

More Than Just Volunteering – Chippewa Valley Free Clinic

Authored by: Dina Guralski (S-L Office & Publicity Assistant)

When I interviewed the Chippewa Valley Free Clinic a few weeks ago, I learned about the service-learning opportunities they offer from the organization's perspective. But while there I was introduced to Chris Maierhofer, one of the student volunteers who spent a lot of time there. We talked about how he graduated from UW-Eau Claire and is now waiting to get into medical school. He shared with me how he had started out as a volunteer and was then offered an internship; however, when his internship ended, he still came back to volunteer. He loves spending time at the clinic and was very enthusiastic about the work he does there. I knew right away that his service-learning experience would make a great, motivational story for other students!

As an intern and volunteer some of Chris's daily tasks include volunteer coordination, communicating with volunteers, figuring out the volunteer schedule and making sure all shifts are filled, writing press releases, and also creating and writing the newsletter for the clinic. Not only is Chris gaining experience in marketing, public relations, and miscellaneous office work, but on the medical side of things, he is able to shadow physicians and learn basic medical skills.

As our interview went on, Chris told me what his thoughts were on the overall experience. He said, "It was like the most important thing I did during college. It taught me a lot about professionalism, how to dress professionally and how to conduct emails and talk on the phone. Being in an environment where you're with volunteers all the time and you're in a service-oriented position, not only do you feel awesome when you're actually able to help somebody out, but we have people coming in every week that need healthcare and through all our combined work we can facilitate them getting better. Doing that, and also facilitating other volunteers to do that, is awesome!"

Chris also shared how he was personally strengthened because of his experience, "When I first started out I was very idealistic as most are when they do their first volunteer work thinking that I could fix healthcare, everyone is going to get service, and everyone's going to be fine. And then you realize how hard it is and you have to learn how to deal with problems that come up and learn how to get along with everybody. So, these skills were definitely strengthened."

Chris has learned many things during his time at the clinic, but he shared two very important things that he feels others should know. “It’s not just being fired up about something, but you learn how to continue being fired up. You can stay motivated and you can keep the ideals that you think are important, but you need to figure out how to make them last in the long run. And the other thing is that someday I would like to run a clinic or hospital, but I don’t want it to be like a regular one. I want to help people become well and then some. Working at the clinic has emphasized how important it is to do more whole-person thinking in treatment of illness.”

And his final take home message: “There are endless possibilities for service-learning projects at the clinic and they are things that would look great on a resume. Service-learning is a vital part of education. The first volunteer experience when you really get psyched and you really feel like you’re doing something important; you can’t fake that. And it gets you thinking about life in a different way, so I think it’s important for people to do.”

*If this sounds like a service-learning project for you be sure to check out the clinic’s webpage for more volunteer information: <http://www.cvfreeclinic.org/>

*And also don’t forget to visit the Service-Learning webpage for helpful information regarding projects!

<http://www.uwec.edu/SL/>