Steaming Cup of Love

In the fall semester of 2008, students were asked to start brainstorming some ideas for an upcoming Service Learning assignment in their Small Group Communication course. After the elementary school pen pals and the non-perishable can collectors were established, one lone group remained, unsure as to what they might contribute to the assignment and the community as a whole. They bounced around ideas of reading programs and community beautification projects. After some discussion, several members of the group realized they shared commonality in their love for music.

“Let’s host a benefit concert,” suggested one member of the group.
“…And the proceeds will go to a deserving family right here in Weatherford,” added another. “The money can help pay for their Christmas.” Soon, the ball was rolling.

Two students volunteered to play their guitars and sing. Another offered her fiddle to the mix. The other members of the group gladly agreed to spearhead the administrative duties. They decided to call the project A Steaming Cup of Love.

On the night of the concert, students piled into the small coffee house on Main Street. Flyers and Facebook groups had been circulating for two weeks and had obviously been effective in getting the word out. As the band played, members of the audience were invited to put money in the basket placed in the center of the room. Two hours passed as they laughed and sang together. The concert was a blast and far exceeded everyone’s expectations.

As the night came to a close, the performers made one last plea for pocket change. The dollar bills seemed to multiply as the group members counted the money. No one could believe that almost three hundred dollars were raised!

Over the next few days, the group members visited local businesses telling them of the concert’s success and their worthy cause. Many were eager to contribute. They collected gift certificates for haircuts, groceries, restaurants, and toys. The gift basket was assembled and taken to the elementary school where arrangements for pick-up had been made. As planned, the designated group member left the basket at the desk while the school secretary dialed the unidentified recipient.

“There’s a package here for you ma’am,” she smiled. “I didn’t see who dropped it off.” When the single mother arrived at the school to pick up her three little boys and mysterious package, she found over $500 in money and gift certificates. There was no note or return address; just an anonymous Christmas gift. To this day, the group members love to wonder about her reaction to the basket and to that of the boys on Christmas morning. Though they will probably never know each other, both were changed with A Steaming Cup of Love.

“When I was given this assignment, I had no idea it would affect me or my classmates so deeply. To this day, I am humbled and moved by the generosity of my peers and community as well as the overwhelming success of A Steaming Cup of Love.

I believe that universities everywhere should more actively pursue the inclusion of Service Learning within their curriculum. Not only does it provide opportunities to better individuals and their communities, it is a practical way for students to take the lessons they are learning within the classroom and apply them to the world they will soon lead.”

-Jonna May Jr., Southwestern Oklahoma State University A Steaming Cup of Love, Group Member