

7 Madonna teams build relationships with community organizations

By Ashley Michalski

amichalski@my.madonna.edu

Building and strengthening a community and developing student potential takes vision, dedication, curiosity, and compassion. It's about acknowledging what is, but imaging what could be. Students are an agent of change and because of this, the Ford Motor Co. started the Ford Community Corps program. This program assists college students by allowing them to gather real-world experience by helping non-profit organizations.

The Office of Service-Learning started this program in January. Madonna University is one of seven schools that provide this program to their students. Ford has provided financial assistance to the university, and, in turn, the company wants to help students build permanent relationships with non-profit organizations.

In winter 2013, six teams composed of various majors throughout Madonna came together to make that change and to address pressing social issues. The teams included faculty mentors and students majoring in one area of study. Incorporated majors were education, business, sociology, journalism/communication, dietetics, and social work. Each team was partnered with a non-profit organization to act as a resource, to manage, research, and communicate how they could turn their organization's needs into a reality.

Students built long-term relationships with their partner. They were able to get out of the classroom to experience what professionals do on a daily basis, and accumulate real-world experience.

Community partners included First Step, Partnership for the Arts and Humanities of Canton, Earthworks Urban Farm, Livonia Lions Club and Sweet Dreamzzz, Adult Autistic Spectrum Disorders Program, and Cass Community Social Services.

In the summer, another team was created comprising of criminal justice, business administration, and graphic design majors. Their partners were Urban Neighborhood Initiatives, and Phoenix Academy in Detroit. Their goal was to lead a high school-to-college readiness program for eighth-grade students called Ninth Grade Counts.

At the end, the seven teams created posters to present Sept. 18 in the Franciscan Center. The posters included information about statistics, events, fundraisers, and overall achievements. This event showed not only how a group of college students can make a difference, but how they can take their experience to personally develop not only as students, but as good role models.

“It was wonderful to get an early start with the kids at Phoenix Academy. The children taught us more than what we taught them. Being a role model for them, and seeing them develop as we progressed through our program was wonderful to see,” said Dylan Cooper, Business Administration major.

“Our focus while partnering with Earthworks Urban Farm was to bring about awareness of food injustice and try to help directly and indirectly with the community. We developed and completed a fundraiser for tools they needed. The most needed tool was a drill and we were able to make sure they were able to receive that. We also donated food books to the community library so the community can learn how to grow natural food and eat healthier,” said Michelle Proctor, professor in the Sociology department.

“I think just getting to know and talk with these incredible women at First Step and getting to know a little bit of their story, it says a lot about how strong these women were. Seeing how happy the women and children were when we talked, and laughed with them, it meant a lot to us. I mean, these women were brave enough to leave everything behind and take a stand for a better life especially based on their situation,” said Helen Ozium and Kristen Drabek, Early Childhood Education majors.

The education team also created a special event on Valentine’s Day in order to make the women and their children feel more at ease, and create a stronger bond between them. The students helped them create cards for each other, and they made personalized cupcakes to send the message that the right form of love does exist and there are people willing to help you no matter what.

Overall, more than 780 volunteer hours were committed, 13 projects finished, and more than 12,000 people aided in communities across Michigan. Presently, Madonna University has started its 2013-2014 Ford Community Corps program and hopes to meet and exceed last year’s contributions.