

Senior Capstone

17 Dec. 2013

Thanks to Our Heroes

### **Part I: Initial Project Research and Brainstorming**

When I signed up for this class, I had a good idea about what the class would consist of. As President of our High School's Interact program and a member of NHS, I am used to service through helping others. I signed up for this class as another way to give back. I was unsure of what I wanted to do as a project. I just wanted to do something that would change someone else's life.

My individual definition of service is acting in a manor that helps or changes someone's life without looking for a reward. As the class progressed we began to share our definitions as a class to come up with a class definition. Fortunately, my definition was close to the class'; which was an action of some sort that impacts a person or group of people's lives without expecting anything in return. I choose to work with Grant and Garret because they are my friends, and I knew I would be able to work with these two well. We chose to leave our final definition of service the same as the class's definition. We decided this because this was a combination of all of our definitions and allowed us to keep an open mind and not count any project out.

We began to brainstorm ideas about what our project would be. We came up with basic projects like going to an elderly home, raising money to donate, and some others. We narrowed it down to two projects. As the President of Interact I have connections with the leaders of the volunteer groups in the community. Our plan was to

go to Murray Lake Elementary and create a group like our high school's Interact group. We would have asked for help from Mr. Audia at Cherry Creek Elementary, who created a volunteer group two years ago. After consulting Mr. Boudro, the leader of our high school Interact group, we decided in the time we had it would be possible but difficult and take a lot of time and effort. With the help of Mrs. Keglovitz, we decided on making letters with an elementary school class that we could have sent out to soldiers.

We didn't have a lot of research to do. We went online together and went through multiple websites that were sponsored by organizations that sent these letters to the soldiers. We decided on an organization called A Million Thanks. We looked to see how we would deliver these letters. We found that there are two drop sites in Michigan, both more than two hours away. The closer of the two was in Ann Arbor. This was going to be too long of a trip, so we called the drop site and found out that we could send the letters to them in the mail and then they would send them out. Oxford Dictionary defines service as "the action of helping or doing work for someone ("Service")," there is a difference between service and service learning. Service, as stated before is an action of helping or doing work for someone else. According to Colorado State university, "Service learning involves students in community service activities and applies the experience to personal and academic development" ("Definition of Service-Learning."). The difference between them two is service learning is doing something to help others but applying it to something academic. Service learning can have a positive impact on students because they can realize the struggles that other people go through and they get an opportunity to help others.

The need for a need assignment is to give students a chance to see the struggles of others, but also to show how they can make a difference in someone's life. The need

we are meeting with this project is the need of support for our troops and show that we care about what they are doing.

## **Part II: Research**

There is currently "561,984 Active personnel and 567,299 Reserve and National Guard personnel for a total strength of 1,129,283" ("Benefits"). This means there are over 500,000 men and women who put their lives on the line every day, away from their families and loved ones. There are different organizations that work to make these people know that they are appreciated and loved. But with all of these efforts, not everyone will receive these thanks and gifts. This loneliness and distance from the people that love them can cause different problems.

The number of soldiers who take their own life has grown steadily over the past couple decades. A report was released that said twenty two soldiers take their own lives every day, including active, reserved, and veterans. More specifically during 2012 there was a total of 349 suicides during 2012, 182 were in the army, 60 were Navy, 59 were Air Force, and 48 Marine Corps. Accord in the Bill Briggs, "Nearly 70 percent of all veteran suicides were among men and women aged 50 or older" (Briggs, Bill). This is an outstanding number. More soldiers and veterans are taking their lives every day then are dying from the enemy. These men and women take their lives for many different reasons, some from the overwhelming stress of war, some from the time away from their families and friends, and some from underlying mental illnesses. These mental illness can include posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, alcohol problems and more. ("Benefits").

A Million Thanks is an organization that sends letters out to men and women serving in the armed forces. Anyone can send a letter to this organization and they will get the letter to a soldier they find in need. The founder of the organization says that "A Million Thanks is a year-round campaign to show our appreciation for our U.S. Military Men and Women, past and present, for their sacrifices, dedication, and service to our country through our letters, emails, cards, and prayers" (Amillionthanks.org). This organization helps men and women serving this country get the thanks they deserve. They have sent over six million letters and counting and will continue to send letters to those who fight to keep our freedom alive. (Amillionthanks.org). Letters like this can remind a soldier who and what they are fighting for and show that they are appreciated.

More and more soldiers are taking their own lives fighting for the rest of us who live every day with the freedom these men and women are fighting for. It is our responsibility to support these men and women in a time where the stress and toll of the war is the hardest. Just know that a simple letter can save a soldier's life so they can return home to their families and friends.

### **Part III: Project Development and Implementation**

When it came time to get started on our project, our first step was to see if we could even get the letters, which we were going to have the kids write, to the drop off site. We found the closest drop site to be just outside Detroit. This wasn't going to work because we would have to drive three hours. We talked it over and decided our best option was to just call the drop site and see if we could mail them

to them. Garret called the next day and just explained our situation and they were excited to have us doing the project. We brought up a couple different ways to fix our problem and decided the easiest would just be to mail them. Now that we knew the project would work out, the next step was to plan it out and get the details down. We, as a group, emailed [REDACTED] the principal at [REDACTED] Elementary, and explained the organization we were running our project through and he said he would be more than happy to help out three fellow [REDACTED]. He forwarded our email to all the teachers and we got emails back from four that were interested in the next couple days. I started to talk to the four teachers individually and find out specifics for each of their classes, supplies, how much teaching they would need, and dates and times. We just did [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] classes on Tuesday, they went great. The kids all had fun and the teachers all commented on how cool of a project was. When we first got to the classroom the class was still at recess. There was one student; his name was [REDACTED], who was playing Pokemon in the room. I dabbled in the Pokemon games when I was younger so I played with him for a little. It was cool and he had a good time. I think this helped because it eased my nerves. After the students got in, [REDACTED] introduced us and we started to explain what they were going to do. We had a small presentation that we planned on showing before we got started but the internet was down in the school, so we had to change plans and we just talked about what would have been on the power point. This included how to address it, what to put in it, and how to end it. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] did most of that because I did the introduction and explained the project and who we were. This ended up working without a problem because the two grades we had

were old enough to know what they were going to do. They then proceeded to start on their letters. While they were doing this, we walked around and guided them and helped with any issues they were having. It was fun to interact with the kids and learn more about them. After they all finished up we said our goodbyes and told them if the soldiers wrote back to us, we would make sure they got the letters.

**Part IV: Reflection**

A. Connection Capstone to Classes

- 1) See Appendix 1

B. Planning and Preparation

1) Belief and Attitude

- a) It would be easy
- b) Not a lot of prep-work
- c) It would fun to hang with the kids for a while
  - i. Easy to get along with
- d) How to get the letters to the drop site
  - i. Would we be able to send them out
- e) How much time would we need

2) We learned about the issues involving sending the letters out by calling the organization and finding to nearest drop site. When we found the closest one we realized it was in Flint. Not having the time to drive there we called the site and asked if we could send them to them and we could.

3) We expected the kids to be proud of what they did. Also we hoped that it would change a soldier's life. \*

4) Anxieties

a) Possible problems

- i. Would we have enough time
- ii. What would we need
- iii. Would the teachers want to do this
- iv. Would the kids want to do this


b) Problems

- i. Some scheduling issues that got worked out
- ii. We forgot the camera at Mr. Russell's room


C. Implementation

1) When I got to the school I was a little nervous, unsure of what to expect from the kids. We were there early so we walked around the school. We notice our 5<sup>th</sup> grade class picture and reminisced with our 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers about memories and how much we changed. This eased my nerves. ~ Who?

2) We didn't need anything because the teachers had paper and writing utensils. We prepared by going over a PowerPoint that we created of what we were going to say. We didn't need to do a site visit because we all went to the school. When we got there we were unable to use the PowerPoint because the internet was down. It was ok because we knew what we were going to say and explained it well. Yes...

- 3) We made a difference because we introduced the kids to ways to help people that fight for them. Also we gave thanks to the people that put their lives on the line every day.
- 4) I don't have much because it went really well. The teacher did a great job explaining the writing process. 
- 5) All three did their part, prepared, implemented, and had fun with the kids. I feel I definitely did my part because I was well prepared and created the PowerPoint.
- 6) I felt fine because we never fought. We are all good friends so we can easily work things out.

#### D. Post Reflection

- 1) That we connected with the kid, one of the kids was inside for recess when we got there and I played Pokémon with him. I saw him a couple days later at a wrestling tournament and he ran up to me to talk to me. Also we have the ability to change soldiers' lives with the thanks they deserve.
- 2) I learned that kids need specific examples and need to be told things over and over. Also that the kids got distracted easy so we needed to keep them on track.
- 3) I'll remember playing Pokémon with  before we got started. And how the soldiers respond in their emails, if they respond.



4) It really didn't because the research was on why the soldiers needed these letters. The implantation was more of why and explaining what to do.

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**Appendix #1**

