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Community Initiatives Multiply University Partnerships

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Mayflower bird area.

strengthen their programs, and eventually realize their dream of a children's forest.

Reflection and Conclusion

Working with HoF the past three years has provided me with leadership skills, an opportunity to learn about a nonprofit, and an understanding of the importance of providing nature experiences for children. I've watched the organization grow from one junior nature club to an organization with several successful programs for community members of all ages, and a plan for a children's forest. This young organization is gathering substantial momentum, and they have the potential to achieve great things with additional funding and volunteers. As I continue to work with this organization, I reflect on Dr. Shepardson's class and think about the impact my volunteer experience with HoF has had on my life. My hope for HoF is that more professors and community members engage with the organization to help them reach more youth and make a bigger and continuing difference in their community.

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Community Initiatives Multiply University Partnerships

Christopher LaFontaine, *College of Arts and Sciences*

Student Author Bio Sketch

Christopher LaFontaine is a senior studying psychology and sociology at Indiana Purdue Fort Wayne (IPFW). He has concentrated on community engagement and service learning as areas of focus for the past year. He plans to pursue a career in applied sociology and he has been involved with applied research among vulnerable populations. Christopher has worked with homeless veterans in Fort Wayne and has studied health conditions in a rural county that ranks low in health outcomes. In this article, he describes his experience with service-learning partnerships between community organizations and an institution of higher education.

Introduction

I first became involved with community engagement collaboration in a fall 2017 course (SOC 340) led by Dr. Sherrie Steiner. In the course, we were required to complete a project that involved a collaboration with Blackford County Concerned Citizens (BCCC) and IPFW students, made possible by a service-learning grant from Purdue University. The scope of this project was to present evidence to residents and city officials of Hartford City, Indiana, that dangerous fugitive dust produced from the operations of a local steel recycling plant is affecting public health in the community. Residents of Hartford City and BCCC are asking city officials to relocate the steel recycling plant away from the residential neighborhood in which it currently operates to an industrial park that is well suited for their operations. If relocation of the steel recycling plant is successful, a large brownfield will remain.

The president of BCCC—a master gardener, trained by Purdue Extension—initiated this collaboration to present an imaginary greenhouse design to residents as a form of prefigurative politics to inspire and empower residents to transform their neighborhood. Leach (2013) describes prefigurative politics as a political orientation that seeks to bring about social changes as a result of the embodiment or “prefigured” changes sought to be realized by the group. BCCC has initiated this collaboration with IPFW to use the greenhouse near Kettler Hall as an exploratory project to show Hartford City residents the reasonability and practicality of aboveground gardening on brownfields. The political aspect of prefigurative

Eric Evans (President of BCCC) looking after vegetables in the greenhouse.

politics is that the steel recycling plant is still operating in this residential neighborhood and has dismissed the request from nearby residents to relocate the business to a more suitable location. This initiation has led to a growth of partnerships, including Dr. Steiner's "Principles of Sociology" course and Dr. Leblanc's "Heath Communication" course, the Sociology Student Association at IPFW, the Communication Honors Society at IPFW, and the Department of International Language and Cultural Studies at IPFW. It also includes two additional community partners—BCCC and the Community Harvest Food Bank—to grow greenhouse vegetable plants for distribution to residents in Hartford City and Fort Wayne.

Community Partner Description

Blackford County Concerned Citizens is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for Blackford County, Indiana, residents by reducing disease occurrence through direct citizen action (BCCC, n.d.). BCCC is a nonprofit organization located in Blackford County that was founded to educate the county's residents about the elevated cancer rates in the-area and to investigate a possible relationship between elevated cancer rates and the county's industrial history. Initial efforts by the BCCC board include tested water and soil samples from participating residents throughout the county, and results were inconclusive. Further information about past projects is available on their website.

The board members began to narrow the focus of the organization from the entire county of Blackford to residents living within a two-block radius of the only Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) city facility that has been documented for violating an agreed-upon order. Residents' property values have been declining in tandem with the expansion of the steel recycling plant. For the last two years, IPFW has collaborated with BCCC to listen to their concerns and to notify the mayor of Hartford City, the Hartford City council, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM), and the EPA region five coordinator. BCCC is serving as a watchdog to ensure that the IDEM and the EPA are enforcing compliance for air, surface water, groundwater, and soil contamination. A noteworthy feature is that BCCC has no staff, is under resourced, and operates in one of the poorest and least populated counties in the state of Indiana.

Activities and Impact

The quality of the collaborative relationship between BCCC and the sociology program at IPFW is what makes this case study so noteworthy. Service learning and higher education have been critiqued for prioritizing pedagogical concerns at the cost of community empowerment (Jones, 2003; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). This community collaboration has intentionally sought to address these weaknesses. The reciprocity between BCCC and the sociology program at IPFW is bidirectional. The sociology program at IPFW provides support for BCCC in generating newsletters. With the exception of the current collaboration with BCCC, all past student placements since 2014 have occurred in the context of specific classes. The class structure defines projects while creating a timetable for events that keep the situation moving forward.

BCCC has an impact on IPFW through the use of an underutilized campus greenhouse. Three campus student organizations were involved and participation was open to all students. More vegetable containers than could be reasonably transported to Hartford City were created, so the Community Harvest Food Bank and the IPFW Food Bank were invited to join the project. Community Harvest wants to empower their clients to accept the vegetable bags, and they requested care instruction cards to be made available in multiple languages, so the sociology program reached out to the Department of International Language and Cultural Studies. Involvement with this collaboration has both direct and indirect effects on students. For example, the engagement experience directly impacted a student's acceptance into a PhD program that

specializes in community engagement. Another student's future was impacted by conversations with the president of BCCC. He drew upon his network as a former district attorney to place a student as an intern with a female judge. She was later accepted into law school.

Reflection and Conclusion

The relationship between BCCC and the sociology program at IPFW has evolved over time. I came along at a time when BCCC asked IPFW to make better use of an underutilized campus facility. What caught my attention was how the collaboration suddenly flourished beyond what one might reasonably expect. For example, the initial project design did not include language translation. Blackford County is a homogeneous population. Community Harvest works with a diverse immigrant population in Fort Wayne, which is the second-largest city in the Indiana. At the request of Community Harvest, students studying foreign languages at IPFW learned that their language skills could have an immediate application. Immigrants eagerly took the plants home when they saw that the care instructions were in their own language.

To best prepare to work with this community organization, it is important for students to understand that the BCCC representative with whom they interact are board members and not staff. Students may be asked to perform tasks that normally are assigned to staff members. They should keep in mind that board members are less directly involved in day-to-day activities. Through this experience, I have come to take seriously the critiques in the literature, such as the importance for the university to listen to the community partner, because I have had firsthand observation of how application of the critique may be useful in solving real-world problems.

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Nurse Practitioner Students: Providing Wellness Screenings to Underserved Older Adults

Rexanna Tatlock, *School of Nursing*

Student Author Bio Sketch

Rexanna Tatlock (BSN, RN, CCRN) received a BSN from Saint Francis College in 2003. As a registered nurse, she specialized in critical care nursing and eventually enrolled in the Adult Gerontology Nurse Practitioner master's program in Purdue University's School of Nursing in 2016. Upon graduation in May 2018, Rexanna has planned to focus on primary health care. The service-learning project provided primary care clinical experience, while meeting the needs of an underserved older adult population. This article will discuss the community partnership, a needs assessment, and a wellness screening offered to Fairington Apartments (FA) residents.

NP student doing blood pressure screening.