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Creating Smiles and Cards for Meals on Wheels

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Author Note

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Abstract

My capstone project was a service learning project involving Caldwell Meals on Wheels. Students around the Treasure Valley created “thinking of you” cards for those who receive meals from Caldwell Meals on Wheels, to be delivered with their meals. Its purpose was multifaceted. Participating in this project brought awareness to high schoolers about those in the community who are shut-ins. The cards are intended to bring joy and brighten the day to the Meals on Wheels recipients. Three keywords that represent my project are volunteer work, community, and service learning.

Introduction to my Capstone Project

The decision to do this project as opposed to other ones was very easy. My father had Parkinson's disease and leukemia. When he was no longer able to work, he volunteered to be a driver for Meals on Wheels. Fast forward 35 years, and I work for TRIO Educational Talent Search and wanted to create a service learning opportunity for the hundreds of students who are current TRIO participants. I wanted to make a significant contribution to our local Meals on Wheels program in his memory.

I started the project by talking to the TRIO director to get approval for the financial expenses that would be incurred when purchasing supplies. I then enlisted the help of my co-workers in getting their students to also make cards. I crafted an email that was sent out to all TRIO participants explaining the project and the timeline. Over the next two months, students from all over the Treasure Valley created 735 cards to be donated to Caldwell Meals on Wheels.

Elements Coming Together

I was surprised by the students' innovative perspectives. The students from Caldwell High School were very excited to help those in their own community. When making their cards, they wanted to make some in Spanish, so I encouraged it! I also thought it would be a great idea to make some cards for the Meals on Wheels drivers. They should be recognized for their hard work and thanked.

The innovative approach that I took was that I did not have a cookie-cutter approach for all the participating schools. There are other TRIO specialists that helped facilitate the project, and I gave them full discretion on how to implement the project. I also had an advisor for the

Future Hispanic Leaders of America group have her students make cards as well during their meetings. The implementation of the project remained fluid for everyone.

I believe my project completely revolves around awareness of others, and in turn, awareness of self, as was explained in “What is Emotional Intelligence” (schooloflifechannel, 2017). Making this a volunteer community project has really brought the idea home of “community”. My students are trying to give smiles to others, and in the process, they are becoming self-aware. I looked at the effects of volunteer work, both on the card maker and the card recipient. Many studies show the emotional benefits for both groups of people. “Volunteers experience greater satisfaction with life and life purpose, increased self-confidence, and a greater sense of identity” (WEB MD Editorial Contributors, 2021). For those that are recipients, the benefits include the joy of receiving something unexpected and the happiness that they are being thought of.

My approach is more about social competence than personal competence. I’m trying to help my students think outside of themselves and look at the needs of those in the community. When introducing this project to my students I realized their lack of knowledge about the Meals on Wheels program. My goal is that they are more socially aware of those in need and that they can make a huge difference with a little effort.

Also in a TED talk with Travis Bradberry (2017), he gives tips on increasing emotional intelligence including getting stress under control. I had one group of juniors and seniors who were having a blast, laughing and talking to each other as they made the cards. I sat and laughed with them and you could almost see their anxiety and stress melt away.

My project is very valuable, especially for those who think one person can’t make much of a difference. This project had a snowball effect, and it was fun to see. I explained to students

that these cards will be given out in Caldwell. Upon hearing that, Columbia High School's FHLA students decided to make cards all next week in Spanish. They were really excited to help in that capacity.

When I started this project with my first group, I found out really fast that there needed to be more of a framework involved, and my students needed to have more guidelines. Their "creativity" was a little less mature than I had expected.

I've worked with high schoolers long enough to know that they needed an incentive to engage in this project, so I made sure to have participation certificates. I also researched and made sure that the Caldwell students also received graduation credits for their efforts.

Several of my schools are in the Caldwell School District, and we will be working with Caldwell's Meals on Wheels. As previously mentioned, when students started working on the cards, they asked if they could create some in Spanish. I had not seen that in other projects, and for ours, it is absolutely perfect and more applicable to our community. Columbia High School's FHLA group joined in as well (Carson, 2022).

The accomplishment of my capstone project is that it brought awareness of Meals on Wheels to hundreds of students. Connecting the students to the Meals on Wheels recipients through cards has brought joy and smiles to my students, and I hope it will bring the same to the recipients.

With the help of my students, we were able to come up with a few innovative ideas. The majority of my students and the community in Caldwell that would be benefitting from this project are Hispanic, so many cards are in Spanish. Cards were also made for the Meals on Wheels drivers, which had apparently not been done before. My students wanted to make sure

that they were thanked for the important work they do. My project will reach more people because of the different approaches we took in creating cards.

Results

The impact was measured both visually and physically. I was able to see evidence of the stress relief that making cards brought my students. Physically, there is a total of 735 cards that are able to be delivered. Caldwell Meals on Wheels delivers 150 meals a day (Caldwell Meals On Wheels, n.d.). This means that they will be able to deliver a card with each meal once a week for several weeks. I also sent out a Google Form for feedback to all of the participants. For the most part, the students enjoyed the project as it was. They did ask for some color pages to be made available so they would not have to come up with ideas themselves. My coworkers did not offer any suggestions as to how the project could be improved, but really appreciated the flexibility they had in implementing the project at their prospective schools.

The benefits are numerous. For the students, their awareness was raised about a very worthy cause and it brought about stress relief and joy. For Meals on Wheels staff and recipients, it was a huge encouragement to have so many cards made for so many people. I'm assuming it will bring hope and joy to them, as it did for me. For the TRIO director, she was very happy to be able to have another service learning opportunity for the TRIO participants.

Conclusion

I anticipated many students making one or two cards each. I was very surprised to find that I only had 20 students participate, but they made 735 cards as of today. I have many

students, and the FHLA group that have not turned in all their cards yet, so I am expecting many more cards this coming week.

Because of the feedback I have received, there are two things that I will be doing differently next year. In several schools, we will not have a set time to make the cards. The students will be allowed to take the supplies and bring them back. The other thing I have already changed is that I have added a “What NOT to do” section to my “Need Ideas” paper for students. I believe it will help with many misunderstandings.

I consider this a very successful project because the students were exposed to what Meals on Wheels is, and they had a wonderful time helping those in their community. When I dropped off the cards at the Meals on Wheels office, they were extremely grateful and made sure I knew that the cards would make many people very happy.

References

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Appendix

[“Need Ideas” Paper For Students](#)

[Pictures of Finished Cards](#)