#HELPING HOUSTON

COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT

STOCKBRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL

STOCKBRIDGE, GEORGIA

Future Business Leaders of America

2017 – 2018
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GOALS AND SERVICES IN THE COMMUNITY

Shortly after beginning the new 2017-18 school year, we were consumed for days with two words: Hurricane Harvey. From January 4th -8th, 2018, twenty-seven Stockbridge High School’s FBLA students and chaperones answered the call of those two words and flew to Houston, Texas for five days. We wanted to help people suffering from the disaster of August 29, 2017. We wanted to make a difference. Although it had happened several months earlier, we knew that there was much work to be done. Many times, because something is no longer in the news, people tend to forget while those affected continue to suffer.

The people of Houston, Texas suffered a huge devastation by Hurricane Harvey that got the attention of the entire world. Our Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) club of Stockbridge High School felt moved by the footage released by the news and decided to act with persistence and compassion to do whatever we could do to relieve some of the sufferings the residents faced after the storm. Hurricane Harvey is recorded as one of the costliest hurricanes in history, costing a total of $75 billion dollars in damage to homes, businesses, and peoples’ lives. The hurricane released 51.88 inches of rain, which was the highest amount of rainfall received from a storm in the history of the United States. This rain submerged one-third of Houston, Texas underwater and forced 39,000 people out of their homes and into shelters. As of September 5, 2017, Hurricane Harvey damaged 203,000 homes.
Most people affected by the storm returned to mold, bacteria infested homes, or to the total destruction of their houses.

Our FBLA chapter wanted to and needed to do something to help the residents affected by this tragedy. Long hours were spent in meetings trying to quantify what was possible to help and how. We could only imagine what it must mean to have to start over from the ground up. With these statistics, it became obvious that the long-term effects towards the people of this city are still existent and the more one looks into this natural disaster, the more you can feel the pain that the men and women endured during these harsh days.

Our next task was to define specific goals that would have long-term effects and could be scalable in the future. It was imperative to help in such a way that our FBLA chapter could continue to stay connected to the people and the vision of work.

**GOALS AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES TO FURTHER THE WORK STARTED:**

A. Take 40 laptops to Houston, Texas and set up a Digital Help Station where we could one-on-one assist people to retrieve important documents lost in the hurricane such as social security cards, birth certificates, driver’s license, school and medical records, property deeds, etc.
   
   a. Once back to our school of origin, we continued to be available to help by setting up an open Skype line where people needing further assistance could call our FBLA hotline for help during certain hours.
   
   b. We made sure that follow-up procedures were embedded with our plan to maximize our results.

B. Help the school children that were impacted by Hurricane Harvey stay on target with their digital literacy since thousands of dollars of electronics were destroyed as well.
a. It was necessary for us to help the students start a heat press T-shirt business so that they could become entrepreneurs and earn money.

I. Our goal was to mentor the students via Skype and instruct them on how to grow their business.

II. We also wanted to plant ‘mental seeds’ to empower students to understand self-reliance with a self-sustainable business idea that addresses particular social issues, positively impacts their community and empowers them to solve local problems in innovative ways.

Members contacted Francis Scott Key’s Middle School’s principal and set-up a day to introduce business lessons on computer coding and how to create their own T-shirt enterprise along with teaching the students how to create a business plan. Key Middle School is a 100% Title I school which means every child’s family lives below the poverty line.

RESEARCH INTO THE COMMUNITY

Instantly, it was vital to get on board with this project as soon as the brainstorming and research process began. Countless hours were spent in class and after school having meetings, getting feedback, making sure we were on the right track, sending out letters, and calling officials, listening to reports coming from Texas community leaders, etc. We knew it was critical to stay organized and to listen to the heartbeat of the people. Many Texans were still navigating their way through disaster recovery steps, especially survivors living temporarily in hotels, short-term apartment rentals, with friends and family, or in mobile homes, travel trailers or leased apartments. Some survivors with unmet needs, not covered by available financial resources, continued to require the support of local, state, federal, nonprofit and private sector partners, to provide social services and innovative long-term recovery collaboration at the local level. Our FBLA team knew
we could in some way address the needs of the people because of the knowledge we gained through our research into the community.

**Firstly:** We met with our school principal, Mr. Eric Watson, obtained his approval and explored ways that we could help – long distance. After all, Houston was about 794 miles away by car, but only 90 minutes by airplane.

**Secondly:** We contacted our Henry County Board of Education board members assigned to our school, Dr. Donna McBride and Mrs. Annette Edwards to get their input. At the meeting, we firmly committed to travel to Houston, filled out the paperwork to be approved to travel to Houston, and set in motion hours of research, meeting with officials, making phone calls, soliciting support and growing in our own student agency, i.e., taking control of our own learning by “doing.”

**Thirdly:** Watching the news, reading various newspapers, and going online became an everyday thing to find out as much as possible about the devastation in Houston; so everything that was already done would not be duplicated. For instance, the vast amounts of supplies, food, and clothing to help support was already overwhelming storm relief centers. Through our research, we found out that it happens in every disaster: people want to help, but they often donate things that turn out to be more of a burden. Truckloads of donations can actually interfere with official relief efforts. While apparently free, donated goods essentially raise the cost of the response: from collecting, sorting, packaging and shipping bulky items across long distances, to the reception, sorting, warehousing and distribution upon arrival.

Thusly, after hours of brainstorming, technological assistance seemed best. This idea came about when all the schools in our county received Chrome Book laptops – all 42,000 students. We were so fortunate and just wanted to give back. We saw that the Chrome Books could provide support in retrieving documents that were important to everyone; documents that are crucial to basic life necessities. To accomplish our goal, the team began asking around and searching for innovative ways to get the job done and contacted people that we felt would be
crucial to the overall success of our project. We talked to many sources of people ranging from the board members, superintendents, city mayor, principals, director of emergency management, to famous socialites and to Houston's Mayor-Pro-Tem to help spread the word. Even as far as talking to Houston's City Hall Representatives and assistants.

EXECUTION AND EVALUATION OF OUR RESEARCH

After narrowing down our research to the Kashmere Gardens area of Houston, District B, it was decided this was the area that needed the most help. Most of the resident were elderly and could easily be taken advantage of with the herds of house flippers swarming the neighborhoods for easy targets. Kashmere Gardens is a historically African-American community with a growing Hispanic population and one of the poorest in Houston. The median household annual income in this community averages $22,000 with 43 percent of households having an income less than $14,000. More than 55 percent of the population is unemployed or out of the workforce.

Kashmere Gardens lies just beside Hunting Bayou and was one of the first areas to flood during Hurricane Harvey. It has been in a terrible waiting game ever since. Residents watched as waters rushed into their one-story homes in the dark hours of August 26, with most waiting until daybreak to safely evacuate. Families waited for as many as eight hours. Some called 911 and waited. Others managed to wave down Houston Fire Department and garbage trucks. Many attempted to evacuate by foot. There were multiple accounts of flooding that reached residents' necks as they moved towards higher ground. Small children and the elderly were carried or pulled on improvised flotation. Parents held tight to the arms of older children who were told to paddle their feet hard. Keith Downey, incoming President of Kashmere Gardens Super Neighborhood 52, estimates that
more than 60 percent of his constituents' homes flooded. Along with the flooding went important
document and all technology.

PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

One of the FBLA national goals that are necessary for us to fulfill is to, “Develop character,
prepare for useful citizenship, and foster patriotism.” As good citizens, we felt the call to help in
some way, not only that but what our membership in FBLA required of us. Directly after the
hurricane occurred, we decided to get in touch with Dr. McBride who is a Board Member of the
Henry County Board of Education for support. Dr. McBride reached out to Hank Stewart who is
the founder of The Stewart Foundation. The Stewart Foundation Mission works to encourage a
generation of children to become influential leaders of society through a program that fosters
independence, self-pride, and respect for others, while also educating and motivating each child
to reach their ultimate potential. Hank Stewart had previously helped our school, Stockbridge High
School, by contributing business related projects and support. Mr. Stewart is also a celebrated
orator and actor.

Mr. Stewart was able to contact Ms. Thelma Johnson who works for Shell Oil in Houston.
She played a vital role in connecting us with city officials, who were instrumental in putting the
project into action. Ms. Johnson contacted the Vice Mayor Pro-Tem, Jerry V. Davis, of the City of
Houston and introduced the idea of our project along with our eagerness on how much we were
willing to participate in a community service for the residents of District B. The Vice Mayor Pro-
Tem is a council member and represents District B, which is the poorest county in Houston, Texas.

The Vice Mayor Pro-Tem being intrigued with our project, made a conference call amongst
Dr. Atkinson (our FBLA Advisor), and Dr. McBride, and his office. They spoke of the logistics of
how to serve District B in the best way possible. He expressed that the greater need was to help
people recover essential government documents lost and/or damaged in Hurricane Harvey. Also,
he added, we needed to help people be able to communicate. The victims of Hurricane Harvey moved to hotels, shelters, or with relatives. It was, therefore, important for the city to get in contact with these people.

After this conference call, the Vice Mayor Pro-Tem put us in contact with Mr. Bilal Khan who is the Director of Community Service for District B. Mr. Khan gave us other alternatives to have students install sheetrock in the houses because many were mold infested. He also mentioned helping people apply for FEMA because they lacked the proper information to correctly apply for FEMA services. Around this time, our Henry County Board of Education had supplied Chrome Books for all the 42,000 students in our county. The team figured that it would be best to put these laptops to good use if we used them on our trip to Houston, so we narrowed down our goal to creating digital literacy workshops. This was not only to teach the residents how to recover their documents, but the goal also fit into the Vice Mayor Pro-Tem's request to register people for email and social media. His desire was to create a way for residents to reconnect with their loved ones post-Hurricane Harvey.

Numerous calls were made to people and agents such as the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, Mr. Aaron Schmuhl, and Assistant Superintendent for Technology, Dr. Brian Blanton. They met with our group over a three-month period assisting and guiding through a lengthy process and loaning us 40 new laptops for the project. We also received a grant of 16 free airline tickets from Southwest Airlines and set up a Crowd Funding Account that paid handsome dividends. Robocalls, Facebook, Community Flyers and Neighbor Next-Door messages were sent out to the residents prior to our arrival in Houston. At first, the people came in very slowly, so the team was divided up and physically went out into
the streets speaking to people, sharing our good news, and leaving them with flyers. As students, it was new to us to view ourselves as privileged, yet it was gratifying to see the people pouring into the center afterward with orange flyers in their hands.

As a team, we managed to configure what was the most appropriate set-up to make the most out of our space. Even taking inspiration from the quick “in-and-out flow” at our local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)’s-type waiting room set-up and implemented that model into our Houston plan. We also talked to counselors and other hurricane survivors about how to sympathize and empathize with the residents. Conversely, it was imperative to get as many partnerships and sponsorships as possible. Despite whether we got the deal or not, we never lacked hope and faith, which helped us to persevere in our efforts, and caused us to obtain a sponsorship with one of the fellow team member’s mother with UBS bank, United Bank of Switzerland. They gave our project 100 personal information portfolios!

IMPLEMENTATION

This community service kicked off upon arrival at the Kashmere Multi-Service Center on Thursday, January 4, 2018. The center was set up according to the plans. Multiple supplies and visuals were used to set up the room used for our project. The supplies included:

- Tables
- Retractable Banners
- FBLA Banners
- 40 Chrome Books
- Orange Flyers
- 1 Printer
- Chairs
- Orange Shirts (for uniform)

We began the process of setting up the center by placing retractable banners printed with our who, what, where, when and how to message to the people right in the main corridor of the community center to direct the community to where the assistance was located. Our “Sign-In Station” contained a sign-in sheet that allowed the residents of Houston to register their name and
phone number. At the “Check-List Station”, residents filled out the type of documents they would like for us to retrieve for them. We then set up the Email Station with four Chrome Book laptops. Our “waiting station” was designed to make a comfortable space for people to wait for the next available student in the “Computer Station” located at the bottom half of the room. We placed four rows of tables with three tables each in this half of the room, and each table had two Chrome Books. This was the area used to retrieve documents and assist residents.

After setting up the Kashmere Multi-Service Center on Thursday, we started Friday and Saturday with an early morning breakfast, and were on the bus by 7am to arrive at the center by 8am. We assisted all who came through our doors offering the service to print their Driver’s License, Birth Certificate, Tax Records, Social Security, Medicare Card, Passport, Marriage License, Disability Records, W-2 AND 1099 FORM, Food Stamps, Wills, Medical Insurance, Gross income, & Education Records until 4:00pm in the afternoon. We printed all the documents and handed all of the residents who used our service a hard copy of their requested documents and a business portfolio from UBS Bank (United Bank of Switzerland) so that they could have a specific folder that contained their important papers. After Friday and Saturday, we prepared for a morning with the children from Francis Scott Key Middle School. We arrived at around 8:00 am, and gave a presentation about what it means to be in business. We began by showing a slideshow of teenage millionaires and showed them that their age has nothing to do with whether or not they have an ability to make money and become a successful business person. We hoped to spark inspiration. After we presented them with what it looks like to be in business, we split up into three groups and had the children split into three groups and placed them in a station that rotated after 30 minutes.
One station was a T-Shirt Heat-Pressing Station, where we taught kids how to heat press T-shirts. We used dry-fit shirts and instructed them how to heat press designs onto shirts. Also, the shirts we printed, as an example, to teach the children how to use the heat-presser, contained the mascots for their school, along with the name of their school. All the shirts we printed for the children were given to them as a gift, which made them very excited.

We also split into a coding station where we managed to teach children how to code using a free easy coding learning program online. We used this station to inspire or introduce to the tech-savvy children an occupation that they can start learning at their age.

The last station was known as the Business Plan station where we gave insight on how to start a business. We taught them how to make a business plan, articulate a vision, mission statements, and answered any questions the children had about what it meant to be in a business. By doing so, we showed them the benefits that come from having a business and if they take it seriously, they can have a very promising future. If they were interested in making their own business, we had every aspect of beginning one covered and answered their questions so they could carry information throughout their lives. We focused on the individual student. We sat in a more intimate setting and really got into detail about personal experience. In the long run, we knew it would stick more with the kids if we showed interest and gave feedback. The old saying, “Kids don’t care how much you know until they know
how much you care,” is still very true. The kids opened up more it did not feel like they were in yet another school setting. We expressed that they have more options to explore in this crucial phase of life.

At the end of the workshops, the students gathered and were informed that the heat-presser used will be given to them as a gift so that they can make shirts themselves and sell them to start their own T-shirt enterprise. The school was appreciative to have received such a gift.

**PUBLICITY**

We received numerous amounts of publicity and we are thankful and appreciative. Memorable moments, such as when Mayor Sylvester Thomas, commended us with a stunning press conference and photo opportunity. Upon our arrival in our home state, we presented our project to our school’s faculty, staff, and board of education members.

Our local newspaper, “Henry Neighbor” published an article detailing our community service. In addition, our efforts were published in various social media platforms and accounts. We also publicized our project and gained tremendous support from our local and worldwide community through donations from GoFundMe.com. The Henry County Board of Education contacted us for more information and is including our community service in its publicity arsenal.
Click on the following video to see highlights in detail of our experience. This video presentation was compiled by our FBLA videography team.

[HOUSTON VIDEO.mp4]

**BENEFITS AND DEGREE OF IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY**

The city of Houston, Texas accepted us with open arms. As the word spread, local businesses and restaurants treated us to free meals allowing us to order anything on the menu. This happened every day; we were so grateful that we did not have to pay for one meal.

One resident said, “I didn’t have any licenses and I didn’t know what to do. I want to thank y’all so much for coming- everybody’s gone- FEMA-everybody, but y’all are here to help.”

The president and CEO of Owens Management Systems LLC (a pre-development land service for residential and commercial builders), Ms. Joyce Owens, noticed that we were a group of teenagers in the mayor’s office and offered to assist us in our efforts. Totally unexpectedly, she came to our headquarters and presented our advisor with a Visa card for five hundred dollars- what a surprise, what an honor, and what a blessing!

One of the greatest impacts of all is that The Vice Mayor’s Office gave us a Proclamation, naming January 8, 2018, Stockbridge High School day in Houston, Texas.
The Vice Mayor’s Officer also presented each student with a personal Proclamation.

EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

#Helping Houston was an excellent project. The community service fits into the “Personally Learning” goals of our school district. Our school has a strong commitment to creating personalized learning opportunities for students. By involving the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching, Learning, and Instructional Technology in our vision early on, this project perfectly fits the foundation for personalized learning that rests on two core beliefs: one - that students should have agency in their learning and two - that schools, supported by the district, should have autonomy in determining how each of the tenets is implemented.

We believe we met the goal of student agency. As students, we are encouraged to take our own ownership of learning and not accept passive participation in the learning experience. As FBLA students, we are keenly aware of our strengths, needs, wants, and goals, and are clear on learning expectations and how to meet them and are resourceful learners who seek information and build skills we need to be successful in college, career, and life. #Helping Houston afforded the opportunity to grow like never before. If we were to change anything, it would be to find more effective ways to ‘teach people how the fish’ so that they are able to break the bonds of poverty.

It is our further goal to set up a bi-weekly Skype Digital workshop where patrons can call in for further assistance if necessary. We also hope to continue a great relationship with our young entrepreneurs at Key Middle School and help them to grow into strong entrepreneurs.