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YNL 290

Service Learning

At the beginning of the semester, when I decided to take this class, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. As a business major, it was an elective I chose to take because I wasn’t quite sure if the business field was right for me. When I received my syllabus on the first day of class, I was so excited to see that I would have the opportunity to work with a nonprofit organization outside of the classroom. At that moment, I knew exactly what group I wanted to do my service hours with; West Kentucky Mentoring Inc., formerly known as Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, an organization I have previously worked with and am very passionate about.

The Big Brothers Big Sisters of Western Kentucky mentoring program began in 1994 through Roger Weis, youth and nonprofit leadership campus director at Murray State University, as a service project for his YNL class of mentoring in the community. Due to unfortunate financial difficulties, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Western Kentucky closed its doors this past July. The closure dissolved the four BBBS branches in Trigg, Christian, Todd and the Murray-Calloway counties, which had existed for 16 years. West Kentucky Mentoring was recently developed here in the Calloway County area to replace BBBS. WKYM is under the same model as BBBS but now revamped and given a different name. WKYM’s mission statement is, “mentoring matters.” It is a mentoring program advised by volunteer and executive director, Mrs. Suzy Crook.

The program had over 100 big and little matches that are being rebuilt today. A mentor, or ‘big,” age 18 years or older, has been defined as a trusted and faithful friend, who listens, supports, and guides young people on a consistent basis over a specific period of time. To a “little,” a child age 5 to 13, it means having a friend who cares about them and listens to them, a role model they can look up to and who will help them achieve their dreams. Children are recognized by the program through a referral process by teachers, agencies and even pastors when they see a need in the child’s life. The parents of the children are then contacted to ask for permission to involve their child in the program, or the parents can even enroll their child themselves. The mentoring process begins with the volunteer filling out an application explaining their previous activities and experience working with children. They also are required to turn in three references and undergo a criminal and social service background check as well as a one hour orientation interview with Mrs. Suzy. All information regarding big and little matches are kept confidential between the mentor and Mrs. Suzy. The volunteer mentors must commit to at least a year of weekly visits which equals about four hours a month.

I chose to do my service hours with West Kentucky Mentoring Inc. because I love being around and helping out little kiddos. During my senior year of high school, I participated in the BBBS program. I was able to mentor the sweetest little boy at Murray Elementary School. Every Tuesday during my teacher’s aide period, I was able to leave school for an hour or so to have lunch with my little. We talked about healthy food choices, troubles he might have been having in class, his homework and then ended lunch with his favorite time of the day, recess outside on the playground. I was able to be there for him in any way that I could. It was so neat to see how excited he was to see me every Tuesday. I felt that he knew I was someone he could always rely on in any situation. I really enjoyed being a positive influence in his life. Not only do I feel like he grew during the year; I grew to learn so much about myself as well.

Throughout my service learning experience this semester I participated in several service projects with my sorority, Alpha Omicron Pi and WKYM, our local philanthropy. In October, we collaborated with Lambda Chi Alpha to host a Halloween party for the kids in the WKYM program. The kids were invited to come out to the Lambda Chi annex dressed up in the costume of their choice for a fun fall festival. Activities included face painting, musical chairs, a mummy race, and pumpkin carving. The perfect fall weather made for an enjoyable afternoon outside. Another service project