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Positively Developing Student Athletes Through Community Service

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## **Introduction**

According to the National College Athletic Association (NCAA), 87% of women and 83% of men student-athletes volunteer on an annual basis and feel that they are responsible to volunteer in the community and their participation not only benefits the community but also benefits their life after college. Student-athletes were able to acknowledge the effect community service has on their post-grad life but Ting (2009) was able to conduct a study that showed how community service positively affected student-athletes while they are in college – specifically, in their freshman year. The research conducted showed that developing a student-athlete’s psychosocial development (including engaging in community service) had a positive impact on their first year grade point average. Engaging in community service positively impacts the student-athlete, and student-athlete engagement in community service also benefits the community.

As each community has its own specific problems, there are organizations that attempt to strengthen those weak areas of the community. Each service organization has goals to reach and Svennsson, Huml, and Hancock (2014) discovered that those organizations value student-athletes as volunteers mainly because of specific skills that carry over from their participation in sports. The teamwork, communication, and leadership skills allows the student-athlete volunteers to contribute to the community service organizations and their journey to serve the community. Community service can be the solution for the community once the focus is shifted from “doing for” to “doing with” (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000). This shift in focus encourages the community and athlete to develop a connection and equalize relationships.

Student-athletes, specifically football players, have been stigmatized by the media, peers, and even professors as “dumb jocks”, which is a term that refers to student-athletes with low intelligence. Community service opportunities allow the football players to eliminate negative perceptions by allowing the athlete to meet the people of the community and possibly change the perception. As a freshman football player, you may lack the knowledge and understanding of the importance that community service has on the community, the football program and your personal development. In order to educate the freshman and their parents/caregivers, a power point presentation was created in an effort to educate recruits and parents about the importance of community service within the Iowa State University football program. In addition, an activity intended to properly instruct players regarding how to approach community service, with the intention of positively developing the student-athlete through community services, was created.

## **Literature Review**

### **Positive Youth Development**

In the early 1900's, the youth development field was a reactive approach to youth's behavior. It was a response to crises such as juvenile crimes, drug use, and other unsafe behaviors that youth practiced. Youth practitioners displayed a sense of concern for troubled youth and an attempt to disrupt negative behavior by implementing several strategies to instill positive development. But Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak and Hawkins (2004) report that the youth field experienced a shift in focus. As time passed, youth continued to practice negative behaviors which led to youth practitioners developing a change in approaching youth.

In the 1980's, the youth field began to acknowledge youth's transitions to adulthood as more than avoiding drugs, violence, academic failure and practicing unhealthy sexual behaviors

(Catalano, Berglund, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004). As the focus shifted from a reactive approach to a proactive approach, different factors and variables became the focus of Positive Youth Development (PYD). When PYD evolved, it began to promote positive social, emotional, behavioral and cognitive factors (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004). Instead of focusing on the negative behaviors, practitioners began to promote positive behaviors with intentions of preparing the youth to avoid negative behaviors and to develop the skills necessary for adulthood.

The field of PYD focuses on each and every child's unique talents, strengths, interests and future potential (Damon, 2004). The current approach to youth development highlights strengths, which allows society to view youth as resources to society instead of problems in society. Damon (2004) examines youth development and discusses three areas regarding transformation. The first area is the nature of the child, the second area is the interactions that youth have within their community, and lastly, young people and their moral identities. The three areas continue to be a focus for youth practitioners and how they can successfully equip the youth to make correct decisions in troubling times.

By studying the nature of the child, one focuses on how resilient the child is and how they may react to challenges they face in life. The interactions that youth have within their community can contribute to their development and if the community can view the youth as full partners, bearing full shares of rights and responsibilities (Damon, 2004), it provides opportunity for both the youth and the community to grow. Young people's moral identities are often shaped late in their childhood when the child acquires the ability to analyze people, situations and themselves in a proper manner (Damon, 2004). These three areas that Damon studies and

discusses regarding transformation in youth have allowed practitioners to pursue young people's strengths and provide explanations for the behavior that youth may partake in throughout their journey of adolescence. Damon (2004) continues to emphasize that "problem-free" does not equate to "prepared", meaning just because a problem is prevented does not mean that youth involved are equipped with the proper tools to prevent other troubling situations. PYD professionals must continue to stress the importance of youth thriving in society and promoting their strengths instead of focusing solely on their weaknesses.

Focusing on the strengths of youth is an attempt to elevate our youth and essentially create a successful transition to adulthood. Zarrett and Lerner (2008) identifies the 5 C's of PYD: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring. These 5 C's are important for youth development and each "C" represents a specific trait that enables youth to develop internally and externally. Competence refers to a youth action and understanding in certain areas and situations. Confidence is an internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy (Zarrett & Lerner, 2008). The third "C" is connection, referring to relationships that a youth have with people in each area of their life (community, school, family). Character is one of the C's that acknowledges the youth behavior, morals, and values and the final "C" which is Caring, is defined as a sense of sympathy and empathy (Zarrett & Lerner, 2008). Zarrett and Lerner (2008) mention that if all the 5 C's are developed, a sixth "C" emerges: Contribution. Contribution is a sign of a thriving youth who can contribute to the people and community around them. If all C's are developed, youth professionals are confident that it will create a foundation for youth to develop and become assets to their peers, families, schools, and communities.

The Search Institute (1997) has identified 40 developmental assets that are significant to young people's success. The assets are divided into two categories: external and internal. The external category is comprised of support, empowerment, expectations and use of time. The Search Institute (1997) defines the support category as young people needing to be surrounded by people who love and care for them, empowerment is focusing on youth feeling valuable, expectations is defined as young people needing rules and encouragement to do their best, and lastly for the external assets is use of time, where young people take advantage of opportunities outside of school to develop new skills. The internal category includes commitment to learning, positive values, positive identity and social competencies. Young people need to understand the importance of learning and being fully engaged in academic activities is what the commitment to learning addresses. Positive values focus more on developing principles to aid in decision-making. A positive identity is defined as youth believing in their own self-worth where they feel they have control over things that may happen to them (The Search Institute, 1997). Social competencies emphasize the importance of young people thriving in society and effectively interacting with others. The developmental assets are viewed as a developmental framework to the needs of young people to succeed in adulthood.

### **Community service among youth.**

The 40 developmental assets and the 6 C's share common themes and beliefs in attaining one goal: successfully developing our youth for adulthood. The value of community and how influential the community is on our youth is a large component of this success. The participation in community service fosters relationships between members of the community. Giles and Eyster (2001) express a great concern for students whose involvement decreases as they get older

because youth who are actively involved develop a sense of personal efficacy. Personal efficacy (self- efficacy) is part of the developmental framework and suggests that youth have to achieve personal goals. Personal efficacy is developed as youth continue to grow but it can be especially important for college students while they are attempting to graduate from college. In regards to the community, college students who actively participate in the community begin to feel that they can make a change in the community.

The idea of community affecting youth development is introduced in the external category in the 40 developmental assets and suggests the community can positively affect a youth, but does the community benefit from service events? Vizenor, Souza, and Ertmer (2017) interviewed 30 community partners and found that service projects that involve students can benefit the community by students contributing new ideas, creativity and enthusiasm to the community. It was reported that 93% of the community partners interviewed enjoyed working with the students in the community (Vizenor, Souza, & Ertmer, 2017). A community respondent wrote, "I loved their enthusiasm and commitment to the project!" (p. 107).

Researchers report a decline in community participation as youth grow older. Schatteman (2014) reported that 3.2 million college students dedicate 307.3 million hours to community service. While this number sounds encouraging, students tend to express difficulty in participation in community service. Time commitment has been an issue for students and their commitment to service projects. Schatteman (2014) conducted a study and found that one-day service projects are more appealing to college students due to time constraints. Other college students may lack participation in the community due to feeling as if they cannot make a change.



As youth tend to gravitate to activities that provide instant gratification, some community events may not provide that which may lead to a decline in participation.

While all college students have a demanding schedule, college student-athletes' schedules are extremely demanding. Universities are trying to incorporate community service events into the athlete's schedule because of the opportunities it provides for students professionally. Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001) emphasize the importance of developing the athlete professionally and suggest that volunteer activities in the community allow student-athletes to gain work experience. For non-athletes, internships and co-ops are opportunities for them to gain work experience but can be very time demanding. Volunteer opportunities do not require significant time demands but can still equip the student-athlete with skills that are vital to professional development.

Some researchers specifically studied how community service affect student-athletes and the athletic program. The National Federation of State High School Association (NFHS; 2015), emphasizes the importance of developing a healthy culture of community service for athletic programs across the nation. NFHS explains that community service can benefit the athletic program in building team camaraderie within the program and provide opportunities for the teams to disengage from their season. Community service can also provide positive publicity for athletic programs and allow the university and the community to view the athletic programs as more than just sports.

### **Methods**

When recruiting student-athletes, the opportunity to present information about the university to the parents should be considered an advantage. When the parents are present,

providing information and evidence that the information is factual is essential to the development of relationship and trust between the parent and the coaching staff. Worley (2011) describes millennial parents as “helicopter parents” meaning they are involved in every facet of their children’s lives. The PowerPoint (see Appendix A) was created to shed light on key components of the program outside of the football aspect. The EBSCO database provided research articles that contributed to the creation of this presentation. The information on community service and athletes is limited but by finding one article and using the reference page that the author provides, it created access to other research articles addressing community service and the effect it has on the football program, university, and development of the player.

As the focus shifts to the student-athletes rather than the parents, the presentation does as well. The 20-word card activity (see appendix B) was created in an attempt to deliver the information and allow the student-athletes to understand and apply the information. Scholarly journal articles that contain information about how to properly educate millennials and generation Z students were utilized. With articles discussing community service and how to educate millennials and generation Z students and the implementation of the backward design, the 20-word activity was created.

## **Results**

When recruiting a student-athlete to potentially become a member of the football program, coaches at the university not only focus on athletic ability but also the character of the athlete and how the athlete approaches everyday life. Once the student-athlete makes a pledge to the university to attend, coaches emphasize the importance of the development of the student-athletes on and off the field. While academics and football are priority, giving the athlete

opportunities to develop a self-identity outside of athletics is essential to their overall development. Community service is an opportunity for our athletes to develop personally and professionally.

As the recruiting process gains momentum, the student-athlete may take several visits to campus. With intentions to impress the athlete and their caregivers, the coaching staff create an itinerary that allows the visitors to learn about every aspect of the program. The visit will include numerous presentations, and the time allotted for each presentation may fluctuate; as such, the PowerPoint that includes information about the community service initiative (Appendix A) was developed to be brief but pertinent, covering Iowa State University football program core values, commitment facts for student athletes, and community service activities, hours and how participating in community service can benefit the student-athlete.

Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, and Palmer (2003) discuss the components that influence a recruit and notes that a winning tradition, academics, relationship with the coach, early playing time and distance from home are top factors in the student-athlete decision making process. Student-athletes tend to gravitate to programs who have a tradition of winning games. The athlete to coach relationship is important to the athlete because it can directly affect their success on and off the field. Mageau and Vallerand (2003) explains that when athletes feel that their coach allows them to feel connected, competent, and autonomous throughout their career, they will experience a greater sense of intrinsic motivation. The extra motivation that the athlete can gain from a healthy coach to player relationship could result in a successful collegiate career. Relationship with the coach is mentioned as important but when distance from home is mentioned, the need for connectedness to the community begins to surface. The distance from

home is a factor because of the idea of the student-athlete feeling comfortable in an environment. The closer to home the more comfortable the athlete assumes they will feel but with community service, it allows the athlete to feel connected to the community with hopes that the comfort level increase eliminates the distance from home factor. The PowerPoint addresses the top factors and allows the caregivers and student-athlete to address questions to the coaching staff which presents the opportunity to actively recruit the caregivers and student-athletes with hopes of the athlete selecting the university to continue their academic/athletic career and the caregivers endorsing the decision.

The presentation begins to discuss the community service program (#CyclonesInTheCommunity), which is a voluntary program that provides weekly opportunities for student athletes to fully engage in the community surrounding the university. Since Coach Campbell's arrival, the #CyclonesInTheCommunity program has increased by 800 total service hours. The current community service program allows athletes to attend schools, hospitals, nursing homes, the food pantry, and thrift stores. With approximately 1,800 hours of community service with an average of 14 hours per player in 2018, the athlete can build relationships within the community, network for future professional opportunities, showcase and introduce team working skills, and develop a greater sense of time management. The active involvement in the community has been shown to affect first-semester grades. As aforementioned, Ting (2009) conducted a study on how noncognitive variables (including engaging in community service) affected first semester grades of student-athletes. The study discussed how student-athletes feel a unique amount of pressure to succeed academically, athletically, and with time management. Ting (2009) compares noncognitive variables to SAT scores and how each factor affected a student-athlete's first semester GPA. Amongst those noncognitive variables, participating in

community service was included as a factor that positively influenced GPA because it is an opportunity for first year students to develop a positive self-identity which result in an increase in confidence (Ting, 2009). The increase in confidence could allow the first year student to excel in their first year of college in the classroom and in their specific sport. The first deliverable, this PowerPoint, addresses community service but more importantly it allows the parents to see how the program will develop their child in a positive manner outside of athletics.

In order for the student-athlete to learn from community service and to increase a feeling of connection with the community while voluntarily giving their time, important themes should be discussed beforehand. In order to discuss these themes, a 20-word activity (Appendix B) has been implemented for the Iowa State University Football team. In the word activity, a student-athlete will be able to select one word from a 20-word pool. Before attending the service event, a jar with 20 words on small sheets of paper will be distributed amongst the athletes, allowing the word selection to be completely random. Once the athlete has their assigned word, the discussion, led by the assistant director of football operations, will start with what the word may mean to them personally and/or they can share personal experiences that relate to the word. Once the discussion has concluded, student-athletes will be encouraged to implement their word into the current community service event or provide an example/experience where they felt the word could apply. At the conclusion of the event, the word(s) will be discussed as the group of athletes travel back to campus.

The word activity is an innovative and creative method to educate Generation Z student-athletes in a non-traditional way. Generation Z students were born between the years of 1995 and 2010 (Mohr & Mohr, 2017). These students approach learning as a “plug-and-play” experience,

which allows the athlete to plunge in and learn through active participation (Worley, 2011). The common presentation or PowerPoint would have been able to deliver the information in a passive manner, but McGlynn (2005) emphasizes the idea that students must be actively engaged with new material. The first deliverable (Appendix A) was a presentation directed at caregivers; but this 20-word activity (Appendix B) will allow student-athletes to gain knowledge and immediately apply what they have learned from the activity while participating in a community service event. In addition, Mohr and Mohr (2017) says Gen-Z students may need guidance when asked to work with others. To aid the participation of the word activity, upper classmen will participate first.

The 20 words were chosen by utilizing the backward design method. Backward design is an approach used by instructors when developing a course/activity. It allows the instructors to “think backward”, in which they ask themselves what the students may need to know when they are done with the assignment (Michaelson & Sweet, 2008). Once the instructor identifies the knowledge the students should acquire, backward design is applied by setting objectives/goals for the student to reach before developing methods to deliver the information and creating assessments to test the student’s knowledge. Therefore, before the service event, the student athletes should understand key components of service such as teamwork, building relationships within the community, and networking. At the conclusion of the community service event, the student athletes should be able to communicate the importance their assigned word may play in a successful community service experience. The 20 words were selected for this activity to challenge the student-athlete and confirm that the proper lessons and experiences flourish throughout the service event.

## Conclusion

As aforementioned, the field of youth development saw a shift in approach from reactive to proactive, and youth practitioners began to focus on strengthening positive behaviors rather than focusing on the negative. As this change developed, Damon (2004) defined positive youth development as an approach that examines the importance of capturing the full potential of all youth. As society began to view youth as resources instead of trouble, it allowed youth to make contributions and develop in a positive manner. #CyclonesInTheCommunity aligns with the shift in focus and approach because it provides youth an opportunity to develop relationships in the community, time management, and teamwork.

As a recruiting tool, a presentation was created to inform the student athlete's caregivers about the Iowa State football team's community service involvement. The presentation introduced Coach Matt Campbell's core values and transitioned to the details of #CyclonesInTheCommunity. In the PowerPoint, activities, hours, and benefits are listed and educate the caregiver on how the student-athlete will have opportunities outside of athletics to positively develop. Zarrett and Lerner (2008) state that how students spend their out-of-school time is the second most important factor for predicting positive development. As community service is highlighted, the presentation highlights two of the 5 C's of Positive Youth Development: Connection and Caring. Community service involvement encourages and subconsciously promotes caring about others within the community; the presentation tells the caregiver about the visits to the schools, hospitals, and thrift stores to aid the development of compassion within the student. Connection is discussed throughout the presentation in terms of how developing relationships can help the student athlete personally and professionally.

Personally, it allows the student-athlete to contribute to and become a valued member of the community, which allows the student to feel connected. Professionally, community service involvement can foster relationships that can lead to future job opportunities and/or references once the student-athlete has completed their collegiate career. As the PowerPoint concludes, the caregivers are equipped with knowledge of how the development of their student-athlete outside of athletics is important and how community service (#CyclonesInTheCommunity) contributes to their overall positive development.

The 20-word activity was the second deliverable developed and it was to target Generation Z students in an effort to ensure that they obtain the proper knowledge from the service event. The activity allows each student-athlete to select a random word, discuss the word with fellow teammates, and communicate with their teammates after the service event about how they were able to identify or exemplify the word. The Search Institute (1997) identified social competencies as an internal asset that emphasizes young people thriving in society and interacting with others. This activity allows the student-athlete to contribute to the community and thrive in the society with a specific word in mind that gives them the opportunity to serve the community with a purpose, and develop social competencies along the way. Community service is a special event but with the addition of a key word from the activity the experience can be heightened and provide the student-athlete with a different and enlightening perspective. At the conclusion of the event, the student-athlete is highly encouraged to discuss how the selected word was significant in their participation and how it influenced their experience. The activity was comprised of thriving, developing social competencies and allowing the student-athlete to voice their thoughts on the service event in regards to their selected word. As coaches attempt to glorify their university and attract caregivers and student-athletes, the importance of developing



the student-athlete outside of athletics should be highlighted and specifically, community service should be included when discussing developing youth in a positive manner.

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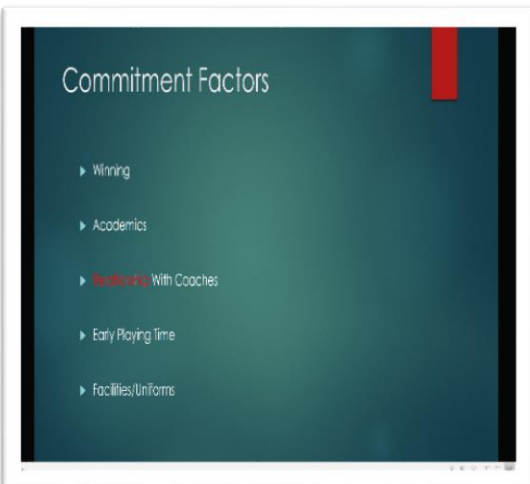
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## Appendix A





## Appendix B

### Community Service Engagement: 20 words to enhance the experience

- Self-Development
- Respect
- Time Management
- Relationships
- Autonomy
- Engagement
- Voluntarily
- Patience
- Discipline
- Character
- Resiliency
- Role Model
- Empowerment
- Support
- Teamwork
- Community

- Behavior (Unhealthy & Healthy)
- Expectations
- Perception
- Unity

\*Each word will be written on a small piece of paper and placed in a container. A student-athlete participating in the specific service event will randomly select one of the words as their word for the day.