Helping High School Refugee Students Apply to and Successfully Matriculate to Colleges and Universities

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Soccer Without Borders (SWB)

SWB uses soccer as a vehicle to impact positive change in the lives of under-served youth through several programs around the globe. This organization aims to serve as a home for refugee and asylee youth and uses evidence-based and trauma-informed strategies to create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere for youth to learn, grow, and heal.

College Access Workshops Program

Many of these students will be the first in their families to go to college in the US or potentially the first to attend college at all. Thus, they may need additional guidance regarding how to successfully apply to college. The College Access program at SWB aims to provide this guidance through a series of informational workshops and one-on-one sessions where volunteers can provide personalized help to students.

Scholar Activities

- Created the curriculum, objectives, and resource database for the workshop series
- Created presentations on the application process, local colleges and universities, financial aid, scholarships, and tips for success for sophomores and juniors
- Facilitated and led six workshops, including three with guest speakers from the community
- Coordinated with a dedicated group of seven volunteers who attended workshops and worked with students

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Emily Sherman and the entire SWB staff for working with me on this service project. I would also like to thank the College Access Program volunteers for their time and commitment to our students. Lastly, I would like to express my appreciation for the SOURCE office and staff for their support throughout this project.

Project Goals

- Provide SWB students with the resources and guidance necessary to help them apply to college and eventually matriculate
- Connect SWB students with mentors in the community who will meet with them one-on-one and serve as their personal guides during the college application process
- Create a strong foundation for the College Access program at SWB so this program can be easily implemented in following years.

Accomplishments

- All twelve high school seniors in the program successfully applied to multiple colleges and were accepted to at least one college. They all also submitted their FAFSAs and qualified for substantial financial aid.
- We exceeded our goal of hosting at least one workshop per month.
- We formed relationships with staff at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC). These relationships will be helpful in the future as well.
- Volunteers enjoyed working with students and were able to have positive impacts on the students.
- I am in the process of aggregating all presentations, resources, and contacts into a final product that can be used to sustain the program in the future.

Challenges

- It was difficult to recruit the desired number of volunteers for this project.
- Our first workshop was held in October, and some applications were due in December. Thus, we had to work rapidly on a few applications that would have benefited from additional time.

Expected Deliverables and Outcomes

- Monthly workshops to help students identify colleges, complete essays and applications, apply for financial aid, and find and apply for scholarships
- Resources for sophomores and juniors to prepare for college applications early and timelines to guide them throughout high school
- Recruit and organize 12 mentors to work one-on-one with students at workshops and between sessions, as needed
- Database of resources to help students apply to colleges and ideas on how to engage students to be active participants
- Compilation of all resources, presentations, and contacts in an organized Google Drive folder to be shared with SWB for future use

Lessons Learned

- Recruiting and maintaining volunteers is a difficult process that requires sufficient time and resources. Communicating with potential volunteers through email is not enough – I should have taken the initiative to set up an information session at school to engage and recruit more volunteers.
- While applying to college is an important process for high school seniors, these students have other responsibilities and priorities as well. Thus, their application timelines must be flexible to accommodate for these additional responsibilities.
- I was constantly amazed by the resilience and strength of our students. Their personal statements and stories about their journey to the US moved me and our volunteers. I think it is important to remember our students’ experiences and use the College Access Program as a means to further their personal growth and healing as well as successfully apply to college.

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