

Harrison Lucas

Rich Collins Community Leadership Impact Fellowship Reflection 2023

Project: The Youth Initiative

### **1. Project Overview**

I have always had a passion for fitness and nutrition; however, it was heightened because of the covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, I picked up jump roping and started using the activity as an outlet. I became enamored by the rhythms produced as the rope hit the pavement. With this newfound joy for jump roping and wellness, I desired to share my passions with others and make learning about healthy eating and physical fitness an enjoyable experience. With this desire, I, along with the help of many, created the “Youth Health Initiative,” which was a 7-week program that sought to promote healthy eating, physical fitness and overall wellness among middle schoolers in the Waltham community. I thought partnering with the Waltham Boys and Girls Club (BGC) to facilitate the execution of this project would be the best as they perfectly aligned with my goals. I connected with Kendall Gillians, Director of Program Operations at the BGC. I told him my ideas and he agreed with my message and what I was attempting to promote. He was ‘all in’ in terms of supporting me in my mission. After communication back and forth we ultimately agreed on 7 dates, starting February 27th and ending April 3rd, to execute my initiative.

### **2. Project Development/Need**

During each week of the project, there was a lesson for 15-20 minutes. These lessons encompassed topics such as learning what a calorie is, reading nutrition labels, the various types of exercises, and even learning about drugs and alcohol from an EMT. Once each lesson was completed, the kids, myself and the volunteers would jump rope for the rest of the hour. We would either do singles, double dutch, single dutch or partner jumping. This was done not only to promote activity among the youth, but it was also done to train them for the end-of-project jump rope competition. In the culminating jump rope competition where students were able to win Brandeis swag and fidget toys. Not only was there a lesson and physical activity each week, but I also provided healthy snacks for the kids to enjoy such as apples and oranges.

Overall, my project is addressing the need for health, wellness and the prevention of various

health issues in the community. I wanted to tackle issues such as obesity, lack of exercise, poor eating habits and cardiovascular disease through this project. This is an epidemic in America, and I wanted to address some of these issues and needs with the youth, as I believe it is easier to implement lifestyle changes while young, ensuring that the youth can maintain a healthy lifestyle in the future.

### **3. Development and Assessment**

The process used to assess the impact of the project comes in the form of surveys and question sets at the end of each session about what was discussed. The middle schoolers performed well on the after-lesson questions, illustrating that they not only were paying attention, but that they understood the material. The pre-survey allowed me to tailor my lessons to their needs and questions regarding nutrition and exercise. Unfortunately, a post-survey could not be done because of the nature of the BGC. Because of the inconsistent nature of the BGC there were people who I had never seen before during the final event, making a post-survey would have been unsuccessful. For that reason, I relied on the after-lesson questions and the anecdotes about the kids enjoying my project. I even earned the name “jump rope,” and the kids wanted to know when I would be back, which is a good sign that my program was well received overall. In regards to unexpected success, I did not realize how much kids enjoyed the fruits I was giving them during each meeting. It really made me happy to see them wanting to eat them and asking for more. In terms of unexpected obstacles, I fortunately had very few.

### **4. The Unexpected**

Communication with my community partner was difficult at times and it would take weeks to respond to emails. Also, the fact that it was not the same group of kids at each meeting was something that I did not expect. My last major obstacle was that the middle schoolers were tired of jump roping after the 6th week. In the future, I would focus on doing other activities such as dodgeball or kickball and focus on being active as a whole rather than solely jump roping.

### **5. Future of Project**

Although my project with Rich Collins is over, I plan on creating a service club on campus that seeks to achieve the same goals as my Rich Collins project, but instead of strictly jump roping,

we would do a different physical activity each week. With a Brandeis service club, I will be able to pool volunteers and receive funding to further the club. I am also thinking about expanding on my original project to incorporate academics rather than only nutrition, physical fitness, and wellness. I noticed that the Waltham Group is lacking any clubs relating to the BGC, and I think I could help bridge the gap and even implement a tutoring service, similar to what other local colleges and universities do at the BGC.

## **6. Self-Reflection**

There are a few takeaways that I have gained from my experience in completing my project. Firstly, support on all levels is necessary to succeed in community engagement. If I did not have support from my volunteers, Rich Collins and Samuel Scholars, it would be difficult to execute this program. They not only gave me courage, but they also played a role in helping me complete the program. I have the ability to coalesce a group of people around an idea related to community engagement. Sharing my project to others and having people agree in it to the point of being volunteers was very rewarding. I have seen an improvement in my leadership and communication skills. Communicating with my community partner taught me to speak succinctly, meaningfully and thoughtfully, as to not waste my community partner's time or my own. Putting on a project like this allowed me to exercise and strengthen my leadership skills.