2016

Boiler Out! Program: Where Cultures Cross for Community Services

Quynh P. Nguyen

Purdue University, qpnguyen@purdue.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/pjsl>

Part of the [International and Intercultural Communication Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Nguyen, Quynh P. (2016) "Boiler Out! Program: Where Cultures Cross for Community Services," *Purdue Journal of Service-Learning and International Engagement*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

DOI: 10.5703/1288284316166

Available at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/pjsl/vol3/iss1/3>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

Boiler Out! Program: Where Cultures Cross for Community Services

Cover Page Footnote

Acknowledgement is provided to Purdue Boiler Out! project manager and my writing mentor, Ms. Carrie Anne Thomas.

BOILER OUT! PROGRAM:

Where Cultures Cross for Community Services

Quynh P. Nguyen, College of Pharmacy

ABSTRACT

Quynh Nguyen reflects on what she has learned from serving the community, from interactions with international students at Purdue, and how her volunteerism supports her current major in pre-pharmacy.

We can do no great things, only small things with great love.

—Mother Theresa

STUDENT AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

During my high school years in Vietnam, I had a high-stress study schedule and did not participate in volunteer activities on a regular basis. My contributions consisted of supporting needy families through donations of used textbooks, stationery, clothing, and other nonperishables when my school had open donation days. Sometimes on national holidays, like Children's Day or before Tet (Vietnamese Lunar New Year Festival), my homeroom teacher would hold daylong trips where we would visit hospitals, talk to patients, and give them small handmade gifts that we had prepared in advance of our arrival.

As a first-year, pre-pharmacy student at Purdue University, I am taught that giving back to the community is an essential part of being a pharmacist. I am encouraged to volunteer as much as possible in order to understand the social perspective of my career interest. A true pharmacist demonstrates professional excellence and an attitude of service toward the public he or she serves. Through curiosity and an open mind to learn about pharmacy, I

chose the Boiler OUT! Program over other campus community service organizations to make my extracurricular time more meaningful.

INTRODUCTION

Boiler OUT! was established by the Purdue Office for International Programs (POIP) in 2009. Their goal is to connect international and American students to help them learn about one another's cultures while providing community services in conjunction with nonprofit volunteer organizations in Greater Lafayette, Indiana. The "Boiler OUT!" name reflects the foundations for which it stands: Outreach, Understanding, and Teamwork. The current Boiler OUT! volunteer coordinator is Carrie Anne Thomas, Intercultural Programs Specialist at the POIP.

Boiler OUT! attracts students from all over the world; there are currently 200 active members. In addition to domestic students, there are members from more than 30 countries. The minimum time commitment for members of Boiler OUT! include: attending the orientation session, signing up for at least one Boiler OUT! community service event each month (a minimum of three events a semester), and attending at least one "Boiler In!" guest speaker presentation each semester (Purdue University, n.d.).

Boiler In! is a one-hour presentation by community-based, nonprofit organizations about their programs, missions, and volunteer registration. These introductions to various organizations and opportunities are held at Purdue and are invaluable sources of information for

international students like me. This is because communication barriers (especially with phone calls) and lack of transportation often discourage foreigners from reaching out to the community—many of us don’t have cars or American driver’s licenses. I attended Boiler In! sessions with United Way and Junior Achievement, and I was amazed at all the projects they create, what they truly believe in, and how their efforts are essential to education in America, especially to American youth.

On the last Tuesday of each month, students look up available events for the next month on the official Boiler OUT! website and pick one that fits their schedule. Boiler OUT! has plenty of opportunities, including walking dogs for Natalie’s Second Chance dog shelter, sorting food at Food Finders, supervising kids at their elementary school’s gathering, or chatting with senior citizens at a retirement home. Boiler OUT! members volunteer with multiple organizations and then select their best fit and work with them independently. This paper describes two of my selections: Food Finders and Relay For Life.

ACTIVITIES

My first Boiler OUT! project began in September 2015. I decided to work with Food Finders Food Bank, located in Greater Lafayette, Indiana. They began operations in 1981 with a mission to enhance food security in Tippecanoe County and its 15 surrounding counties (Food Finders Food Bank, n.d.a). As a member of Feeding America, Food Finders provides services to support nutrition for people in need. Half of their clients, in fact, are not hungry all the time, but often have to trade nutrition for other necessities like rent, clothing, or medical care. This is what food insecurity looks like in America, and the mission of Food Finders is to help provide them with healthy food through various programs. They also provide food to member agencies, advocate for the hungry, and educate the public about issues related to hunger. They are funded by several agencies, sponsors, and grants, including Feeding America (Food Finders Food Bank, 2013).

My peers and I went to Food Finders to sort corn, which was donated from a local farm. We were taught basic food safety rules to ensure that we selected edible corn that wasn’t moldy. For two hours we packed as many ears of corn as possible into banana boxes and stacked them nicely on pallets (Figure 1). After we cleaned up our working space, Sarah Mihich-Baker, the volunteer coordinator for Food Finders, showed us around the warehouse—where we had been working—and talked

Figure 1. Sorting cereals at the Food Finders Food Bank warehouse.

about the history of the organization and how they run their Backpack Program, mobile pantries, open-to-public selling corner, and school pantries. This year, Food Finders distributed 7 million pounds of food throughout north central Indiana—and this number keeps growing. Sarah emphasized the importance of regular volunteers to keep food distribution running smoothly. In addition to Boiler OUT! volunteers, they receive help from other groups at Purdue and from other schools and local individuals. We completed our tasks eagerly as it was our first time to sort corn and learn about hunger in America.

I also registered for other Boiler OUT! events over time, like a pumpkin patch fundraiser and “kids’ night in” at Happy Hollow Elementary School, but I kept coming back to Food Finders. Sarah, the volunteer coordinator, remembered what tasks I had done there before. Of the 42 hours I have volunteered with Boiler OUT! thus far, I have spent half of that time with Food Finders. Other events are fun in their own ways, and I always feel helpful when I join a Boiler OUT! session, yet I feel my efforts with Food Finders have a large impact on the community. This empowers me to help them continue their good cause.

Most recently, I attended a Boiler In! session about Relay For Life. The concept was totally new to me. I had to go home and look up “relay” in a dictionary to fully understand its meaning. Relay For Life was introduced to us through Purdue Colleges Against Cancer, and it has become a global phenomenon in recent years. Relay For Life is part of an attempt to fight cancer through fundraising, advocating, and raising public awareness. The program supports cancer research and provides free services to cancer patients and their caregivers. We watched short videos about how Relay For Life began, grew over

time, and recruits people to join the battle against cancer every year. What I remember most about the session is that Relay For Life has two primary activities: walking nonstop for 12 hours and the Luminaria ceremony. To me, these are beautiful events; nonstop walking represents the relentless fight against cancer, while the Luminaria ceremony full of candle-lit paper bags is a symbol of hope and remembrance of the individuals that have lost the painful battle.

Relay For Life happens in more than 5,200 communities and 20 countries, with more than \$400 million dollars raised annually (American Cancer Society, n.d.a). On April 8, 2016, Relay For Life at Purdue University took place inside the France A. Córdova Recreational Sports Center (CoRec), beginning at 6:00 p.m. and lasting until 6:00 a.m. the next day (Figure 2). This year, 99 teams and 1,135 participants raised more than \$87,000 dollars for the American Cancer Society (American Cancer Society, n.d.b). Although Relay For Life only occurs once a year, the Purdue Colleges Against Cancer chapter has regular opportunities for fundraising and volunteering to increase community awareness about their mission.

I walked the Caregivers Lap around the two Gold and Black gyms inside the CoRec with other participants. The Luminaria ceremony was my favorite moment throughout the night as people told their stories about cancer and everyone shared the same spirit in memory or in honor of their grandparents, parents, extended families, and friends. After completing the ceremony with the Survivors Lap, I went to the Boiler OUT! booth to make henna tattoos for our fundraising activity for the night. It was my first time following requests for designs by participants. I was nervous since henna is a complex art form that requires skill and attention to detail. I was the only one making henna tattoos for two hours, and the waiting line at our booth kept getting longer. However, seeing the satisfaction of my customers' faces and hearing their praises made me happy. Even though my skills

are far from perfect, I realized I can do more than I think, as long as I put my heart and time into my service.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

One reason I chose to return to Food Finders was Sarah's thorough preparation for volunteers. Every time my peers and I go to Food Finders, tasks are ready for us to complete. Workflow is well maintained; after we sort through large carton boxes of food, new food pallets are set up for us to continue. I always feel proud to see how much food we have sorted in three hours. One time we sorted through 300 pounds of cereal, and a staff member told us we were working so fast that he could not move enough new pallets in to keep up with us. My efforts, along with hundreds of other volunteers, ensure that the food is ready to go to food pantries all over Indiana.

In contrast, Relay For Life primarily impacts the community through fundraising and raising awareness about cancer. The money raised supports cancer patients with treatment costs and eases the families' burdens by paying for them to stay close to where the patients receive treatment. Relay For Life may be the biggest event that gathers campus organizations to support one common cause. Their success in impacting the community depends on how much they raise and how many participate. Colleges Against Cancer at Purdue prepares well by training volunteers to work throughout the event, and by providing necessities for participants like water and food during the 12-hour period.

STUDENT IMPACT

Boiler OUT! helped me learn more about people and places in the Greater Lafayette area, and taught me invaluable life lessons along the way. Contributing to the community in which we live is a major theme in my pharmacy orientation class. Volunteering with Boiler OUT! has reinforced the importance of service within my career. I have enjoyed the opportunities to discuss cultural differences in America and in other countries around the globe. Listening to people from different cultures always intrigues me and inspires me to explore their traditions and unique customs. I now feel more confident while talking to foreign friends. I better understand that my wording does not sound offensive, and I have become more open with those I encounter. Volunteer activities ultimately improved my communication and intercultural development. Likewise, I am now proud to introduce Vietnam to my peers. Some of

Figure 2. Relay For Life event.

my friends have a misconception that Vietnam is still at war, so I now happily explain to them that Vietnam is moving forward despite national challenges.

Besides obtaining new cultural understanding, I also realized the importance of perseverance in serving others. There is a misconception that volunteerism often involves large, significant tasks, but I now see that the consistent efforts I put into service build up over time, and each of my three-hour sessions were worthwhile and made an impact. Mother Teresa said, “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” This quote hangs outside the warehouse door at Food Finders and encourages me to return.

I learned lessons not only from good things that I saw and did, but also from barriers I encountered. For instance, one day I was working at the Food Finders Mobile Pantry at the Tippecanoe County fairgrounds. We were serving food cafeteria style, meaning everyone was in line and we stood behind tables to distribute portions of food. Residents kept asking if they could have a whole six-bag cookie box rather than the two-bag portion size. Saying “no” to anyone used to be a weakness of mine, but I learned that saying no was necessary to ensure that every person in line that day was fed.

As members of Boiler OUT!, we must show up on time and be ready to perform any tasks given to the team on the spot. We handle tasks with an open mind and no expectations. Instructions and tasks are straightforward for students, such as sorting food, moving pumpkins, walking dogs, supervising kids, or talking to seniors. Being flexible is important. Volunteers often must adapt to the situation at hand and not allow disappointment to dissuade from the purpose of service. For instance, one day my team and I went to Natalie’s Second Chance Dog Shelter early on a rainy day to walk dogs. When we got there, we found out that all the dogs had already been walked to avoid the rain, so we returned to campus with regrets. It was unfortunate, but life requires flexibility.

Reflecting on my stories, I understand more about myself and how I react to different situations. These pocket lessons are necessary for me to become a well-rounded individual and to reflect on what I can do differently to improve myself and my community. I always enter a volunteering day with genuine eagerness and an “I have to commit to it” state of mind.

CONCLUSION

Service-learning is a reciprocal process. Not only did I serve others, but I have also grown throughout every Boiler OUT! session. On the surface, the activities I participated in did not directly relate to pharmacy or my professional knowledge, but the interactions I had with the organizations, my peers, and the public broadened my personality and provided me with support on my path to becoming a pharmacist. I used to be shy and only open to my close friends; I now love to talk with people from different backgrounds and tell them my story. I am willing to listen with a more accepting heart. I learned when to say no, and when to be flexible. I learned that small work counts in the long run, especially when I put my heart into it. I also learned to be hopeful seeing what nonprofit organizations and individual volunteers can do together to address current societal issues. I will definitely continue to support Boiler OUT!, Food Finders, and Relay For Life. I am also glad that, through my work, the public learns more about Purdue and our army of volunteers that want to make a difference in our communities. Boiler up!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my writing mentors, Ms. Carrie Anne Thomas and Dr. Patricia Darbshire.

REFERENCES

- American Cancer Society. (n.d.a). Learn about Relay For Life. Retrieved April 10, 2016, from http://relay.acsevents.org/site/PageServer/?pagename=relay_learn
- American Cancer Society. (n.d.b). Relay For Life of Purdue University. Retrieved April 10, 2016, from http://main.acsevents.org/site/TR/RelayForLife/RFLCY16LS?pg=entry&fr_id=72954
- Food Finders Food Bank. (n.d.a). About Food Finders Food Bank. Retrieved April 10, 2016 from <http://www.food-finders.org/about/>
- Food Finders Bank. (n.d.b). Learn about hunger. Retrieved April 10, 2016, from <http://www.food-finders.org/learn-about-hunger/>
- Food Finders Food Bank. (2013). *2013 Annual report—Growing another year stronger*. Retrieved April 10, 2016, from <http://food-finders.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/2013-Annual-Report-Full.pdf>
- Purdue University. (n.d.). Boiler OUT! Retrieved April 10, 2016, from <http://www.ippu.purdue.edu/Programs/BoilerOut/BoilerOut.cfm>

Nguyen, Q. P. (2016). Boiler OUT! Program: Where cultures cross for community services. *Purdue Journal of Service-Learning and Engagement*, 3, 8–11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284316166>