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Purdue Habitat for Humanity International Trip

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PURDUE JOURNAL OF SERVICE-LEARNING AND INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Purdue Habitat for Humanity International Trip

Zack McCormack, College of Pharmacy

Abstract

Zack McCormack is an advanced practice professional pharmacy student in the College of Pharmacy. In this article, Zack describes his experience with the Purdue Chapter of Habitat for Humanity—a nonprofit, Christian housing ministry with a belief that everyone should have access to decent, safe, and affordable housing.

Introduction

Although I was involved in a number of organizations during my time at Purdue, my participation with Purdue's chapter of Habitat for Humanity has been the most rewarding. I initially heard about the organization through one of its callouts, having been prompted by a campus flyer. I was strongly attracted to it due to its mission, and I was intrigued to work with such dedicated individuals.

Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit, Christian housing ministry with a vision that everyone should have access to decent, safe, and affordable housing. Through partnerships with families in need, the organization and the future homeowner work to renovate and build homes truly living up to the often-quoted line of “giving a hand up, not a hand out.” Homeowners are selected based on their level of need, their willingness to become partners, and the family's capability to repay the loan through an affordable payment plan. This payment plan is part financial (Habitat makes no profit on the sale) and part labor in that the homeowners invest hundreds of hours

of their own time, called sweat equity, to construct their future residence (Habitat for Humanity, n.d.a). Since its foundation in 1976 by Millard and Linda Fuller and the support of notable individuals like President Jimmy Carter, Habitat for Humanity has expanded internationally, helping more than six million people throughout the world (Habitat for Humanity, n.d.c). Their national headquarters is located in Atlanta, Georgia. Since its beginning, the organization has expanded to nearly 60 local affiliates in Indiana (Habitat for Humanity, n.b.d).

The Purdue chapter of Habitat has built eight homes in the past eleven years, and has raised funds and awareness for the cause. Altogether, I have spent three years as an officer, ultimately as the vice president of operations. During this period, I attended and helped organize events such as weekly Saturday builds in the local community, biking tours across the state, and spring break builds across the country. I was instrumental in the development of the first international trip last summer, which marked the end of my time as an officer. Specifically, I marketed the trip toward individuals most likely to attend, hosted information sessions, developed detailed spreadsheets regarding costs to participants and Habitat, and applied for a variety of grants.

Purdue Habitat for Humanity partnered with The Fuller Center for Housing, an affiliate of Habitat (The Fuller Center for Housing, n.d.). Through this collaboration, we sent eight students to Las Penitas, Nicaragua for one week. Not only was this a new experience with the organization, but it was also novel for the students who had never met one another before. The students quickly forged a bond by working together to help others. The eight Purdue students aided four families in constructing sustainable houses, working on the walls, roofs, and

floors of each home. They formed numerous friendships through frequent interactions with the locals on the build site, at the hotel, and in the community. During free time, the group went to the local nature reserve and marketplace, which provided a broader perspective of Nicaragua's culture. All of the Purdue students responded positively to post-trip surveys. In fact, one participant remarked that it was one of the best weeks of her life. My hope is that this opportunity continues to be offered since it (1) broadens the perspectives of Purdue students, and (2) improves the quality of life of citizens in other countries. Participants were responsible for funding the cost of their trip, which was a concern for many. This was alleviated, in part, by Purdue's contribution through a Student Community Service/Service-Learning Grant through Purdue's Office of Engagement. Additional grant opportunities should be explored in the future.

While it might seem that building homes is quite distinct from my profession in pharmacy, I would argue that they both promote a sense of empathy for and bonding with those in need of assistance. My involvement in Habitat has helped me understand the humanistic elements that play an important role in health care professions. In order to build trust with patients, pharmacists must foster an environment in which patients are comfortable sharing thoughts and concerns. Pharmacists are widely accepted as the most accessible health care provider, and therefore have the potential to make significant improvements in people's lives, should individuals open up to them. In order to establish trust, it is critical to relate to others and offer nonjudgmental guidance.

In organizing this event, there were a variety of challenges that needed to be addressed, which I can apply to my future career. As with any event that involves different groups of people, there were some competing interests. It was difficult at times to try to completely abide by all rules of the club, Purdue University, and The Fuller Center, and to fulfill the desires of the trip participants. Every effort was made to solicit feedback from all involved and to create an open dialogue to make the trip the best experience it could be for everyone. Wherever I end up within the field of pharmacy, I would ultimately like to be in a managerial role. In such a position, any experience I can draw upon in developing programs and reconciling the interests of a group will be valuable. I am so glad to have been a part of this organization, and I sincerely thank the group of individuals who took the chance on this inaugural trip and made it a success.

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