SEARCH (Student Energy in Action for Regina Community Health) Volunteer Experience and Response Paper

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 **February 6, 2016**

Today was my first shift after the orientation, which I did on January 23, 2016. I was nervous prior to the shift because I have little experience with Aboriginal people and with the media stereotypes I did not know what to expect, which I know was wrong for me think about.

When I first got there I started to work in the kitchen helping to prepare the meal; I remembered from the orientation that this is suggested to start with. When all the volunteers arrived, we met in a group and introduced ourselves including our year and faculty of studies. Kelly then addressed housekeeping topics and assigned everyone a job; I was assigned to kitchen duty with a few others. Our priority was to prepare and serve the meal for the day; cream of broccoli soup, vegetables, fruit and grilled cheese sandwich melts (yum!). I peeled vegetables, cut fruit and vegetables for the trays, served coffee and tea and the meal, washed dishes at the end of the shift and lastly, cleaned the space. It was not too fast paced and I did not feel under a lot of pressure, which I enjoy in a working environment because it helps me to work well and efficiently, which is important for good service. Some of the clients came for a late lunch so there was a sudden rush of people, but we adapted well. When we ran out of soup and more clients came in, the mentor found more in the freezer and we served it shortly after. We served the meal throughout the shift and then started cleaning up at 3:20. We then preceded to meet in a circle to debrief and discuss our experiences, everyone had something different to contribute.

I enjoyed the debriefing session and I understand why the volunteers are encouraged to participate in it. Because no one can be doing every job at the same time, we got to hear about what happened on the medical side of the building and hear some stories and how things went overall. I was nervous to speak at this time because I wasn’t sure, at the time, what I had learnt. I realize now that I learnt about being able to adapt to our surroundings when there was more people than expected. It was admirable of the mentor to be able to adapt so easily, and because she could do this, the shift ran smoothly.

Overall, the shift went well for me. I felt useful in the kitchen and I was able to talk to every person who wanted a meal. Even though they weren’t meaningful conversations (we were crunched for time and I served them quickly) they were still good interactions and I hope that even a smile from me brightened someone’s day. I love the idea of SEARCH, having a free facility for people in need to come to with open arms, and I was glad to be apart of it.

**February 27, 2016**

Today was my second shift. Kelly, Jessica, Morgan, Sam and Kay were the mentors. I found out their names during the introduction, which is the first thing I experienced today. The focus today was food security, which is the state of having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. This is a new term to me so it was interesting to learn about it. Now that I am more comfortable volunteering at SEARCH, I talked to the mentors more, especially Jessica, Morgan and Kelly. I was assigned to be at the door during this shift with a partner, Sarah. This task consisted of writing down statistics of the clients that came in that day. These statistics included age, gender, returning or new client, the activities they participate in, etc. The task was easy but there did not seem like a lot of opportunity to learn and communicate with clients. I did communicate with kids, though, as well as other students and mentors. At the end of the shift during the debriefing session, we went into small groups and discussed an article about the food bank and food security. My small group discussed the lack of education for some people so they do not know what food security is. Many people think that if they have a job and can feed their family occasionally then they do not need to use the food bank. We also acknowledge the stigma towards the food bank that it’s meant for a certain type/group of people. This makes it so that others are too proud to received food from the food bank. The debriefing session was the most interesting part of the shift and overall, the shift went well.

**March 12, 2016**

Today was the best shift out of all three! I was assigned to facilitate family yoga (which ended up being child yoga). As a part of this task my job was to encourage families to participate in yoga and I read descriptions of yoga poses to the kids. The kids got to pick a book and show me the pose they wanted to try or they had the option to pick a flash card and I read the pose description on the reverse side.

The kids were very loud and energetic today. This made my job a bit more difficult because I had to keep them on task with the yoga position that *they* said they wanted to try. Because the children’s focus easily wavered, they got bored of yoga and wanted to do something else. It was an easy transition to go from yoga to arts on crafts (on yoga mats). Even though there was not a specific craft for the kids to make, they enjoyed making whatever they wanted to.

This shift went really really well. I talked to more clients today than in my previous shifts. I found that the kids kept me on my toes and made me engage in the activities they were doing so that they were being nice and following the rules. During the shift I gave a *lot* of piggy backs to the child care room and back to the yoga station. I learnt that after I said yes to one girl when she asked, then everyone else wanted a piggy back too.

Overall, this assignment was very helpful and fun. Volunteering should never feel like work, I think it should be enjoyable and this experience definitely exceeded my expectations. I think each shift has its own value. I say this because I didn’t feel that there was a lot to learn in my second shift when I stood at the door writing down statistics compared to the first and third shifts with more of an opportunity to interact with clients.