



Service Learning/Field Experience Model of Success

Lehigh Carbon Community College

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Remember the Children

There is a traditional greeting used by the Masai tribe of Kenya, it is “Kasserian Ingera.” This salutation translates to “How are the children?” and it is used to make somebody’s acquaintance within the community of this powerful tribe. The traditional reply to meeting individuals in this tribe is to respond “All the children are well.” This statement helps to recognize that the well-being of the children within their community is deeply valued. Ultimately, the greeting means that peace and safety prevail and the priorities of protecting the young and the powerless are in place.

The opening paragraph of this article helps to set a tone to take a closer look at how the faculty and staff at Lehigh Carbon Community College (LCCC) support their students enrolled in education courses at the college. How is the task accomplished at this facility of higher education? One goal of the LCCC faculty is to mentor and model for their students how to make a difference in the lives of the children and their families. Looking out for the students within this department is of utmost importance. It means that when students are involved in various community projects and these projects help to support the local community, the well-being of children and families are deeply valued.

Ultimately, the students who enroll, transfer, or graduate from LCCC have opportunities to gain experiences through various community projects. The LCCC faculty and staff prepare and empower their students to learn how to support quality care and education of all children within their communities. In addition, by connecting with different experiences students

(guided by staff) have the opportunity to explore why they are interested in early childhood education, education, or special education as a career. There is a core belief that by offering opportunities for students to participate within community and non-profit agencies, each individual can explore why they should invest in teacher education as their career choice. In other words it questions, what is in your heart that will help you sustain your vision as an education professional?

Professor Melanie Wursta, coordinator of the LCCC Teacher Education department, sets the tone for the department. Melanie has led the team to pursue federal grants through the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, to fund degrees for candidates (Project FLAGSHIP and Project SET SAIL) and grants to self-evaluate and improve degree programs (Project REACH).

As a cancer survivor, Melanie was inspired to create Lights of Hope in 2009. Along with Kristine Shaffer, the department's administrative assistant, Melanie created this unique program. The Lights of Hope luminaria program has four goals: (1) to raise awareness of this disease; (2) to honor the lives that have been impacted by cancer; (3) to remember the individuals that lost their lives to cancer; and (4) to help raise funds for research to help find a cure for cancer. Students, staff, and colleagues are invited to donate money to light a luminaria bag. Each bag has a label with a name or special note for a loved one. Raffle baskets and a link to the college website also support this effort. In 2012, outreach was made to other local colleges to build a community of partnership to help them adopt this highly visible and radiant ceremony. The program at LCCC has over the past four years raised over \$13,000.

How does this program support quality care and education for children? Families in today's society are experiencing the impact of what cancer can have upon their loved ones. This disease crosses many boundaries that can include age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, and religion. This community event, Lights of Hope, helps to provide a moment in time where individuals can stop and experience hope by dedicating this luminary for a loved one. It is a way to give a voice to families and friends who may be experiencing vulnerability in their lives due to cancer.

In 2011 spring and fall semesters, the ECE 225 class, Early Childhood Professional, taught by Judy Brown-DuPaul was asked by Lehigh Valley Children's Centers (LVCC) to create twenty-seven family literacy backpacks. Supplies and materials were funded through a grant that LVCC received from local organizations. Each student created one backpack that included a high quality children's book that was donated through the Cops 'n' Kids program. Each literacy backpack also included related manipulatives such as a stuffed animal, puzzle, puppet, or toy that help to support the topic of the book. The students then designed teacher made games and note cards with five related lessons that a family member could do with a child at home. Some students delivered the literacy backpacks to the children at LVCC centers for use in a rotating family lending library.

Assistant Professor Joseph Davis' students (also in the spring of 2011) completed a spring break community service project at a Salvation Army located in Allentown, PA. Joe's students tutored

the children in the after school program, helped to run the recreation program, and served meals at the center. Joe also offered a workshop for the parents and families. The topic of this workshop focused on using effective parenting skills to support raising children. These skills are useful to help support the children who in turn help to build successful relationships with their peers and staff.

From 2007-2011 as part of Project SET SAIL, a grant that funded early intervention degrees at LCCC, Adjunct Faculty Schelly Engelman and Suzanne Mulhern and Project Director Judy Brown-DuPaul designed a number of service learning projects. Schelly is also employed at Easter Seals Eastern Pennsylvania which holds a yearly "Walk with Me" fundraiser. As a way of connecting the two entities, before the event LCCC students volunteered in the Kid's Corner by painting faces, playing games, and providing puppet shows for the children.

In addition to volunteering their time, the Project SET SAIL students also raised money for two local organizations that support children with special needs and their families. Students contributed their own money as well as raised other funds from outside sources to have a "Penny War" amongst them. Funds raised were spent on therapeutic equipment for the preschool children of Easter Seals. Other donations went to the Miracle League of the Lehigh Valley where more than 40 students in Suzanne Mulhern's field experience class volunteered at 15 baseball games each summer for three summers. These students in Project SET SAIL also volunteered at the Miracle League's annual Halloween Event for children with special needs as well as at other walkathons.

Other service learning opportunities included Casa Guadalupe which is a not-for-profit agency that provides services and programs to a challenging area in center city Allentown. In the fall of 2010, students in the Foundations of Education course spearheaded by Mary E. Braccili, assistant professor, were assigned the role of creating an appropriate environment for the Pa'Lante after school program. They created learning centers for science, math, art, and literacy and included elements of design inspired by the Reggio Approach. Students pooled their resources to acquire monetary and product donations and discounts on purchases at area businesses. Students signed-up during a three-day period for their service learning experience where they came ready to clean and reorganize closets, paint, mop, and set-up centers. Students also helped to entertain the children during the time of renovation. When the project was complete, over 75 LCCC students along with a few of their family and friends, created an educational environment that was reflective of current practice and inspiring to the students of the program.

In 2012, Professor Laura Segatti led her students in an effort to make boxes of homemade cookies, familiar food, and crossword puzzles and other books to be sent to the troops in Afghanistan. Students spent many hours making cookies and notes for the troops to connect LCCC to the armed services. One of our Teacher Education students was stationed with this unit.

There are many ways that LCCC faculty of the education department helps support the community and invite their students to be involved in neighborhood programs. Hopefully this article helps others to see how the LCCC faculty and staff look at their involvement with various community opportunities. How do these experiences help to support a model of success? Each experience looks into the local neighborhoods that serve the LCCC area. Students interact and help to make a difference and see firsthand the value of service learning. They are supported throughout each semester with various ways to make a change by faculty and staff. Mentoring and guiding students helps to build relationships that make a difference and support a chance to give back to their neighborhoods. These differences influence education that goes on beyond the walls of the classroom; it involves commitment and time to develop a foundation to build an educational philosophy of teaching for future professional teachers and paraprofessionals.

LCCC is a place where the students continue to learn while preparing to become educators for all children. LCCC faculty and staff strive along with their students to keep their focus and support idea to help remember the children and families. Perhaps there can be a traditional greeting for the individuals at this community college. When the faculty and students reflect on their community engagement and classes each semester, they can stop and see how their experiences help to “Remember the Children.” Maybe there will be a day when the traditional greeting by the Masai “Kasserian Ingera” and response “All the children are well” can be a mantra that every student will strive to include in their educational philosophy. The vision can be to look ahead to a day when it can be said, “All the children are well” in the LCCC communities and neighborhoods.