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Helping Hoodies Clothing Drive

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Author Note

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Abstract

This service learning project recognized the needs for warmer clothing for disadvantaged children that they genuinely wanted and would wear. Oftentimes, children who are in the care of the state for any purpose are children that have suffered trauma and loss. Not only loss of their possessions, but their families, friends and stability. I partnered with a non-profit organization, The Closet, that gives these children back their ability to choose clothing items that fit their style and helps them to gain back a piece of their identity. I created the Helping Hoodies clothing drive that ran for a week in November, collecting gently used and new hoodies and sweatshirts. I accomplished this through social media posts, flyers, donation bins, personal correspondence and solicitation. I created and produced two different flyers and a QR code directing people to The Closet's website and mission. I then collected the items and donated them, washed, sorted and sized back to The Closet to be chosen by the disadvantaged teenage clients she serves.

Keywords: foster care, clothing drive, teenagers, The Closet, homelessness, juvenile corrections

Introduction to my Capstone Project

I chose to do a service learning project for my capstone. I have a huge heart for service and for children in particular. I grew up in foster care and recently became a certified foster parent. Through this process, I was made aware of the huge lack of resources available to the foster children and foster parents of Idaho that is still ongoing. In particular, clothing and hygiene items are scarcely provided to foster children. Oftentimes they arrive at temporary housing with nothing. While the burden is primarily on the foster parents to supply these items for each child, there are a few non-profit organizations in Idaho that help offset these additional costs.

Through my research I found The Closet, a non-profit 501-c3 dedicated to giving the disadvantaged teens in the Treasure Valley the ability to have a personal shopping experience up to four times a year. With each appointment, they are able to choose 12 items of clothing. In addition, the owner/founder of The Closet Kelly McMurry, allows children to pick out a pair of Vans shoes, a pair of Nike shoes, a deodorant, socks, and chapstick that doesn't count towards their limit. She is able to do this through donations from the local community, sponsorships, and fundraising.

Elements Coming Together

After finding The Closet's website, I reached out to the founder via email and explained that I was doing a service learning project for my capstone and asked if she would be interested in partnering with me for a clothing drive. She was extremely responsive and invited me to Boise to see her storefront and learn more about her mission. Once there, I learned so much about

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Kelly's current health struggles, (she was diagnosed with MS), and her steadfast dedication to helping teens who are in homeless shelters, foster care, juvenile detention, and mental facilities. She saw a need and, "just did it." (K.McMurry interview, Sept.27, 2023)

After interviewing Kelly McMurry and meeting with several of her volunteers, I took multiple photos while touring her shop. I took a quick visual inventory of items she appeared to be low on. I asked her directly what she needed the most for her teens. She informed me that while many people want to host coat drives, the teens rarely choose a coat or would begrudgingly choose one after being persuaded to. She knew they would leave her store and never wear the coat. Kelly said that she would rather I did a clothing drive focusing on the hoodies and sweatshirts that teens would actually wear. That was how the idea of Helping Hoodies clothing drive was born.

Kelly had several signs left over from a donation fundraiser that she organized with a coffee shop chain in Boise. I borrowed ten of these signs to post at businesses around Mountain Home. I left with the knowledge that the QR code on them was expired and I would have to create a new one and attach it without damaging them so they could be reused in the future. I also created two separate flyers for the clothing drive to distribute to 20 locations around Mountain Home. I also attached the flyers to decorated donation boxes I placed in three strategic buildings.

I reached out to a local coffee/smoothie shop called FUBAR drinks. I spoke with the co-owners, Matthew Maneen and Stephen Nameth about setting up a box and flyers in their downtown location. It is centrally located near churches, schools, shopping and city hall. They were completely on board and I set up a date to drop off the donation box and flyers. Matthew said they would make a facebook post and even offer a raffle off a \$20 gift certificate. Anyone

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who donated would get one raffle ticket per item. It just worked out that our city election was held during my clothing drive and FUBAR was the meet and greet place for the candidates to meet the public. This meant a lot of foot traffic and eyes seeing my flyers and donation box.

The Uppercut Day Spa and Salon was another location that I set up flyers and a decorated donation bin at. The owner, Polly Roman, is known for her charitable works and her daughter, Davee Derosier, is the foster care placement coordinator for Elmore County and has several foster children herself. I was in touch with them both several times. Davee agreed that, “hoodies were a particular need for teenagers in winter,” which was fast approaching. (D.Derosier, interview, Nov. 2023) Along with offering to be a drop-off location, they both shared the posts I made to their personal and professional pages.

The final location for my donation bin was in the wing building of the Mountain Home Air Force base. I chose this location because it is the most prominent building on base. Nearly all personnel stationed in Mountain Home will go through that building at least once a week. I got permission from the Inspector General, Lt. Colonel Cody Hawkinson, to set up my box and flyers in front of the stairs and elevator so that it could be seen by anyone walking in the building. It was my most “profitable” box of the three gaining an impressive 80% of items donated.

In the days prior to the clothing drive, I posted on several social media sites as well as contacted people via email and texts. I researched online other successful clothing drives and the methods they used. I solicited donations from other IPS students via our weekly discussion board. I encouraged my five children to ask their friends as well as go through their own closets to see if they had any hoodies or sweatshirts they could part with for a good cause. I was able to

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donate 12 of my own hoodies as well as a few I purchased in hard to find sizes for those teens who may not get any donated in their size.

I monitored my posts and responded hourly if needed to any questions or comments. I drove daily to each location to check for and pick up any donations as well as build more rapport with the businesses who were generously helping me and The Closet. I was in communication via email with The Closet to update them on my progress. The drive lasted for one week beginning November 6th and ending with final donation pick up on November 13th. Once I collected each item, I counted and washed them all. I folded and bagged them up according to size and gender.

The Results

I measured my results by counting the usable items donated. I also submitted a survey to the owner and co-owner of the non-profit, The Closet. I conducted interviews with the owners/operators of the three businesses where I placed drop off donation boxes and worked with on a day to day basis throughout the week. I also have likes and comments and shares added up from multiple social media posts.

My survey results were 100% “strongly agree” on all 7 questions posed to Kelly McMurry and her co-owner. On Facebook I had 1,036 followers who saw my 7 posts. I had 5 shares and 6 comments on average per post. Fubar and the Uppercut had a total of 2,138 followers who saw the tagged posts. I shared the clothing drive across my Snapchat and Tik Tok accounts resulting in 103 more people hearing about the non-profit and gaining awareness about the teens in need. On Instagram I also made 7 posts to the 285 followers resulting in an additional 30 likes. My flyers were posted in 20 different locations resulting in an uncountable

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amount of awareness to the public. The clothing drive brought in 92 usable hoodies and sweatshirts to donate to The Closet.

The Conclusion

This clothing drive positively impacted the community of teens in need and the stakeholder by not only gaining the items needed for this season, but also gaining awareness of the need for clothing for this particular group of children. There will be 92 children with gently used or new hoodies this winter that they got to choose for themselves based on their own style and preference. Another indirect positive consequence of this clothing drive will be that more people now know about The Closet and their mission. Hopefully this results in more teens, case workers, and foster parents knowing about this free resource. In addition, I hope the public continues to donate even though the drive is over and perhaps may even become volunteers.

The project positively impacted not only the children receiving the items but myself also. I met the wonderful owner, Kelly McMurry, and am so happy to know that there are resources out there as a future foster parent that I can count on. I was disappointed to not meet my goal of 200, but 92 *usable* donated items was still a good amount considering the specificity of the clothing. I think if it were open to any or all items, there would have been more donations.

Kelly sent me an email and said, “You were an absolute blessing to THE CLOSET. To allow us to customize to our biggest need was so nice...sweatshirts and hoodies are desired by all teens. You washing all of them was so above and beyond. Thank you, truly Thank You.” I believe it was a success and the non-profit and teens they serve are happy and satisfied with the results of the clothing drive.

Appendix

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/jHnp8UZh6txpWeXU7>

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