Cricut machine at home that I use to make crafts. It is not strong enough to cut fabric or the plastic waterproof material,

but the idea hit me that there are machines that people use all the time to cut fabric in a precise manner. This was innovative for our group. This innovation helped us make more kit pieces than before.

Section 2: Emotional Intelligence

The work and the research that I am doing is bringing more awareness to me by propelling my efforts to do more and to do a better job. I used to ask, “Why was I born in a country where I have ample opportunities to work, to get educated, to buy disposable hygiene products?” Now, I think, “What more can I do to help those who don’t have what I have?” I think, “What would help the recipients of the hygiene kits to know that we care for them, that what we are doing is a labor of love?” I am beginning to be more aware of myself in that I want to do a great job on these kits, not just so I can complete a school assignment and graduate, but that I can help someone to be able to stay in school, or I can help someone to know that somebody far away is aware of their needs and is doing something for them. I will be more vocal about serving others. I felt almost like a hero through my project, but the more that I see and hear how many girls around the world are suffering I am aware that what I am doing is a drop in the bucket of need, and yet that drop is helping someone and I am happy for that. Many girls miss school or work because of the lack of proper hygiene products. In a study by J. Chinyama, it says, “Girls' school attendance and participation in physical activities was compromised when menstruating due to fear of teasing (especially by boys) and embarrassment from menstrual leakage” (Chinyama and et al., 2015). The girls who benefit from my project have expressed their appreciation. Some of the girls have shed tears, some have been choked with emotion that they couldn’t speak, but could only hug their kits. Lorrie Healy, head of the Arkansas chapter of Days for Girls said, “The people who deliver the kits that we send say that girls are on a waiting

list for the kits. They literally cry when they receive their kits”, (Lazarte, 2021). By doing this project, I am showing that others/audience can learn that even though the final goal is monumental they can be creative and draw strength and fortitude to help others. Karissa Bosco, one of the new recruits said, “When I saw the video of the girls receiving their personal kits, I cried with them. It felt good to be a part of something so positive”, (Lazarte, 2021). I’ve come to realize that I can’t just wait on someone else to come up with the ideas. I realized that when I see a need, I will ask myself, “What can I do to resolve this?” My audience can see that we are making a difference and they can ask themselves the same questions and increase their emotional intelligence so that they can help others and have resilience in finding creative ways to help others. Emotional Intelligence can be learned and taught and I think that the more people I have getting involved in my project will be able to increase their emotional intelligence as well as mine as I rely on my creativity and resiliency to spread the word to others about this need.

Section 3: Creative Thinking

The project I chose is a creative endeavor to be creative as I fulfill a great need for women and girls. I mean to say that choosing the appropriate fabric, cutting out the perfect fit, sewing them together are all steps to using creativity but there is more than what meets the eye. First of all, choosing the correct fabric is the first, vital step. The fabric has to be 100% cotton so that it will absorb the best and so that it will stand up to the harsh washings that it will go through in rivers, scrubbed against rocks. The fabric also has to have designs on it and darker in color to hide the eventual stains that will occur. There are countries where faces of people or animals are not allowed by religion or law to be put on the fabric, so we must avoid that. We send most of our kits to Venezuela, where the people are starving so we avoid any fabric with any prints of food. Also, in Venezuela, they don’t like solid red because it is used by the

Communists and they are Socialists. The thread needs to be polyester so that it is stronger to hold the pieces together for longer times. If we send the kits to Africa or other parts of South America, the girls like color, so we try to make them happy by using pretty colors which will hide stains without fading to look old too fast. Having said all this, which is only a fraction of the creative thoughts put into making the kits, I think the hardest creative work goes into how to involve more people to “want” to help get these kits made and sent to the females across the globe who need these supplies. Creative skills are needed to show donors how needful their donations are. That’s why I have taken pictures of the things that I have been doing, working on these kits and posting them on social media so that others can become aware of the need. Creative is being open about a very personal, female problem to the public, male and female, so that all are aware and will want to help. I have used Twitter, Instagram, and FaceBook to announce the need that Days for Girls have for others to help. I was raised in a family where one did not discuss personal matters such as these especially in mixed groups. I have cast away those inhibitions to help others. I even came up with a way to sew the kit liners in a more time saving way so that a person can be more productive. I have used creativity in the construction of the kits as well as how to recruit more volunteers.

I think what makes my approach unique is that we are sending the kits to Venezuela which is a very complicated country to send things to. My approach is to get Americans to want to help people in a Communist country. A lot of the potential donors don’t realize the extreme hardships that the people of Venezuela are enduring. Some of the potential donors know that the president of this country hates America, which makes the donors not want to support my project. I have a unique situation to persuade people to see the suffering and overlook the government that is controlling the people who need our help. I’ve had to use persuasive ways of showing

pictures of some of the girls and women to prove my point. That is why I decided to make a poster of the girls and their needs, but sadly I am not allowed to use pictures of the girls from Venezuela because of their laws. I am in a very unique situation to convince donors and yet not show them the actual pictures of the girls in the country where these kits are being sent. By next year the chapter in Arkansas will be shipping kits to Bolivia in South America. I speak Spanish fluently because I lived in Bolivia when I was younger when I served a volunteer mission for my church. I have the opportunity to help with the translations of the notes that we are making to send to the women who are setting up the receiving center in Bolivia. I think that my contributions are unique in the way that I am finding donations and my use of the language to help bridge the barrier so that another country can benefit from the donations.

Section 4: Your Innovative Solution

For my project we made 25 personal hygiene kits and contributed to 25 more. In the end we sent 50 kits to Venezuela. The process is that we need donations of all kinds, fabric, panties, money to buy the waterproof liner material, soap, wash clothes, printing of instructions, thread, snaps, and ribbon. I requested donations on my social media and I took a sample of one kit to a few stores to get donations. I was given fabric and thread from the stores. I washed, dried and ironed all the fabric. And it was different because I had to wash the fabric in non-scented laundry detergent and without softener, because the women are not used to so many scents and it's too strong for them. I then organized a women's church group to gather together to cut the fabric and the waterproof lining material. We were able to get a die-cut to use in a die-cutter machine so the waterproof liner material was easier to cut and we had less waste. I realized that although we had a large gathering of women and girls who were willing to work to make these kits, it would take longer than anticipated to coach them how to do the work for that day. So, I innovatively

requested women to sign up to do the work in their homes if I came by to train them and deliver the fabric and pick up the finished pieces. There were a few women who signed up so I was able to have them learn how to do the sewing and on later dates I was able to supervise them. Either I was going to try to do all of this myself or I could encourage others to help, which I did, using a new and innovative process that includes women who previously were unable to help. I innovatively created a “check out” log and a “return” log so women could work on the project on their own time at home. This was not done previously. The innovative way that I organized to include more women who were previously left out because of one of the few reasons, like not wanting to carry their sewing machines to a different location, or that they couldn’t meet at set times because of either work or family conflicts; thus, allowing them to take home unfinished projects and sign them out so we know who has what is the way to use so many more volunteers.

If given the opportunity to do this project again, I would immediately start looking for donations. I would be more thorough by going to more stores. I found so much success in the little time that I had to use that I wish I had started earlier. Another thing is I wish that I had asked for donations for shipping costs. Sending to Venezuela is expensive. My innovations of using a die-cut machine was life saving in time. Also, my innovations of logging out fabric so women could sew in their own homes was the best idea, because more women are able to participate and this is ongoing.

Section 5: Results

I was the first to benefit from this project. I benefited by seeing how blessed I am in this country. I learned to lead others to serve and to donate to a worthy cause. I learned to love more deeply my sisters from all over the world and I learned how with a little bit of sacrifice I can reach out and send love through the things that I make for them. The girls of Venezuela benefited

from this project. I was able to send a box of 50 hygiene kits through the Days for Girls organization and that will help 50 girls. My capstone helped several of the volunteers on this project because they learned how the girls are in need of such hygiene kits. Some of the women were motivated to stay on as long-term volunteers. The organization, Days for Girls, has benefited from my project because I was able to get 50 hygiene kits sent to Venezuela for the girls in need. This organization benefited by having me join their group because not only can I help with the construction of the kits, I have opened the doors to several donors who have donated fabric, thread, money, underclothes, wash cloths, soaps and printing supplies. I also speak Spanish and can help with the translation for the communication between our chapter in Arkansas and the contacts in Venezuela and Bolivia. This organization has also benefited from my project because I have used social media to promote their organization as my project has progressed. This has brought more attention to their needs and awareness to more potential donors.

I learned that nothing goes as planned. I learned that I can accomplish a capstone project that at times seemed monumental. I learned that I felt amazing working to help others. During the several weeks of work on my project I would swear to myself that “Never again will I do such a project”. Then as my project came to an end, I found myself committing to doing more of the same with this organization because I felt that I had done something for someone and that feeling is the best. I learned that doing for others motivates me to take on more work. When we received the report that the kits were received joyously I was motivated to start constructing more kits.

Section 6: Different Approaches

I could have taken a different approach by choosing a different chapter who sends their kits to a different part of the world. The country of Venezuela is very difficult to work with because of all of their restrictions. I did not expect all the restrictions that we faced with Venezuela. That was extremely difficult, but I think in a way, because it was so difficult the end was that much more fulfilling and satisfying. I also was not expecting so many strict guidelines for constructing the kits. Calibrations for the sewing machines, stitches per inch and color of thread was at times so stressful that I thought I might not be able to complete my project. Ideally, I would have liked to be able to say that we made a kit for every needy girl in Venezuela or that we have enough supplies to be able to complete that goal, but we were able to double our number of kits, therefore I feel so happy and satisfied with this project.

Section 7: Conclusion

I learned that projects are hard to complete and that I need to prepare for unforeseen circumstances by planning more time into a project. I learned that I must stay motivated because no one else is going to pick up the slack. I learned that I can be a leader by encouraging others to look beyond their lives to help others. This project benefited me by helping me to see that I can make a difference. The organization, Days for Girls benefited by having more donations given to them in the form of money, sewing machines, fabric, thread, underclothes, wash clothes, soap and ribbon. They also received more volunteers to continue working. 50 girls of Venezuela benefited from receiving education about menstruations and they received personal hygiene kits. The volunteers benefited from this project because they felt the joy and learned new skills on how to construct these kits. I learned how to best solicit donations from stores and people. I developed better sewing skills. I developed a deep appreciation for my personal life and I also developed a deeper love for the women of our world.

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