

2016

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Recommended Citation

Lasker, Kristina (2016) "Imagination Station," *Purdue Journal of Service-Learning and International Engagement*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 19.

DOI: 10.5703/1288284316181

Available at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/pjisl/vol3/iss1/19>

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PURDUE JOURNAL OF SERVICE-LEARNING AND INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Imagination Station

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Abstract

Kristina Lasker, a student in the College of Health and Human Sciences at Purdue University, describes her experience with Imagination Station, a nonprofit organization located in Lafayette, Indiana. Imagination Station introduces elementary and middle school students to a wide range of information about science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines through exhibits and hands-on learning activities.

Introduction

I am a senior at Purdue University majoring in human services and minoring in global studies. Seniors in my major are required to secure an internship (20–40 hours per week) during their final semester of school. This is generally a stressful, difficult process. Many factors must be considered when searching for an internship, such as whether you want to work with a nonprofit or a for-profit, if it is a paid or unpaid internship, the driving distance, and what the opportunities for employment are after graduation. Professors, other faculty, and fellow class members help make the process easier. I discovered my Capacity Building Internship at the Indiana Nonprofit Resource Network (INRN) through a class member who remembered hearing about this position.

During my time interning at INRN, I learned about many nonprofit organizations located in West Lafayette and the Lafayette area. Many I didn't know existed, and the work they do is inspiring. One of these organizations is Imagination Station. I had passed by Imagination Station

numerous times, but I had never been inside. My fellow intern and I met with their representative and conducted a needs assessment that we had created at INRN.

Imagination Station

When I first entered Imagination Station, I noticed that there was so much to look at and learn about. If I enjoyed it that much just walking through it, I can only imagine how exciting a place like that would be for a young child. Imagination Station's mission is to "provide hands-on learning experiences in science, technology, and engineering in order to strengthen the scientific literacy of children and families in the Greater Lafayette Community" (Imagination Station, n.d.). Imagination Station has been in its current location at 600 North 4th Street in Lafayette, Indiana since 1999 under the supervision of the Association for Science, Space, Engineering, and Technology (ASSET).

Imagination Station is unique. When you walk in the door, you see vibrant colors, large displays, huge blocks and toys, pictures of famous people in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), and so much more. Even I felt compelled to engage and play with some of the toys. That is one thing that makes Imagination Station great—they reach a wide variety of public demographics. The activities and events are created for children, but parents and college students enjoy the setting as well. The doors to Imagination Station are open to anyone who wants to explore. The admission fee is \$4 per person, but they plan to lower the entrance fee in the near future to attract more people who may not be able to afford it.

A fellow intern and I worked closely with Imagination Station's executive director and the president of the

board. The executive director stated, “We make an effort to engage people of all socioeconomic statuses and to bridge the diversity gap.” Imagination Station administrators are passionate about the STEM field, specifically about teaching disadvantaged children about STEM. Unfortunately, most of the staff are transient volunteers, resulting in few people willing to commit to speaking opportunities to assist in advertising. Purdue students often volunteer at Imagination Station during the day, and the organization is always looking for more volunteers of any age. Advertising and low attendance are primary challenges within the organization. As a business targeting school-aged children, Imagination Station realizes the need to extend their hours. They are currently brainstorming ways to get their name out, get more volunteers, and stay open longer on school days. Anyone interested in volunteering or learning more about the organization and upcoming events can either visit them or go to their website at www.imagination-station.org.

Reflection

My time with the Imagination Station and their representatives was wonderful. It is clear how passionate the staff is about the STEM field, and their goal is to target children and families from both sides of the bridge. The STEM field is constantly evolving, and Imagination Station is dedicated to evolving with it. The staff and volunteers continuously search for new ideas for exhibits or toys that allow kids to have fun and learn simultaneously. As Mr. Cardella, President of Imagination Station, stated, “The STEM fields will never go out of style. If we can get kids interested in STEM in kindergarten or at an elementary age, then imagine the success they will have by the time they leave college as a STEM professional.”

References

Imagination Station (n.d.). Mission & history. Retrieved August 8, 2016 from http://www.imagination-station.org/?page_id=38