

Junior Core: Helping Strategies

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Ever since I can remember, I have wanted nothing else but to be a mother. When I was in about fourth grade, I had convinced myself that I would not have a job and I would just be a stay at home mom. This passion I had to care for children lead to me taking every opportunity I had to work with children of every age. As soon as I was old enough, I took a babysitting class and started babysitting for all the families the lived around us on the military base. I continued doing what I could to work with children, even through college. My second quarter at Western, I decided to work with Compass 2 Campus to mentor sixth grade students. Naturally when this service learning project was assigned, I automatically knew I wanted to do a project involving children, although I had no idea what that would entail. When I was paired up with Kiley, it was a relief to find out immediately that we both wanted to work with children. Kiley wanted to do an awareness project with a group of students, and we thought the easiest way to do this was to talk to the director of Compass 2 Campus to see if we could get into one of the schools. We scheduled a meeting with Cyndie Shepard and she was extremely excited to see that we were interested in working through her program. Cyndie became our sponsor and she helped us set up meetings with the people we needed to talk to. After many trips to Lynden Middle School filled with meetings and planning, and a lot of time spent planning with Kiley, we were able to come up with a lesson and multiple activities. We went into Mrs. Revak's sixth grade class after lunch and did a presentation on the effects that smoking and drinking have on their brain and what that means for them. Everything we did was centered around the goals and aspirations of the children so they could get a better idea of how using substances directly effects them. After the presentation, we broke the class up into groups and had them act out different scenarios. The scenarios Kiley and I came up with were about drinking and smoking, and the children were able to demonstrate what they would do if they were offered substances. This went very well, and the

class really enjoyed it. We took them into the lunch room after every group presented their skits, and we gave each group a section of a poster. They had to color their section and write out their goals. After each group was done, they had to work as a group to put the sections in order. Overall, the class was very interested in listening to what we had to say, and once we got them up and moving, they were very involved in the lesson.

Although our original idea for the awareness project seemed fairly simple, it turned out to take a lot more time and effort than we originally thought. I did not expect all of the outside systems that would impact the success of our project. There were a lot of things we worked on just the two of us, but a lot of our progress depended on the schedules of other people. Once we got our original idea down, we had to wait to schedule a meeting with Cyndie. After getting clearance from her, we were able to work out a few more details, but before we could get too far, we had to meet with Mrs. Revak (the teacher we were working with) and Mr. McClure (the Vice Principal of Lynden Middle School) to make sure they approved our project. We got approval, but then it was a lot of back and forth waiting for approval on topics and activities. We had to coordinate our class schedule with the schedule of Lynden Middle School, and that proved to be quite difficult. Lynden had a lot of days off this quarter, so it was difficult for Kiley and I to find a time when we were available to go out there. This definitely slowed down our project, and that made us both quite anxious. Not only was the school's schedule hard to work with, but Kiley and I had some pretty conflicting schedules as well. I had a lot of free time this quarter, but Kiley works a lot of the times that I am free, and that made it difficult for us to find times to work on the project. This was made more difficult by the fact that Kiley and I seemed to be out of town frequently on weekends.

There were a lot of difficulties throughout our project, but we were very supportive of each other. Many times over the quarter, I especially got very anxious and a little hopeless. Kiley was intentional about supporting me emotionally and would often decide to take a break and would ask me what I was feeling and then would talk me through it. Towards the middle of this quarter, my depression started coming back and it affected my work. Although Kiley did not ask about my depression specifically, she could tell that I was not feeling up for doing anything. She asked what was causing me to be irritable, and I confessed that I was really unsure about how the children were going to react and if we had chosen the right project. Kiley was calm and kind and told me that although we cannot predict how the children are going to react, we could talk about some alternative ways to present our project based on the energy we feel in the room. I could tell that Kiley was a little disappointed in my attitude towards our project, but she was very helpful in getting me through the end with little anxiety. I think our biggest problem was on the day of our presentation. Kiley came to my building early to pick me up and found that her car was leaking oil. She acted very calm and collected, but when I came back with my car, I could see that she was upset. We started out the day on a bad note, and she started worrying about how the rest of the day would go. We had preparations to do in Lynden Middle School, we had a two hour presentation, and then we had to come back to take our benchmark exam. It was a full day, and I could tell that Kiley would have a hard time getting through it. I had always relied on her energy to get me through our meetings, but this time she needed to rely on mine. It was a learning process for me, but I was able to learn quickly how Kiley needs help and support. Overall, I think the biggest way we helped each other was by speaking authentically with one another from the start. We discussed our strengths and weaknesses with each other, but by speaking authentically, we were able to learn more strengths and weaknesses about ourselves.

As we learned more about ourselves and each other, we were able to adjust and perfect our helping strategies.

I never told Kiley this, but I believe she had a major influence on me throughout the quarter, both personally and in my interpersonal skills. I have a tendency to be a bit of a pessimistic person; I have a hard time looking at the good in the world when there is still so much that needs to be improved and perfected. Kiley, on the other hand, I believe to be an optimist. As a result, Kiley is often happier than I am; it is easier to be happy when you see the light in the world as opposed to focusing on the dark. It is not easy to change how you view life and the world around you, but I have been encouraged to do so based on Kiley's optimistic outlook. It is rare that I am perfectly content with just being where I am (which is most likely the cause of my depression cycle), and it is tiring to be unhappy all the time. Being around Kiley was refreshing; she has so much joy and it spreads to those around her. After spending the quarter with her, I have noticed that it is easier for me to find light in little things throughout the day. This, in turn, affects my interpersonal skills. Looking at relationships through the eyes of a pessimist is very difficult and it often results in a negative effect; I have a tendency to get caught up on the little awkward moments and it halts my communication. The more time I spend with Kiley, the more I try to not get caught up on those moments so I can focus more on building a positive relationship with that person. I have been working on this in all of my relationships, and I can see it making a difference. The more work I put into improving my relationships, the happier I am and the more I can focus on the relationship, and it just continues in a cycle. In the beginning of the quarter, we were talking about positive and negative relationships. We broke off into small groups and discussed different relationships we have and what roles they played in our lives. We had to decide whether or not they were worth our intentionality. I now find that I

try to be more intentional in my relationships. I cannot say whether I impacted Kiley to the degree in which she impacted me, but I do hope that I have had some impact on her interpersonal skills. I know that I can be a handful emotionally, and I know that it can take some adjusting to figure out the best way to keep me going strong. If anything, I hope that I have helped Kiley to be flexible with her interpersonal skills and sensitive and tuned in to the emotions of those around her.

This quarter's dyad project was a big learning experience and I got a lot more out of it than I expected. Within the first few classes, I knew that this quarter was going to be a little bit of a struggle because I would have to look at my relationships, and I know deep down that I need to let some of them go. However, I did not expect to learn so much about myself. I learned a lot about how I act in relationships and more about my thought process in every interaction I have with a person. In conjunction with the class activities, Kiley was a big part in helping me discover how I work. Her support not only helped me realize that I should change the way I see the people and things around me, but she also helped me get through the dyad project. On the day of our presentation, I was having a really hard time, and starting the day with car troubles did not help. It was hard to be energetic, but I knew I had to be in order to fully engage the class in what we were saying. Kiley and I had a good talk in the car, and then she put on her happy face and did an excellent job throughout the presentation. I had some weak points, but I was always able to count on Kiley to help refuel my energy. She taught me to be more intentional about my relationships, and through the process of this project, it has become easier for me to be a more open and honest person. Working with Kiley for the past ten weeks has greatly improved my interpersonal skills, and I can already tell it is making a difference in a lot of my relationships.