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Introduction to the Health Professions

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My Service-Learning Experience

**IGNITE Pantry**

I volunteered with the IGNITE Pantry from 2:30 PM to 5:00 PM on November 1, 2017 to help distribute food to disadvantaged Monarch students. While volunteering, I helped to count food points for pantry-goers, bag food, and be kind in general. Most of the volunteering session was slow, so we also helped to collect pantry signs around campus and organize food during down-time. At the end of our shift, volunteers also carried stools and chairs down to the IGNITE worship room to help the pastor set up for the next day’s worship session.

IGNITE Pantry is a donation-based food pantry which makes healthy, non-perishable food available to students who are not food-secure. The mission of IGNITE Pantry is to supplement Old Dominion Students and staff who are not food-secure with some food options which can ensure that students are still eating and to offer support for students who may be struggling to receive proper nutrition. Hopefully, all Old Dominion Students and their dependents will have access to proper nutrition and nourishment in the future. Food donations are organized by nutritional group, and make canned fruits and vegetables, proteins, grains, whole meals, and snacks available to ODU students and staff in need. Food distribution is organized on a nutritional basis and portioned per person on a points-system that assesses the need of each student and what the pantry can provide. All ODU students and staff who are living on their own qualify for a base amount of fifty points, but receive an extra twenty-five points for each dependent living under their care.

Within the Old Dominion Community, a common problem is that Old Dominion staff and students are not able to afford food in the quantity or quality that any person needs. This makes earning a degree very difficult to students who are struggling just to meet their basic life needs. These services relate to my intended career field, nursing, because IGNITE Pantry helps students to maintain their general health and remain well-nourished while pursuing a higher education. This allows students to not only maintain their immune system and general health while in school as a preventive measure, but also helps students to secure stable careers later in life through obtaining skilled qualifications. Working in a stable, well-paying career later in life will help my fellow Monarch’s general health by allowing them to afford proper medical care, food, shelter, and anything else necessary that they can obtain with financial capital.

Volunteering with IGNITE has changed my perspective about food pantries and made me more likely to recommend food pantries to those in need. I now see how common it is for people to need help in receiving proper nutrition, and I feel more connected to the people in my community who I want to help. I feel privileged to be allowed to help my community, and I want to continue doing this. I think that being a nurse will be a very fulfilling experience for me because I can not wait to keep helping people in any way possible.

Though I have no prior experience volunteering in a health-related organization, and my only previous health experience is a CPR/AED/First Aid certification, I do feel inspired to start volunteering more regularly with IGNITE Pantry. Any student majoring in public health could also benefit from volunteering with the IGNITE Pantry, because this organization is meant to serve the general health of the entire community. I do not feel that this is a major I will ever take interest in, as I want to work in the medical industry directly. Because I plan to be a midwife, surgeon, or exotic veterinarian, public health can not prepare me for the career paths I wish to pursue.

**IGNITE Tutoring**

I volunteered with IGNITE Tutoring from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM on November 10, 2017 to prepare a Thanksgiving activity for fourth grade children. Because it was Veteran’s Day, school was canceled for the children and we were unable to do a lesson at James Monroe that day. Instead, we prepared a Thanksgiving lesson by cutting out craft materials for turkey bags for the children to assemble the next week. I also volunteered to make an example bag for the children to look at so that they know what they are making. The turkey bags are for the children to interact with different colors, shapes, and practice their fine motor skills in assembling the bags. The children also got to write down what they are thankful for this Thanksgiving and give the bags to someone they love. At the end of the session, we arranged chairs for the next IGNITE worship session for the pastor.

IGNITE Tutoring goes to James Monroe Elementary School every week to help tutor Norfolk city youth and offer extra lesson plans and resources for elementary school students. IGNITE Tutoring is meant to ensure Norfolk city youth have adequate academic resources to excel in their primary education. This is because the IGNITE organization also prioritizes equal opportunity education to all students and works to make academic resources available to children when they are young and in crucial stages of their development.

Norfolk, like any city, has areas stricken by poverty. This and poorly funded public education systems in cities leave some children in our community without all of the resources necessary for them to develop their brains and form a basis of learning to set children up for later, more advanced education. IGNITE Norfolk works to resolve this by offering tutoring in James Monroe Elementary School to help children in our community receive the resources and mental stimulation necessary to develop their learning capacity. This may help to balance out what students aren’t receiving enough of in classes due to a lack of funding, or it may encourage students by adding an extra source of support.

This relates very closely to what I want to do in nursing. Children’s physical, mental, and learning development all directly affect their health. The turkey bags are a good example because the one craft activity that this exposes them to can help a child develop in several ways. The children will work with different colors, and be able to process how other colors and shapes work together to form one larger object. This heightens their creativity and their ability to turn geometric shapes or simple concepts into more abstract, complex designs. Their fine motor skills are also tested in the act of assembling the bags themselves. Children also practice their written communication and linguistic skills when writing to their loved ones about an abstract idea such as “being thankful”. Hopefully, this activity will also help children to have stronger relationships with American traditions and with their family by participating in bonding activities. Before volunteering here, I felt like I did not work well with children. But after volunteering and reflecting on past volunteering experiences, I think that I should be more open minded to volunteering in youth clinics and working with children. I feel that having an impact in a child’s life so young can really help to make a very lasting impact in their lives- hopefully for the better and to better equip them for life.

Although I have no previous health experience, I do have previous experience tutoring and working with kids. I have made an art lesson plan and taught this to fourth graders in conjunction with my high school national art honors society. Helping children realize their creativity and encouraging them to learn and practice brain-developing habits is important for setting up critical thinking skills in children. This could relate to education as a parallel major, as I had to create lesson plans and work with how to best develop a child’s education in one lesson. I would not want to choose this as a parallel major, because I want to work in the medical field and have no desire to ever go into education. Additionally, I do not feel comfortable with committing myself to a career in which I would essentially rely on having the second income of my partner for the rest of my life.

**Greendot Training**

I also signed up for Greendot Bystander Training on November 16 from 4:30 PM to 8:30 PM and on November 17 from 5:00 PM to 7:30 PM with the women’s center. Greendot Bystander training taught attendees how to prevent or stop violence in and before dangerous situations escalate. We discussed how to identify dangerous situations and how to spread preventative measures that avoid violence and sexual assault in our community. Attendees were also shown different methods of how an individual can step into situations that could become dangerous for others and how to keep others safe. One of the most important things was that training also addressed the many reasons that people do not interrupt in violent situations, and I think that being aware of what is holding us back has helped me to be more active in my community and address my own faults.

The Women’s Center has many purposes. In its most basic level, the women’s center is for any medical attention needed for female student’s health on campus. Their mission is to make Old Dominion University a safe, non-violent environment on campus for women and to support feminine health on campus however possible. This has begun to disseminate throughout the Norfolk community and throughout Virginia Beach, but I believe that the Women’s Center has fostered a long-lasting impact which will hopefully continue to establish its roots deeper in our community and spread farther into society.

They offer well-woman visits to females on campus, sexually transmitted disease prevention, and basic health advice. Greendot training is offered by the women’s center to prevent violence on campus. Another lesser known fact is that the women’s center acts as a donation center for women’s hygiene products for disadvantaged students as well. This is important for female students who cannot afford feminine hygiene products despite how unavoidably important these are. Finally, the center works with hospitals and forensic nurses to make and distribute kits for victims of sexual assault across the Norfolk-Virginia Beach area. This provides support for women throughout the community to uplift victims and disadvantaged members of our community from violence or lack of resources. As a nurse, I will work closely with victims of sexual assault. I will have to provide support for them through the difficulty they have just faced and ensure that they feel safe when receiving any testing and medical care they may need. It is also part of my job as a nurse to help educate patients about their sexual health, so I should be familiar with how the Women’s Center operates both as a source of personal knowledge and as a resource for my patients.

After attending Greendot Training, I do feel like the way that I carry myself and act in public will change permanently. I feel mor confident in social settings now because I am more aware of the fact that I can to change a situation for the better. I feel empowered to speak out against violence and sexual assault when I see something I am uncomfortable with.

I have no previous volunteering experience in health-related organizations or in violence prevention, so this was entirely new to me. However, Greendot training shows me how deeply sexual assault and violence have impacted our community. I do feel more inspired to work as an ER nurse or reaffirms my desire to work as a midwife. I want to support our community and prevent violence however I can, but I also want to promote reproductive health and basic sexual health for females.

Another degree program that this relates to could be political science, public health, or sociology. I have considered getting a minor in political science or women’s studies to address sexism and gender inequality in American society. Sexual violence and violence prevention relates to anything that addresses it as a societal problem and can help to research the issue, advocate for legal change, or offer support programs throughout the community. I would not want to choose this as my parallel major because I do not want an office or bureaucratic career, I want to work as a medical professional.