

For approximately five years, sophomores in our IBMYP program have covered a unit on Power and Responsibility in Language A. In class, the students consider the extent to which an individual has the power and/or the responsibility to create change in his or her society by reading texts by individuals who have exercised their power through writing – portions of “Civil Disobedience” by Thoreau, portions of speeches by Gandhi, and the entirety of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”. After reading these works, students then practice using their voices to work toward change by writing a research-based argument letter to an elected official, attempting to convince the letter’s recipient to take a particular stance or make a particular change on an issue of importance to the student. Finally, the unit culminates with a community service project, where the students work together, mostly outside of class time, to choose a cause of global concern and help make a difference for that cause.

Throughout the history of the unit, students have worked hard on the community service projects and donated thousands of dollars to organizations that work for safe disposal of landmines, African AIDS education and relief, alleviation of global poverty, rebuilding efforts after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunamis, etc. However, while the issues that the students chose to work on each year are far-reaching and important, for a group of teenagers from Colorado, they are all very far from home. Instead of actually watching themselves make a change in the world, all the students could do was raise money and send it off, hoping that their efforts would make a difference.

When we received funding from IBARMS to help with this project last year, we saw the extra funds as an exciting resource to help expand the project into one where students simultaneously work to serve and build community locally as well as raise money to help with causes internationally. For the first time in the history of the project, instead of merely planning an event in which the students participated to raise money, the students planned an event for the entire community. The project evolved into the Palmer High School Community Festival, a festival open to and planned for all members of the community of all ages. The IBARMS funding allowed us to purchase supplies for such a festival beforehand, and then the students voted to donate all proceeds from the festival to Doctors Without Borders. In this way, the project became an intergenerational event for the Colorado Springs community as well as a benefit for international medical aid.

Students planned the Community Festival for an afternoon in early May. After some frustrating attempts to reserve spaces in city parks to hold the festival, students decided to hold the event on the school campus, inviting the community to come see the school and to share our space. Plans were made for a variety of activities to be held in both indoor and outdoor spaces, including crafts and games for children, an art show and competition for student artists from the school, a Guitar Hero competition for teens, live music for all ages, and plenty of food.

The students quickly learned, however, that sparking interest in the community is much more difficult than sparking interest in those who have been working on the project since its inception, and a community event was much more difficult to plan than an event for MYP students alone. Announcements were made at the school, fliers were printed and distributed at our school and several others around town, information was posted in local businesses, details were announced on the local NPR station, and blurbs were posted on online community calendars hosted by local television stations and newspapers. Nonetheless, those planning the event struggled to generate

interest among other students in the parts of the festival geared toward teenagers, let alone generate excitement in the community as a whole.

Despite frustration over planning hiccups and publicity problems, students worked tirelessly to put the project together, working for hours after school and during lunch breaks to solicit donations from local businesses, make decorations, line up bands to play, purchase every supply they imagined they could possibly need, recruit adult and student volunteers to help run booths, bake food at home to sell, communicate with the school facilities staff to coordinate use of tables, chairs, and sound equipment, and continue to try to spread the word to the community. By the night before the festival, the students felt like they were ready to go, and they were excited.

The event itself, however, was frustrating for the students. The weather was cold and windy, and not many people were in the mood for an outdoor event. Students found that they were more interested in playing together and participating in the activities than responsibly managing the events for others; as a result, they made a lot of money from MYP students, but sometimes put off other participants, because student workers had abandoned their stations. Miscommunication with the bands who were performing meant no publicity had gone out to their fan bases, and so the bands didn't pull in the audience the students had expected. Students who got cold or ate too much would give up and go home, and students who had worked hard to plan well got frustrated with the lack of follow through on the part of others. The leaders of the event decided to shut down an hour early, and only a few cold, overworked, bedraggled teens stayed to help clean up.

In all, the students spent nearly all of the IBARMS funds for expenses they incurred in planning for the festival and buying supplies beforehand. After the festival was over, they donated leftover food and supplies to a local soup kitchen and had made just over \$2000 to donate to Doctors Without Borders. The students made less money to donate than has been made in most previous years of the project, but, as a teacher, I watched them work harder on this project than on previous years' and learn much more from their experience, both in terms of what it takes to plan a complicated event and what it looks like to serve the community. Students told me that, even when they were frustrated with the weather, the difficulty of making arrangements, or the attitudes of their friends, they learned more than they had thought possible about event planning and true community service.

We, as a school community, are grateful for the funding from IBARMS that helped make this project possible. Without financial resources beforehand, this project could never have taken the shape it did with all the supplies and publicity that needed to be paid for in advance. Because of the IBARMS funding, students were finally able to reach out to their own community as a part of this project, bringing people from all directions onto campus, enhancing the relationship between school and city, and then sending resources from the school and the community out into areas of need around the world. Thank you.