Grace Michael

Ms. Galassi

Leading with Service-3

11/6/17

Project Bloom Personal Reflection

When I began working on Project Bloom at the beginning of this semester, I was eager to make a difference in my local community by raising funds to help The Summerhouse, a facility for young adults with intellectual disabilities, continue to flourish.  I knew that my team and I could make a positive impact on Summerhouse, but I did not anticipate the depth of impact that the overall experience would have on me.  As the Head of Communications, I was charged with being the main point of contact for The Summerhouse staff.  I relayed all relevant information to my team throughout the semester and kept our project moving as smoothly as possible. I began the task ahead by researching, summarizing, and sharing The Summerhouse’s history, mission, and purpose with my groupmates.  I also made initial contact with Donna Frugé, the Executive Director of The Summerhouse.  Although she was very familiar with IWA and knew much about our leadership programs, I further explained the main goal of Leading with Service and what types of projects we were looking to help with. After a few emails and phone calls, we settled on a date for our first group meeting with her at The Summerhouse. When we finally got to meet Mrs. Frugé and Ms. Bria Selman, the Program Assistant, my group and I were very excited.  After introducing us to some of their members and taking us on a tour of their facility, Mrs. Frugé told us about ‘Shred for Independence,’ a unique paper shredding business in which The Summerhouse members are employed.  Mrs. Frugé then told our group that what she really needed to further her business was another $1,700.00 industrial shredder.  We immediately accepted the task, and from that moment, our project had a simple and clear purpose, which everyone was very invested in.

Our team was entirely committed to accomplishing our goal.  Although I remained the main point of contact with The Summerhouse staff, our fundraising and marketing teams got right to work by setting up viable fundraising goals for our team as well as each of us individually.  After these goals were set up, I took on the role of motivating others to attend our meetings at The Summerhouse.  I also encouraged my teammates to follow through on deliverables and kept us on a scheduled timeline in order to buy the shredder as soon as we were able.  Because of my developed planning skills, I was able to use my positivity, determination, and outgoing personality to personally raise over $400.  My passionate conviction that all people deserve a good-quality life and the right to work was clear to all who donated to benefit The Summerhouse.  As a result, my friends, family, and classmates all believed that my team and I were capable of raising almost $2,000; and they gladly donated to my cause.  They even told me that they donated to our cause because they could see that I am a true believer in The Summerhouse mission: “ [To] fill gaps by providing quality support for young adults with disabilities, assisting their families, and educating their communities,” and wanted to be a part of my vision.

I really enjoyed getting to learn the Five Principles of the Student Leadership Challenge while I was working on my project because I could apply them to my social justice project in real time.  Although I found all five of these practices very helpful, I feel that “Model The Way” has helped my team the most.  Modeling the Way is very important because it is built around the most notable characteristic of a leader: credibility.  During this unit, I learned that leaders Model the Way by finding their voice and setting an example.  I applied this to our project though our “Project Values” Canva. Throughout the semester, our team kept the values on our Canva at the forefront of our project, and this really impacted our mindset.  Soon, we were not raising money to buy a shredder- we were raising money to buy a shredder *in order to help our brothers and sisters in Christ*.  We moved away from the “what” of our project and decided to focus on the “why” instead.  Without our values such as accountability, trust, communication, collaboration, respect, and punctuality, our project would definitely not have been able to impact so many lives.

Although the project as whole was extremely fulfilling and worthwhile, we were also met with some difficulties.  The most challenging of the Five Student Leadership Challenge Principles to enforce was definitely “Challenge the Process”.  Hours of brainstorming went into our final fundraising plan, and when we finally did think of a solid timeline, we had to be flexible enough to change it.  We ran into our first roadblock very early in our project as we soon discovered that it was no easy task finding a venue for our bake sale.  Most churches I contacted did not responded, had already booked their calendars out months in advance, or said that they were ‘closed’ to outside fundraising requests.  After much research and outsourcing, we were very fortunate to be granted access to the parish of St. Augustine Catholic Church.  Secondly, even after a hugely successful bake sale, we found ourselves hundreds of dollars short of our $1,700 goal. We knew that we had to dig deep and do whatever we could to raise the last couple hundred dollars.  Through the generous donations of our peers and numerous phone calls to family members around the country, we achieved our goal at last!  The final roadblock we ran into was actually purchasing the shredder.  We anticipated that the new shredder would arrive in time for our Christmas party with The Summerhouse members, so we were incredibly disappointed to learn that it would arrive around one week later than expected.  Even though we would not be able to deliver the shredder to during the party, we made sure to let both the staff and the members know that they can expect a big surprise in time for New Years!

When we initially agreed on our social justice issue and began to identify ways to help The Summerhouse, I was interested to help, but I was not yet emotionally invested in the cause.  Although I knew that The Summerhouse was doing much good in the community, it was not until I developed a relationship with both the staff and the members that I realized that my heart was truly broken over the fact that some people were not as respected as others.  Through their person-centered approach and sincere generosity and kindness, the staff at The Summerhouse truly model love and respect for all who come through their door.  Early on, I did not interact much with the members of The Summerhouse because I did not know how to do so.  After my first visit, however, I grew more comfortable with the members and they became more comfortable with me. For example, during one of my more recent visits, we were meeting as a team to do some baking with members of The Summerhouse in anticipation of our upcoming bake sale.  One of the girls enrolled in the program, named Jessie, was having a hard time adjusting to my team’s presence.  I saw how uncomfortable she was, so I approached her and sat down next to her. I began a conversation with her about all of her friends at The Summerhouse, and we even found a common interest- chicken nachos.  This shared interest almost immediately put her at ease, and she gladly helped us bake for the remainder of our visit. In that instant, my eyes were opened. She and I had more in common than I had originally thought.  We were not that different. This was the true goal of Project Bloom: to respect all life and to actively raise awareness about those with disabilities in our community.  This respect for all life is a key pillar of Catholic Social Teaching.  The Church, in her wisdom, has shown us the value of all life regardless of race, religion, age, or metal and physical ability.  I plan to continue to spread the word about the good work of The Summerhouse to others in my community and in my clubs and organizations.  In the long run, I would like to see a school-wide fundraiser be approved during Respect Life Month (October) to support The Summerhouse’s ongoing efforts to foster a world in which those with disabilities and their families are supported.