

LOCAL NONPROFITS *get* HELP

*Service learning pays
off—for everyone*

WHEN IT COMES TIME FOR THE CAPSTONE PROJECT IN HIS CLASS, Shaun Knight, senior instructor and associate director of online education in Penn State’s College of Information Sciences and Technology, usually directs his students’ focus toward building Web sites for businesses. Last year, Knight instead contacted the Centre County United Way to see what nonprofits might be interested in their help.

“It was a good way to give back to the community that has raised these students as young adults for the past four to five years,” said Knight.

Students ended up working with nonprofits such as CentrePeace, Centre Volunteers in Medicine and Smart Start Centre County.

For example, Eileen Wise, executive director of Smart Start, which prepares young children for school, needed help tracking the organization’s funds and events. Six IST seniors performed a needs-assessment with the organization, then designed and developed a project-management Web site.

“When we saw [it] we were delighted with the clean, spare and inviting visual design,” said Wise. The Web site frees time for Wise and others to focus on administering programs for families instead of administrative details.

PR Success

Dr. Denise Bortree, Penn State assistant professor of communications, works with her students to create public relations campaigns for local chapters of nonprofits—including Big Brothers Big Sisters, the youth mentoring organization, and Special Olympics.

Students who worked with Big Brothers Big Sisters were charged with increasing program awareness in surrounding areas. They organized the “One Day, Big Difference” event at Port Matilda Elementary School, bringing together more than 40 current and potential participants; led focus groups; and



P.J. Waterhofer

Penn Staters run a Big Brothers Big Sisters awareness event.

ran an announcement through the Penn State Faculty/Staff Newswire, resulting in several direct inquiries.

Jodi Morelli, Big Brothers Big Sisters program coordinator, said, “We’re very fortunate because the University provides a huge resource for us in recruitment opportunities.”

Bortree added, “The class becomes both community outreach and service learning,” guiding students through a PR campaign process—from identifying the needs of a group, to strategizing and planning, to carrying out the campaign.

Thanks to another group in Bortree’s class, more than 200 new potential volunteers signed up for Special Olympics. Their efforts included stories placed in the Centre Daily Times and The Daily Collegian.

Heather Fetterman, a student participant, said, “Instead of simply receiving a classroom grade for our efforts, we were giving back to an outstanding organization and, ultimately, helping other people.”

PHILADELPHIA'S DISADVANTAGED

Poor neighborhoods and broken families may have shaped these young adults—but with literacy training they can improve their lives

IN NORTH PHILADELPHIA, Penn State Abington students are participating in a program in which they work one-on-one with high school dropouts who have basic literacy issues.

“It isn’t easy,” said Lisa Morris, Penn State Abington senior instructor in administration of justice, who coordinates the program. “The Abington students are dealing with a challenging population—mostly from poor neighborhoods, broken families and weak school systems. They have responsibility and maturity issues, too.”

Part of the Pennsylvania Literacy Corps (PALC)—a partnership between higher education institutions and adult basic literacy agencies statewide—the program is designed to train college students to help young adults earn their

GEDs so that they can go on to get jobs, and possibly even a college education. The Literacy Corps has been in existence for about a decade and is managed at Penn State by Dr. Sheila Sherow at the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy.

Morris has been coordinating the program with Penn State Abington students for about four years—training her students to be tutors, who then work with the clients for more than 40 total hours during the semester. The tutors also take the clients on a tour of Penn State Abington’s campus.

Reduce Dropout Rate

Morris, who examines the status of education among young adults and how education helps them succeed

in the future, estimates that if the national high school dropout rate was reduced by 50 percent, it would save the economy \$45 billion annually. She said that high school dropouts are more than three times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested in their lifetime. Nearly half of all Philadelphia public school students drop out of high school and do not graduate.

Maria Thuy, director of the Philadelphia E3 Center (stands for Empowerment, Education and Employment), where Penn State Abington students go to work with the clients, said that one-on-one tutoring is very important.

“Many of these young adults are very low-level. They do not do well in a classroom setting because they are self-conscious.” Thuy added that the tour of the campus is “eye-opening. These young adults are not familiar with a college environment.”

Morris says that in the end everyone benefits. “The clients go on to get their GED, and student tutors gain real-world, transferable life skills. It’s a positive outcome all around.”



Student tutors and clients

Courtesy of Lisa Morris