

Transformative Learning Through Sports Outreach: A Case Study for Sharing a University Student's Community-Engaged Learning Experience

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Abstract

This article examines Noah, a sport management major and Honors student, who has worked in a supportive housing community for over 2 years. His journey started in a community-engaged learning (CEL) course and grew into an Honors project, focused on developing a sports outreach program to meet local needs. Using reflective practice and a case study approach, Noah's contributions to the community are demonstrated, and the transformative effects of CEL on his personal and professional growth are highlighted. The findings showcase the long-term impact of CEL on students and underscore the value of integrating such projects into academic programs for both student development and community benefit.

Keywords: case study, community-engaged learning, sports outreach, undergraduate



The popularity of community-engaged learning (CEL) in higher education has steadily increased over the past few decades (Berard & Ravelli, 2021). Of the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in North America, 24 have offices dedicated to community engagement or service-learning, such as Creighton University's Office of Global Community-Engaged Learning. Schools without dedicated offices, like Le Moyne College, incorporate service-learning through first-year programs. All members of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities offer multiple CEL courses, and at Gonzaga University, the Center for Community Engagement (CCE) offers courses from 15 departments, including environmental studies, nursing, teacher education, sociology, special education, and sport management.

Although research documents CEL course outcomes and benefits (cf. Astin & Sax, 1998; Holtzman & Menning, 2015; Smith et al., 2024) and examines empirical settings

in fields like sociology (Johnston, 2020) and education (Smith, 2018), less is known about how students apply the knowledge gained from these courses. This article explores the journey of a university student who, after completing a CEL course, used his experiences to develop an Honors project that fully encapsulated the community-engaged experience. This case study posed the following research question: "How do the individual experiences of one undergraduate student in a CEL course extend beyond the classroom?"

The case study is structured by first describing the physical setting in which it took place, followed by an exploration of relevant CEL literature. Next, the methods used to collect the student's CEL experiences are detailed, concluding with a reflection by the CEL instructor on the course and its importance for this type of research.

Noah's experience is uniquely detailed, beginning with the supportive housing community where the case study takes place. The literature review highlights existing

CEL research and the need for more focus on student perspectives. The following sections detail Noah's methodology and his insights from working in this setting, along with commentary from his faculty advisor. Noah reflects on his experience as a third-year undergraduate in a CEL course and how it shaped his decision to continue community engagement for his senior Honors project. Unless indicated otherwise, the thoughts and experiences in this article are Noah's. The article concludes with final reflections from both Noah and his faculty advisor.

Experiential Setting

Gonzaga Family Haven (GFH), part of Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington, is a supportive housing community in Spokane designed to assist families transitioning out of homelessness. GFH provides 74 apartment units and communal spaces, offering residents access to social services, job training, educational support, and counseling. This stable environment fosters community engagement and empowerment.

The mission of Catholic Charities—"Feed the Hungry, Heal the Hurting, Welcome the Stranger"—guides GFH's approach. Peggy Haun-McEwan, GFH's director of community, highlights that stable housing is essential for health and well-being. Homelessness is a health crisis, with individuals facing higher rates of illness and a life expectancy 12 years shorter than the general U.S. population (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2019). GFH provides secure housing and services to break this cycle, recognizing that housing is health care (P. Haun-McEwan, personal communication, September 5, 2024).

GFH's goals include offering permanent housing, supporting children's academic success, improving residents' wellness and stability, breaking intergenerational poverty, and transforming lives. Partnering with organizations like Gonzaga University, GFH provides youth mentoring, legal clinics, finance workshops, mental health counseling, and sports outreach (P. Haun-McEwan, personal communication, September 5, 2024).

Literature Review

CEL, which integrates hands-on community involvement into coursework, is rooted in the civic missions of universities. This pedagogical approach traces back to the

19th century, with institutions like Oberlin and Antioch Colleges pioneering community involvement in education (Stanton et al., 1999). The Morrill Act of 1862 further expanded CEL through land-grant universities, which focused on practical education and community support, particularly in fields like agriculture and public service (Peters et al., 2005). Influenced by educators like John Dewey, who emphasized experiential learning, CEL evolved in the 20th century, with the term "service-learning" coined in 1969 by Robert Sigmon and William Ramsey (Stanton et al., 1999). By the 1980s and 1990s, service-learning became institutionalized, and by the late 1990s, it was widely integrated into university curricula (Jacoby, 2014).

CEL has continued to evolve throughout higher education, with increasing emphasis on topics such as equity (Wallerstein et al., 2020) and sustainability (Deale, 2009; Soyer et al., 2023) in community partnerships. Traditionally, CEL courses have been a natural fit in arts and sciences disciplines like sociology and philosophy. However, the expansion of CEL courses has reached diverse academic fields, including accounting and finance (Poston & Smith, 2015), engineering (Goggins & Hajdukiewicz, 2022), geology (Chaumba & Chaumba, 2022), and sport management (Smith, 2018; Smith et al., 2024).

Much of the CEL literature noted above provides understanding and introspection on instructors' and students' experiences in the classroom or out in the community. For example, Goggins and Hajdukiewicz (2022) examined over 300 community-engaged engineering projects, drawing on their 12 years of experience leading these initiatives within a community-based inquiry framework. This engaging and collaborative framework incorporates "teacher's presence, cognitive presence, and social presence to ensure that students discover, discuss and reflect upon their new learning" (Goggins & Hajdukiewicz, 2022, p. 4). With a holistic approach to incorporating CEL into the engineering program they described, Goggins and Hajdukiewicz found that students were much more motivated and encouraged when they could collaborate with the instructor and community members, witnessing the positive impact of their efforts in making a meaningful contribution to the community.

Informing university students about CEL

can take many forms, whether through fieldwork or conceptual in nature. Soyer et al. (2023) employed a conceptual approach to introduce their students to a CEL topic of sustainability in a university course titled *Methods of Social Research*. Students received the necessary research methods curriculum followed by a series of guest speakers from the community offering multiple levels of sustainability challenges. Twenty-six students then chose one of six sustainability research projects (e.g., *Parental Perceptions of Air Quality*, *Student Perceptions of Renewable Energy*). Several deliverables were required of the students, including the submission of a research proposal, a grant application that would aid in the research for the given sustainability topic, a written paper, and a class presentation of the paper. The overarching lesson of CEL was integrated as the foundation of each project. Although the project the students completed was a simulation, and no hands-on work in the community came of it during the semester, an analysis of student experiential responses in the course found that “using CEL to teach about sustainability fostered a better understanding of the sustainability issues . . . students also displayed their ability to develop solutions based on these problems” (Soyer et al., 2023, p. 156).

Understanding the impact of CEL for university students in a classroom setting is a larger theme of much of the existing literature. Research from individual classes from authors such as Soyer et al. (2023) and CEL sustainability projects with students over several years (Goggins & Hajdukiewicz, 2022) represent two ways CEL research is evident. Smith et al. (2024) utilized a word cloud course assessment to understand if CEL course objectives were being met. Students in the course were asked to provide a final written reflection representing their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual experiences based on their hands-on CEL sports outreach coursework. The research found that not only were course outcomes being met, but the personal impact of the CEL course was evident in participants' reflections, such as this one:

I found myself enjoying the work I did but looking for a greater sense of purpose. I wanted to do something that positively affected people in the community. This course validated the importance of providing

social contributions in the community and that this can be done through sport. This class helped me confirm that I want to work in community relations or another service-focused job, which eased a lot of uncertainty and worry in my life. (Smith et al., 2024, p. 26)

As opportunities for college students to engage in CEL courses continue to expand, and as research on CEL experiences grows, limited research has explored the specific, individualized experiences of students participating in these courses. Berard and Ravelli (2021) used a fourth-year sociology course semester-long project and a reflective journal method for their students to engage and reflect in CEL. These authors, along with other members of the research team, conducted an in-depth analysis of these journals using a three-phase thematic analysis to explore students' firsthand experiences in applying sociological skills within community settings. The researchers found three main themes from student journal entries, (a) the undergraduate experience, (b) imposter syndrome and positionality, and (c) the power of community. Regarding the undergraduate experience, students expressed their frustrations that this CEL course was available only as an upper level course. Previous courses had asked them to learn sociological theories, methodologies, and statistics, but they had never been asked to apply them until the CEL course. This feeling led directly to the imposter syndrome and positionality theme. Students continued to comment on their lack of preparedness, skills, and abilities in working in the community. Finally, the power of community theme identified that students had an overwhelming feeling and deeper appreciation for their work, individually and collectively, in their community.

Previous research on CEL has provided valuable insights through both quantitative and qualitative analyses, uncovering key themes and significantly enhancing our understanding of CEL as an educational practice. However, the distinct dimensions of individual student engagement can become obscured when generalized into broader thematic frameworks, even in a course with 20 students. Focusing on one student's involvement offers a deeper, more nuanced perspective, revealing subtle aspects of learning and transformation that broader studies may overlook. This ap-

proach enriches the existing CEL literature and fosters a comprehensive understanding of how students' experiences are shaped by CEL courses.

By examining the intricacies of an individual's journey, this research fills gaps in current scholarship, providing fresh insights into the personal and contextual factors that influence student engagement. It also enhances our ability to design more inclusive and responsive CEL programs that cater to diverse student needs and experiences, strengthening the effectiveness and reach of CEL across academia.

The ongoing advancement of CEL practices and research is both important and timely. Even as Berard and Ravelli (2021) explored their students' voices, they acknowledged a gap in the literature focusing on the individual experiences of CEL students. The present research addresses that gap by examining one student's CEL experience and its impact beyond the classroom through a case study approach.

Methods

Qualitative research focuses on discovering meaning in diverse experiences, making it suited for exploring the nuances of individual engagement. This case study employed a narrative approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to understand the meaning-making processes in CEL. Specifically, it uses a case study method to investigate an undergraduate student's experiences in a CEL course during his third year and how those experiences informed his Honors project at the same location in his fourth year. Building on the work of Berard and Ravelli (2021), this research addresses gaps in the literature regarding college student experiences in CEL courses.

Case study research examines one or more cases to investigate issues within predetermined boundaries over time using detailed data collection methods (Creswell, 2016). Merriam (1998) reiterated, "The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent" (p. 29). Similarly, Yin (2009) emphasized exploring the lesser known through the case study research method: "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined" (p. 18).

This case study takes an exploratory approach. Yin (2009) suggested this approach when assessing situations (i.e., life experiences) without a clear set of results. Priya (2021) expanded on Yin's methodology by stating exploratory case study research aims to "study a phenomenon with the intention of exploring or identifying fresh research questions which can be used in subsequent studies" (p. 96).

The case study approach I took when working at GFH involved a comprehensive research phase conducted during the summer before implementation. The overall aim of this case study was to bridge the gap in research related to student experiences in a CEL setting. Therefore, the study addressed this research question: "How do the individual experiences of one undergraduate student in a CEL course extend beyond the classroom?"

Working with my faculty advisor, we developed a research plan rooted in scholarly articles and books, forming the program's framework. An annotated bibliography captured critical learning outcomes and their relevance to the sports outreach CEL course and future projects.

My initial reading highlighted leadership theories and management perspectives, particularly the need for a trauma-informed approach when working with children affected by homelessness. This case study centered on the course EDPE 307 Foundations in Sports Outreach, exploring its origins, managerial strategies, and evaluation methods. Training and leadership development provided by the CCE shaped programming policies and procedures. Continuous research, meetings, and training ensured the program's development remained aligned with the expectations of CCE and GFH.

Process

After completing the Foundations in Sports Outreach course and conducting months of investigation and literature review related to sports outreach, community engagement, and service-learning, I officially began leading the sports outreach program at GFH during the fall semester of my senior year. In this role, I served as the student leader under the direct supervision of on-site CCE staff. Through a case study procedure, I explore the program's dynamic nature, documenting how adjustments were made

in response to participant needs and evolving knowledge.

Data Collection

For this case study, I employed a range of qualitative techniques that enabled deep, reflective engagement with my experiences at GFH. One of the primary methods was keeping a detailed personal journal throughout the program. This journal allowed me to capture daily observations, emotions, challenges, and successes, offering a space for ongoing self-reflection. Journaling followed each session, and it played a significant role in tracking my personal growth and leadership development, as well as my evolving understanding of trauma-informed practices. The end product was a reflective log, which provided rich, qualitative data that aligned with the case study approach by offering insights into my role within the program and its impact on participants.

In addition, I made extensive use of field notes to document real-time insights during program activities. These notes were taken during or immediately after each session to capture specific interactions, environmental factors, and spontaneous reflections that might otherwise have been overlooked. The immediacy of this method ensured that I could record details accurately, which contributed to a more authentic understanding of the dynamics at play. These field notes served an essential function in the case study by offering a grounded, observational layer to the analysis of program implementation and effectiveness.

Finally, I engaged in informal yet reflective conversations with my supervisors and volunteers to gain a wider perspective on the program's impact. These discussions varied in length, ranging from brief exchanges to more in-depth talks, averaging around 15–30 minutes. Conversations were conducted with a diverse group, including volunteers and staff, in order to understand multiple viewpoints and gather a holistic picture of the program's outcomes. The inclusion of these conversations in the case study provided a diverse set of data points, enriching my analysis of the program's effectiveness and impact on both participants and facilitators.

This article discusses how I adapted activities based on participant behaviors and refined program policies using insights from

sports outreach management literature. These adjustments highlight the significance of continuous research, training, and collaboration with community partners, which are essential for ensuring the success, ethicality, and sustainability of the sports outreach program.

I employed a case study approach to examine the operations and outcomes of the sports outreach program in depth. By systematically collecting observational data and field notes during each session, I closely monitored participants' behavior and their responses to various activities. This real-time analysis uncovered key patterns in group dynamics and individual development, informing my adjustments to activities to better meet participants' needs. These insights also led to important refinements in program policies, ensuring that the activities fostered personal growth, social cohesion, and inclusivity.

Collaboration with community partners was also pivotal to the program's success. Engaging with stakeholders from GFH, CCE, and sports outreach program volunteers allowed me to incorporate diverse feedback, ultimately strengthening the program's ethical framework and ensuring its long-term sustainability. This adaptive and holistic approach highlights the importance of continuous research, reflective practice, and collaboration in managing a successful, ethical, and enduring sports outreach initiative. By adopting this methodology, the program became more attuned to the participants' needs while aligning more closely with established best practices in the field.

Reflections From Noah's Faculty Advisor

Noah's experiences reflect a broader effort rooted in sports outreach, also known as sports ministry. This concept traces back to the 1700s with the emergence of "Muscular Christianity" (Mathisen, 1990; Smith, 2018). Sports outreach takes many forms (cf. Coakley, 2020; Connor, 2003). Smith (2018) described its essence as "combining faith communities with character-building aspects through sport participation . . . to produce confident youth and adults who will contribute to their communities" (p. 276). The goal is to foster a positive relationship with God through biblical and sportsman-ship foundations.

I have been involved in sports outreach since 2012 through research, board mem-

bership, and developing the university course EDPE 307 Foundations in Sports Outreach. This course, after peer review, became CEL-designated and focused on “providing safe sporting opportunities for youth, embodying Catholic values of Mind, Body, and Spirit” (Smith, 2023). It helps students understand and practice sports outreach.

Noah, one of my students in EDPE 307, showed a passion for working with underserved youth. His journey from taking the CEL course to pursuing his Honors project at GFH demonstrates his growth and commitment to outreach. It’s always encouraging to see students apply their learning in real-world settings, as Noah did.

Noah’s Inspiration

When my family moved from the suburbs of Minneapolis, Minnesota, to a rural town, my mother insisted that my sister and I join a sport or extracurricular activity to help us adjust. I loved watching the Minnesota Vikings, so I asked to join the local youth football league. However, my mother’s initial reaction was fear—not because of the injury risk, but due to the financial strain it would place on our single-parent household. The cost of equipment made football seem nearly impossible for us. To lower expenses, my mother bought preowned gear and sought financial assistance from the local community education center. Just as she was considering asking me to choose a more affordable sport, I received a scholarship based on our family’s financial status, allowing me to play football for 9 years. This experience inspired my desire to give back later in life.

Before moving to attend my first year at university, I contacted a former football coach for advice on how to become involved within a new community when relocating across the country. My coach shared how his own similar experience of relocating as an adult was aided by his decision to become a volunteer youth football coach. In his experience, he benefited from meeting other people within the local community who were interested in helping youth populations experience the positive aspects of youth sports participation. Seeing the similarities to my situation and personal interest in making youth sports more accessible for all children, I began searching for volunteering opportunities once I arrived on campus as a university student.

In my first weeks of university, I volunteered with two separate organizations in the area, one that focused on serving individuals who experienced homelessness and the other an organization that provided sporting opportunities for physically disabled individuals. These experiences highlighted the benefits of connecting with the local community through volunteering.

As I evolved as a university student, factors such as location, transportation, and schedule became important. My experiences at both organizations were tremendous, helping me grow personally and professionally. I wanted to make a deeper impact within my community that would last beyond my time at university. So, aware of my continued interest in volunteering with youth sports, I decided to search for other service opportunities within my community.

As I was preparing my course schedule as a third-year university student, I received an email regarding a new course, EDPE 307 Foundations in Sports Outreach. The course was structured using university core integration of social justice and writing enrichment as well as offering a CEL designation within a sports outreach setting. The learning opportunities of this course would fill gaps from my previous volunteering experiences in an educational and professional capacity, all while allowing me to inspire youth populations to engage in sports and recreational activities.

The challenges I face as a liberal arts student, particularly with written reflection, stem from the emphasis on critical thinking, self-awareness, and integrating diverse perspectives. I’m not just expected to grasp the material but also to reflect deeply on my learning process, articulating my insights, challenges, and growth. This process requires both introspection and the clear expression of complex ideas, which demands ongoing practice as I continually evaluate academic content and personal experiences. These reflective exercises fostered personal and academic growth, forming the foundation for my multidisciplinary Honors senior project at Gonzaga University. Built on research into youth sports accessibility, the project evolved into a biweekly sports outreach program at GFH, a rehousing initiative in Spokane, Washington. This initiative became a key part of my personal and academic journey, intersecting with my volunteer work, leadership, and sports involvement. This article highlights the

ethnographic foundation of the EDPE 307 Foundations in Sports Outreach course, which shaped my project to lead a sports outreach program for children impacted by homelessness and housing insecurity. As the student leader of the sports outreach program, I collaborated with the CCE to establish a foundation for sustainable programming. Responsibilities included creating activity outlines, weekly thematic planning, volunteer coordination, and direct leadership during program activities. The structure aimed at fostering a consistent and wholesome experience, encompassing healthy snacks, warm-ups, main physical activities, and reflections. Continuous engagement with participants and volunteers sought to empower program beneficiaries, emphasizing the importance of their feedback in shaping future activities.

The case study underpinning of the project echoes the principles of the Honors program as the author reflects on the mission of fostering an intellectual environment, nurturing students for lives of meaning, service, and leadership. The project aligns with the Honors program's values by providing innovative and immersive educational experiences, enhancing leadership skills, and embodying the commitment to service. The requirement for community service within the Honors program is mirrored in the project's primary objective of serving the local community at GFH.

Results

EDPE 307 Foundations in Sports Outreach Reflections

The process of implementing and leading the sports outreach program at GFH proved to be a transformative and enriching experience, characterized by a series of challenges, personal and professional growth, and the development of meaningful connections. The initial phases of this course underscored the foundational principles of leadership and adaptability, drawing on the theoretical frameworks presented in *Sports Ministry That Wins* (Smith & English, 2018) and their practical application within the facility.

Becoming acutely aware of the potential impact on the children and the broader community at GFH instilled in me a deep sense of responsibility and motivation. Although I initially felt uncertain and apprehensive, the early stages of the semester reassured me that meaningful change was possible in

the lives of these children. Transitioning to on-site work came with both expected and unexpected challenges, requiring me to be adaptable. The fluctuating number of participants and unpredictable weather conditions forced me to adjust plans, underscoring the importance of being responsive to the evolving nature of the program.

Reflecting on this transition revealed significant personal growth, as I navigated challenges and witnessed the profound impact of engaging with the GFH community. Overcoming my fears about using public transportation added another layer to this growth, challenging preconceived notions and broadening my perspective. These experiences not only pushed me out of my comfort zone but also deepened my commitment to the program and the community.

I chose to incorporate insights from my course textbook (Smith & English, 2018) that emphasized the connection between ministry, evangelism, and the Christian obligation to serve others. The principles of love, joy, and inclusivity provided valuable guidance for maintaining a positive and impactful sports ministry program. Further, Burke-Harris's (2014) TED Talk on adverse childhood experiences brought a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the children at GFH. Her insights on creating a safe and supportive environment resonated with the need to prioritize the well-being of participants, considering their unique backgrounds.

The journey, marked by challenges and successes, highlights the significance of continuous self-improvement and empathy in community engagement. The sports outreach program at GFH was not just a series of physical and recreational activities; it became a transformative platform for both my personal growth and the collective development of everyone involved. Through my experiences, I saw how the program fostered not only physical well-being but also emotional and social growth among the children. It provided a structured yet flexible environment where participants could push their limits, build confidence, and develop resilience through sports and play.

The lessons I learned during my time in the EDPE 307 CEL course went beyond the immediate context of the course, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of community engagement and the importance of

intentional, compassionate leadership. The connections I forged with the participants were deep and meaningful, built on mutual respect and a shared commitment to growth. These relationships became a source of support and encouragement, reinforcing my belief that true community engagement requires not just participation, but a genuine investment in the well-being of others.

The positive impact I witnessed in the lives of the participants served as a solid foundation for my future endeavors in community outreach. The success of this program has shown me the importance of designing activities that resonate with the needs and aspirations of the participants. As I move forward, the principles and practices that guided me at GFH will continue to shape and inspire my future initiatives, ensuring that the legacy of growth, connection, and positive change endures in the community.

Honors Project Reflections

The program, shaped by the intersection of personal experience and academic pursuits, draws inspiration from my own financial challenges faced during my childhood when I participated in youth sports. Recognizing the privilege associated with participation in youth sports, my Honors project aimed to bridge gaps for children facing financial constraints. It explored the missed opportunities for physical development, holistic maturation, and relationship building that arise from the unmet need for sports participation. Furthermore, the project delves into the influence of academic disciplines, specifically religious studies and sport management, in shaping its interdisciplinary approach. The connection between personal faith, leadership, and service is explored, alongside the impact of sport management education on program development.

The beginning of the semester was marked by a mix of excitement and apprehension, as the responsibility of being the student leader came with heightened expectations and pressure. My anxiety increased with the abrupt departure of three scheduled volunteers just before the start of the program, but I quickly learned the importance of adaptability. This situation taught me to focus on the positive—namely, the willingness of new volunteers to step up and help.

In the initial stages of the program, I faced a unique set of challenges, ranging from

unexpected encounters during bus rides to managing larger-than-anticipated groups. One memorable experience involved a child expressing agitation over a traumatic event, which served as a reminder of the diverse backgrounds of the participants and underscored the necessity for trauma-informed programming. As the semester progressed, I experienced both successes and setbacks. Positive moments, such as participants enjoying the scheduled activities and volunteers rising to the occasion, were balanced by difficulties. At one point, unstructured play led to feelings of failure, revealing my vulnerabilities and highlighting the need for self-reflection.

A turning point occurred during conversations with my supervisors from the CCE, whose insights were invaluable in addressing miscommunications and challenges with participants. By embracing their feedback, I focused on improving communication with volunteers and implementing strategies to enhance the program's effectiveness. Despite personal health challenges, I made progress, evident in the participants' improvement in soccer drills and the success of the "Shark Tank" game, both of which demonstrated the program's positive impact. However, I also had to address negative comments, underscoring the ongoing learning curve in managing group dynamics.

A significant challenge arose when a participant's disruptive behavior required tough decisions, including the emotional task of sending the participant home. Seeking advice from my supervisors and developing strategies for future interactions became essential for my growth as a leader. As the program continued, I gained momentum, achieving several successful sessions that received positive feedback from academic tutors and participants alike. These successes were a testament to collective growth—not just in the effectiveness of the programming but also in the relationships formed between volunteers and participants. Fostering collaboration, teamwork, and opportunities for self-expression became key priorities, exemplified by activities like Lego tower-building, which highlighted the program's positive environment.

As the semester drew to a close, I focused on ensuring proper closure and reflection. Clearly communicating changes in volunteer staff to the participants became a crucial skill. Activities like making friendship bracelets and engaging in creative

projects provided a meaningful conclusion to the semester. Reflecting on this journey, I recognize that the sports outreach program has been transformative. The challenges, setbacks, and successes have collectively shaped my understanding of leadership, adaptability, and the profound impact that sports and organized activities can have on individuals in need.

After completing the program, I felt immense gratitude for the support from the CCE, GFH staff, and the volunteers who contributed to its success. This experience has deepened my commitment to community engagement and reinforced the importance of resilience, empathy, and continuous self-improvement in leadership roles. As I anticipate the next steps in this journey, I carry forward the lessons learned and the connections forged. The sports outreach program at GFH has been more than a series of activities; it has served as a platform for growth, learning, and making a positive impact on the lives of these children.

Conclusion

Reflecting on my time at GFH, I recognized a transformative journey that shaped my personal and professional growth. Initially, I faced anxiety and uncertainty, but these challenges taught me key lessons. One important takeaway was the need for adaptability and flexibility in dynamic envi-

ronments. Managing fluctuating participant numbers and unforeseen challenges, like weather, required me to adjust plans quickly. Additionally, the experience underscored the necessity of trauma-informed programming, emphasizing empathy when working with children from diverse backgrounds.

Compassionate leadership emerged as another vital lesson. The relationships I built with participants were rooted in mutual respect and investment in their well-being, fostering a positive atmosphere essential to the program's success. Self-reflection and guidance from supervisors were crucial in addressing challenges like disruptive behavior.

This case study offers insights into community engagement, leadership, and trauma-informed care. It highlights how sports and organized activities serve as tools for social and emotional development, especially for children from challenging backgrounds. The lessons learned can benefit educators and organizations by providing strategies for adaptability and meaningful connections. Further exploration of undergraduate experiences in CEL settings is essential to develop a framework for fostering effective, empathetic leaders who can make a lasting difference in their communities.



About the Authors

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