

Culminating Projects Summary - Class of 2007

Trisha Lam and Erin Callahan: School House Station - Choreographed and taught a dance class for at-risk teens at a Mercy Housing California affordable housing development for families. The teens went on to perform and win a competition for the Daly City Parks and Recreation Department.

Culminating Projects Summary - Class of 2008

Alison Hornback, Ronnie Granucci and Eleni Sagredos: Institute on Aging – Offered a cooking class, and created a cookbook and documentary on recipes and memories of food, involving a dozen senior citizens.

Marielle Bautista: Veterans Hospital Project – After regular visiting and involvement in art projects, launched an interview project with 6 veterans, focusing on their life stories, and the transmission of wisdom to youth today. Shared their stories with the Mercy student body at an assembly.

Ashley Oropeza: Mercy Terrace – Created a Friday-afternoon youth group, starting with 6 and growing to 15 pre-teens by the end of the summer. Offered arts and crafts, games and some volleyball, with an emphasis on building self-esteem and community.

Natalie Wolfrom and Nicole Tavrovsky: Koret Family House – Organized a “cancer awareness campaign” at Mercy, beginning with an assembly, and culminating in a “Hair For Care” event to benefit Koret Family House, raising \$1034. Professional hairdressers volunteered their services among 35 students and faculty members who paid \$20 to get their hair cut. Several students cut 6+ inches of hair, and made donations to “Locks of Love.”

Culminating Projects Summary - Class of 2009

Marta Pold: Marta brought beauty, health and spirit to elderly people at Alma Via Senior Center by teaching “Hips Don’t Age,” a belly-dancing class to the senior citizen residents.

“Dancing is something that lets people express themselves and the light of their souls. It does not matter how old the body is because souls are eternal and will always stay. Belly dancing lets the women enjoy the beauty within them. What I did makes me feel like the sun because my dance classes were like a reminder for the women that the beauty they have inside them is, and always will be, shining within them; it also energized them like the sun by warming their bodies and making their blood pump... There is nothing better than sharing something that we are good at with others.”

Maya Nieto: Prompted by challenges raised in her junior year “Women’s Literature” class, Maya offered a summer-long course to 12- and 13- year old boys and girls on hidden messages in the media. She focused especially on the treatment of women, consumerism, and violence. She wanted her Aim-High students to learn “how to interpret what the media shows them and the need to look beyond the surface, to dig deeper for the true meanings behind the images.”

“The image that I would use to symbolize my experience is the removal of blinders so that we are finally able to see the full picture. I chose this symbol because I feel that often times people live in this world choosing to be oblivious to things instead of working to figure them out... So many people don’t think this is an issue until their eyes are opened to it.”

Katey Simons: Combining her gift of dance with her desire to make a difference in children's lives, Katey taught a movement and dance class to low-income children at Columbia Park Apartments (an affordable housing development for families created by Mercy Housing.)

"The symbol I could use to describe this experience is a spotlight on a stage. This project gave kids a chance to try something that they might enjoy and that they could 'shine' in... At times, I felt like a spotlight myself because I taught the children something that could open up inside of their minds, and 'shine' those feelings through their movements... I hate the fact that some kids get the opportunity to do whatever they want in their lives, and some kids, as much as they try, will not get those opportunities just because they don't have as much money as others... I wish that all kids had a chance to strive to be what they want to be, because all children have something to bring to our world."

Stephanie Sanchez and Tanya Santo: Gifted with song and guided by compassion, this team originally conceived a project in which they would teach song-writing to formerly homeless youth staying at Shelter Network. Due to the constraints inherent in the lives of homeless youth, their efforts evolved into accompaniment program, through which they offered diverse activities for the youth two afternoons a week throughout the summer.

"I chose to address this issue because I felt that kids growing up in an unstable environment needed all the commitment that someone could give them. That's what Tanya and I did; we volunteered twice a week for three months and didn't miss a single day... These kids can do and be whomever they want, but they need to be helped and guided. Most importantly, they need to have a stable lifestyle so they can focus on themselves, rather than worrying about where they're going to live next... I felt that my presence there made them happy (at least I hope it did.) I do know for sure that in those three months, we were one of the only things stable to them." (Stephanie Sanchez)

"A symbol I would choose for this experience would be handcuffs and their keys. Once you're in handcuffs you feel captured. You feel that you may never be free. That is like the kids' experiences: being trapped in the same situation day after day; of not having a home; and not knowing where they're going next. The key to those handcuffs could be certain people, situations, and activities. I wanted writing songs to be the key to those kids' handcuffs." (Tanya Santo)

Mariela Martinez: Responding to disengaged teens and destructive tagging throughout the City, Mariela implemented a graffiti art program, "Dream But Don't Sleep." Over the course of several months, she gathered inner-city youth from the Boys & Girls Club to envision, draw and paint a collaborative mural.

"I saw and heard a lot from observing these teens in my neighborhood. Since they came from tough neighborhoods, and all liked graffiti, I wanted to create a program where they could come and express themselves through art. "We Are the Dream" is the centerpiece of the mural, because today's youth are tomorrow's future... I really wanted to create a positive message in my mural so it could speak out to the public... I wanted these kids to feel proud of their accomplishment and say "hey, I did that."

Janine DeJesus: Janine took to heart the challenge of one of the survivors in Mercy's annual Holocaust Speakers Series: *Don't let these stories and lessons die.* She organized an educational forum at Holy Angels School, allowing 6th, 7th and 8th graders to hear directly from Helen Farkas, a Holocaust survivor. Recognizing that these survivors will not be with us forever, Janine also helped document Helen Farkas' story, and returned to Holy Angels several months later, to share this experience through technology with new students.

"If we help to bring awareness about this issue to those outside of our community, we can really make a difference in our world. We could prevent another Holocaust from occurring. A wishing-well is a good symbol for this experience because the Holocaust issue acts like the water that sits at the bottom of the wishing-well. Simply, it is up to us to bring the issue back out and to explain it to the rest of the world... I can make a change in the world - even through the smallest ways."

Culminating Project Summary - Class of 2010

Jacquie Loo, Natalie Ayala and Rachelle Hidalgo offered an art class to senior citizens at Notre Dame Senior Plaza, an affordable housing development of Mercy Housing. During the class, they also interviewed the seniors and created a short documentary of their experience.

Jacquie: *As I heard their stories of their past, it dawned on me that these seniors were actual people -- they all had childhoods and stories from their rebellious teen years to talk about. I had changed my mind - from thinking that these seniors would be bitter to knowing that these seniors were some of the warmest and most positive people I have met.*

Natalie: *I chose to give the senior citizens the love and care they needed mainly because my grandmother died when I was very young. I never had the chance to properly talk with her, ask her how her day was, or even how she was when she was a teenager. I thought it would be interesting to volunteer at a senior citizen home and experience what a grandmother figure would be like.*

Rachelle: *My arts and crafts class makes me feel like a river... This river helped our group flow into the hearts of the seniors and helped them communicate and come out of their comfort zone. In a river, there are fish that come from different places but all come together to make one big school of fish that stick with one another and swim alongside to come to common ground. In my class, each senior represented a fish that, over time, all came together and made crafts in my class.*

Vickie Gutierrez and Sarah Manzano offered a theater camp for children living at Columbia Park Apartments, an affordable housing development of Mercy Housing. In preparing for the production, they emphasized acting skills, costume and set design.

Vickie: *What bothers me about this issue is that the kids are the ones who are losing. With the budget cuts in schools and*

not many centers being open for the kids to go to, the kids are the ones who lose. They end up not having that one place they can go to be safe... Kids need a place in order to be exposed to different and better things. They need a place to learn and have fun. They need somewhere where they can be themselves and express who they are.

Sarah: *There were a few kids that didn't like what they were doing because it was a small role or they just didn't want to cooperate with me and do what they were supposed to do. So I decided to make them my assistants. That made them feel important, which I think really helped because they really got into the play business and even started telling other kids to pay attention.*

Shelby Getsla was drawn to a project at the Veterans Hospital, largely because there are many veterans and active members of the military in her family. While regularly visiting with the residents there, she compiled oral histories of some of the people whom she met.

Shelby: *My role was a reporter, an avid listener eager to hear what they had to say... My project made me feel like a tape recorder. I could take stories and replay them, in a sense, for others so that they too may share in their significance.*

Ria Aquino and Lizzy Bilasano are gifted dancers – and offered a “hip-hop” dance class to the youth and adolescents at Shelter Network’s Family Crossroads, transitional housing for families on the edge of homelessness.

Ria: *Many poor people are just like us: they go to school, they have friends, and they have talents and dreams. I used to have an opinion that poor people were just lazy and smelled because I had never met anyone who was in poverty. I never knew anyone who lost a job which made them lose their entire life. But because of this project I realized that they're just like us, they just went through a really unfortunate event.*

Lizzy: *I have such a great passion for dance and other forms of performing arts; I just want to share it with everyone. I feel like I have a good thing here with dance, and I want other people to see and feel how great it is. To me, if you have a good thing – you should go out and share it...*

Claire Lim and Rachelle Ramirez are great fans of the Twilight Book series. Inspired, they offered a “Twilight Activities Camp” – with Twilight-themed activities ranging from art projects to water balloon fights – to the adolescents and teens at the Excelsior Boys and Girls Club.

Claire: *This project made me feel like an open book because the children - and those who helped me and Rachelle with this project - opened me up to new people and new experiences. They welcomed us and showed me that even though working there was completely new to me, I could have a good time and help others have a good time as well. By taking a risk and being open to trying something new, this became a great experience.*

Rachelle: *We chose to address this issue because we love working with children. A majority of the children aren't supervised at home, so they come to the Club to spend their days hanging out with friends and doing leisurely activities. These kids that come to the Club don't have many resources at home and come from low-income families. Being familiar with the neighborhood, we know what issues arise.*

Jenny Montoya has been a member of the Girls Scouts since the 2nd grade, and has been bothered by the absence of a recycling program during the summer camps. For her project, she engineered a recycling and environmental education campaign for the participants in her annual summer camp.

Jenny: *Even though we were out in nature, none of us had ever really thought about ways we could preserve this beautiful area we took for granted. So, I decided to bring the issue of not*

only recycling but also educating the girls. I knew they would want to make a difference if someone just told them how.

Caroline Cunningham and Gladys Martinez wanted to increase the sense of pride in Latino culture among immigrant and native-born Latino youth. They offered a Spanish Literature and Art class at the Boys and Girls Club in the Tenderloin.

Caroline: *I picture a very urban street, like Jones, whose colors are mainly black, gray or brown. But, in the middle of the block, where an empty lot used to be, there is a garden. This garden is full of beautiful flowers of all shapes and sizes. And although the garden grows very slowly, at the end it is beautiful. To me, the kids at the Boys and Girls Club are that garden. Although they are located in a less-than-desirable area, the kids are allowed to flourish and grow with all the support they receive there.*

Gladys: *Since I wasn't able to be part of an art program when I was younger, I decided to start a new one at the Club. Also, since I had just finished taking a Spanish Literature class, I felt as if I could conquer the world. Therefore, I thought I could mix up some elements of Spanish literature into the class. Since most of the kids at the Club came from low-income families, I thought I could relate to them and share a little bit of my knowledge with them.*