

Neighborhood House AmeriCorps Member Stories of Service Fall 2014

Raven Hughes Youth Tutor – Seola Gardens

My name is Raven Hughes. I'm an Americorps Youth Tutor at Neighborhood House Seola Gardens Youth Tutoring and Resource center. I serve in a mixed-income housing development in White Center. Our population consists largely of refugees from Somalia and Iraq. I hope that my service in the tutoring center will help students gain some necessary skills to succeed in their lives, and help build a better future for the next generation.

For both the students and the staff at Seola Gardens it has been a pretty tumultuous beginning of the school year. Both me and Chan, the other AmeriCorps youth tutor, began our terms at Seola in September. In addition, the new site supervisor also came on board. So the kids had three new faces in their center. Meeting the kids and getting to know one another has been a big focus of ours. Building strong relationships and establishing a fun and positive atmosphere are two of our core goals at the center. An important tool we're using to reach these goals is having meaningful and engaging programming.

This quarter our K-5th graders theme for their project based learning (PBL) is everyday heroes, such as firemen, nurses, EMTs and lifeguards. We're looking at how to keep safe and help other people be safe in dangerous situations. We're focusing on scenarios that our students may see in their everyday lives, such as fires, swimming safety, first aid and earthquakes. Through lessons, activities and interactive discussion, we are helping the students gain an understanding of the best way to approach these dangerous situations. One way we wanted to effectively engage students in the project was with field trips and guest speakers. I have some friends who are lifeguards, so I figured they would be a fun and informative group to have talk to the kids.

It turned out to be an awesome time. The kids loved it. The often rambunctious and noisy students were perched on their chairs, absorbed in the lesson of the three lifeguards. They did a lesson on pool and beach safety, going over basic rules and guidelines. After the talk, the kids got to practice putting on life jackets and using flotation devices. It was pretty hilarious, especially with the kindergarteners and first graders. The lifeguards did a great job engaging the students with a mix of lecture, discussion and activities.

This experience was a great example of how to build successful programming. We integrated engaging activities and meaningful content. Providing students with background information and skills, and then having them relearn it in a more interactive and real-world condition is a great way to create effective learning. I wish we could have guest speakers like this every day, but it is important to have a balance of different types of learning, within the PBL unit. These situations are also ideal for giving students the chance to really present their poise and intelligence. It's great to see how students step up with their behavior and their brainpower, when they're more invested in a situation.



Raven Hughes preparing youth to present their rules on safety