

Final Summary: MyZone

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This year, I had the privilege of volunteering for a middle school afterschool program called MyZone. MyZone is located at the Newberg Christian Church and goes from 3:00pm to 5:00pm Monday through Friday. Its goal is to have a safe, secure, and fun environment for the kids to go to when they have nowhere else to go. This program allows kids a wide variety of things to do, such as a place to study, play games in the Gym, play games on Xbox, play music, or just hang out with their friends. This paper will be an overview of my experience in the program.

What I did

This was my second semester being at MyZone. However, this semester I was hired on as paid staff for MyZone. I did some of the same things this semester as I did last, like playing songs on piano that some of the middle schoolers would sing to or I would teach them how to play songs on the guitar or piano that they wanted to learn. I also had the privilege of doing new things, one of which was develop and teach a leadership class to a few hand-picked middle schoolers. This was a great experience. It allowed me to take a lot of life skills and lessons that I've learned through years on leadership as well as integrate aspects of psychology that I've learned here at George Fox.

The leadership class was a six-week program developed with a dual purpose. The first was to teach them about life skills and ideas that can be extremely beneficial to a person in life. This ranged from servant leadership, what being a role model is about, how to receive feedback, and so on. The second part was more application of how to do certain things, like how to stay organized (and why it is a good idea to), how to make and use a schedule, how to teach others, and so on. The goal of the this two-purpose step was to equip them with skills that would both

benefit them in their future personal and/or professional relationships as well as equip them with skills that employers look for. One of the tools I created to teach this curriculum was a workbook that was filled with questions about the related topic that they would answer for homework. The main teaching though came from our class time where I would talk about the subject and connect different psychology-based concepts and other things that I've learned through my own leadership experience/teachings to help them grasp each concept. We'd discuss a lot of different things, such as issues that they face in school as well as what they believe their strengths and weaknesses are.

While they were learning these things, they were also learning how to plan and create their own event. The event that they planned takes place well after the class is out to give them plenty of time to plan the event and make sure it goes well. The whole purpose of creating and running this event was that it allowed them, if not required them, to incorporate everything that they've been learning over the six teaching weeks. It also puts them into a position of true leadership as I made my role at that point to be more of a guide so that they run the event. However, I made sure they knew that they had me for help. I made it a point to constantly tell them that I will let them fail, but I will not let them crash. What this meant for them was that they are going to make mistakes and forget things, which is okay! That's how they learn. However, I won't let them forget anything or do something that will make their event fall apart. One of the ways I went about this is by meeting with certain people they needed to meet with beforehand so that the leadership team would get asked certain important questions about their event that could make or break it, in which I would follow up with them to make sure they had a plan in place for those things.

Reaction to the Experience

I think my experience this time around at MyZone was incredibly fulfilling for me. I was able to build a lot of meaningful relationships with so many of the middle schoolers and I'm going to miss them. So many of these kids a great amount of potential just waiting for someone to take the time and energy to help them develop it. Even though I'm sad to leave, I'm grateful for the time I got to spend with them.

Course Work Connection

I think when working at MyZone, it is hard not to use aspects of many different psychology courses. For me, I found myself using much of what I learned from Counseling (PSYC 381) and Advanced Counseling (PSYC 382) when talking to the middle schoolers or when listening to what was going on in their life at the time. I used a lot of concepts from both Adolescent Development (PSYC 314) and Learning (PSYC 360) for both my developing my curriculum for my leadership class. Adolescent Development in particular was helpful in shaping my expectations and knowledge of both the middle schoolers in my leadership class and those in the program.

Goals

My goals for this semester at MyZone was to connect with more middle schoolers than I did last semester. I think I was able to achieve this goal well. I ended up moving around a lot more this semester instead of mostly just hanging out with the kids at the music station. This allowed me to build relationships with many different kids other than just the ones that liked music. Also, my leadership class helped me form strong relationships with the few that were in that class.

Faith Influence in my Field Experience

While MyZone does take place at a church and some of the adult helpers are the pastors of the church, MyZone isn't a Christian-based program. So, while I didn't explicitly share Christ with the middle-schoolers, I was still able to love them like God commands me to. Also, certain concepts that I delved into in my leadership class held certain faith elements, like servant leadership and being a good role model to those around you.

Experience's Influence on my Future Plans in Psychology

While I do love working with adolescents, I'm not sure what my future will look like in that regard. My end goal is to become a clinical psychologist and work more specifically in health psychology. This means that even though the population that I will be working with may include adolescents, it won't be focused on that demographic. While I do love this program and plan on continuing working here into graduate school, my future goals haven't been influenced by my work at MyZone.

Conclusion

All in all, MyZone is a great program to work for. If you have a heart for working with adolescents in the real world, this program may be a good fit. With many of these kids, you have the power to make a positive difference in their lives while using the gifts God has given you. It just takes time, courage, people skills, empathy, and possibly a few psychology courses to make that positive impact in their lives.