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Climate Action Project (CAP)

Stone Soup Society

Stone Soup Society began in a very unconventional way. It started with having an emergency foster care placement of my foster daughter's siblings who were 13 and 17 with no food literacy or cooking education that grew into my Climate Action Project. The basic goals of my CAP are to provide education resources to at-risk youth to empower them to understand produce picking, identify FLOSN foods, learn cooking basics, utilize food repurposing, and eliminating food waste.

While the goals have remained the same, the audience has shifted to the middle school students rather than high school students. This came as I encountered the challenge of locating and obtaining a place to run a workshop. My initial contact that has seemed very promising as we had been working on solidifying a date notified me three months into the project that their classes were not going to have the time or space to have the workshop. While this was discouraging, I knew that this could not be the end of my in-person program. I decided to instead reach out to a school located in the inner city of Peoria. This school's zip code is one of the 100 poorest in the nation. This area has extremely high unemployment rates, high teen pregnancy rates, and high crime rates. South Side Christian Academy exists in this area and is a K-8 school adds a grade each year of its existence. I reached out to one of the middle school teachers and was warmly welcomed to work with their boy's club which is comprised of 7th and 8th grade boys. This group of ten students and two sponsors have welcomed me as one of their monthly segments, and we will continue to partner through the foreseeable future. If the first school I reached out to accepted, I would not have this opportunity to work with these young men to gain valuable life-long skills.

Personally, the past five months have been riddled with challenging life experiences. My father was diagnosed with aggressive prostate cancer and has undergone surgery and radiation starting in November and has continued an immunotherapy that will take two years to complete. My family also lost my grandpa in January which took an emotional toll on us all. Despite these challenges, I have been able to find light in my project. Finding a communal purpose and realizing you are creating a ripple effect of change has been a blessing as I walk through this season. Seeing the impact and the potential that my project has and helping others brings light to the darkness.

When assessing the timeline and process for my CAP, I have found that there have been certain areas of my project that has grown more than I anticipated. I launched the online portion of my project on Instagram in February, releasing 3-4 videos each week. In March, I released 2-3 videos a week to maintain balance while continuing to work on my in-person program. I have found that my online platform has provided many viewers with valuable FLOSN eating tips and cooking strategies. The videos have ranged from around 500 views up to 5500 views per video. I have had peers reach out providing feedback that this is the type of kitchen and cooking advice that they have been looking for but had not found. They have been desiring to eat cleaner and cook more but the aspects of picking out produce and knowing how to prepare them had them hesitate and falling back into old habits. The potential of the online portion of my CAP is unlimited, and I intend to continue creating content to educate, encourage, and empower others.

Through this online platform, I have also been able to make new contacts. This summer I am excited to be presenting my program at Royal Family Kids Camp. This camp is for foster

children in the Peoria area to go to an overnight camp. I will be presenting my lessons to these campers and could not be more excited about it. Through social media, I have also formed a connect with a local, organic farm in Congerville, Illinois, called Henry's Farm that will be supplying the FLOSN produce for all the events occurring from May through November through their Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. This type of farm is hard to find in our area and being able to work with Henry's Farm will truly enrich the program. The CSA will provide FLOSN produce to be utilized throughout my in-person programs. Through these collaborations, I have been able to retain and complete to my five-month timeline with minimal change. Some details have been molded, and others have been expanded based on circumstances and feedback which is necessary for any starting organization.

Moving to the community impact and outcomes of my project, I would be excited to say that the digital platform has had a much greater impact than I anticipated. My Instagram profile has gotten over 11,000 views reaching over 6,500 accounts on Instagram (a 14,062% increase) with only having 102 followers, making a 92% increase in 2 months. This growth has been unexpected and exciting as I feel that this platform is maintainable and buildable. My desire is to continue the online presence in the same manner and continue to grow and educate others in the same way than I am growing and educating my in-person sessions. I have an open invitation to continue my workshops at South Side Christian Academy which will result in 10 meetings per school year with FLOSN tailored workshops and the expectation of growth in the program as more students join. I also see growth with the ability to work with local camps like Royal Family Kids Camp. There are many day camps that occur in my area that are always looking for volunteers. Upon completing the work with Royal Family Kids Camp, I hope to create a program for these types of camps that can be used in a week type format. I have also created a rough draft of a workbook that will be given to any individual that goes through the workshops (images are attached in another PDF). This book has a variety of topic that are covered in the workshop and converted to a book to give to students as they work through and finish the course. The topics range from produce picking to the importance of eating organic foods to egg substitutes to reducing food waste to breaking down a recipe. The desire is to have the workshops be the starting point that gives the students enough scaffolding to spread their wings and try shopping, cooking, and repurposing foods on their own.

When thinking through the key learning effects, I would first start with the fact that any lasting organization runs a marathon and not a sprint. Being faced with adversity and continue the project has taught me resilience and endurance. Flexibility is also key with any project. I also believe that working with a team can accomplish more than one individual can. I am thankful for my mentor and ambassador for being great sounding boards and for the community that I have been able to build through my social media platform. It truly takes a village.

All in all, I am most proud of seeing both the digital and in-person portions of my program take flight in ways that I never imaged they could. From individuals who are learning feeling empowered to cook and provide for themselves in the digital platform to the children learning that they can like vegetable being cooked different ways and learning how to prepare their own food, I can see the ripple effects that my small project that started in my kitchen with my foster daughter's siblings gaining cooking skills has transformed into a network of individuals, schools, camps, and farms working together to create a healthy, sustainable future in the food realm.