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Student Finds Niche in Community Service

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Monica Nelson, with her love for helping others, has found her niche in community service. When she was a sophomore, she organized a fundraiser for Henderson House, a shelter for victims of domestic violence in Yamhill County. This experience ignited her passion for service, and she continued to engage in various projects throughout her college career.

When it comes to community service, Monica Nelson’s actions speak for themselves. As a sophomore, she became president of the SPURS honor society, an organization involved in a Habitat for Humanity building project. As Zeta Tau Alpha philanthropy chair, she organized the Duck Derby on campus to raise money for breast cancer research and education. When it comes to community service, Monica Nelson knows that “I just love to do all different types of service,” Nelson said.

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Monica Nelson began working with Henderson House during her internship there last year. Nelson combined her interests in social work, psychology, and Spanish language for the position.

“Monica’s experiences with Henderson House have not only taught her about working for a non-profit organization, but have also affected her life. I have always known domestic violence is a reality, but when I worked at Henderson House, I saw it firsthand,” Nelson said. “It has made me all the more passionate about wanting to do something about domestic violence and work in an area of social services.”

Nelson’s work at Henderson House has led to an interest in psychology and social work. “I want to work with organizations like Henderson House are usually thankless,” Nelson said. “But the work that they do is so necessary and important to the communities we live in.”

Nelson’s experiences with Henderson House have changed her perspective on community service. “My first year, I was working with Henderson House and volunteering there, and then I realized that I wanted to do more,” Nelson said. “I knew I wanted to make a difference, but I wasn’t sure how to do it. Then I found Henderson House and I knew that this was where I wanted to be.”

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Local youth recently found out health can be all fun and games during an after-school nutrition and physical activity program at Linfield College. Twice a week, eager young participants upped fruit smoothies or munched “ants on a log” (peanut butter, raisins and celery) during hands-on nutrition lessons before heading out to play. There were scavenger hunts, slip-and-slides, traditional sports and swimming games.

The program, developed by Janet Peterson, assistant professor of health and human performance and recent winner of the Samuel I. Graf Faculty Achievement Award, focused on helping children live a healthy lifestyle. Participants ranged in age from 7 to 18. The single most important element to improving kids’ health, “Getting moving,” said Julie O’Neil ‘07, this year’s program coordinator. She knows active children are more likely to feel good about themselves and perform better at school.

“Every child should learn the importance of living a healthy lifestyle,” said O’Neil, who will pursue a master’s in public health promotion at Oregon State University in the fall. “It’s important to get them out playing and enjoying activity.”

With guidance from Peterson, more than 20 Linfield students ran the program, gaining practical experience outside the classroom in addition to serving the community. They performed fitness evaluations and prescribed an exercise regimen for each child. Enrolment has nearly doubled from 17 to 32 since Kendra Victor ‘05 led the first project in 2005. Although it initially targeted overweight youth in the community, the program is now geared to all kids, stressing a healthy lifestyle.

“Two of this year’s most energetic participants were 7-year-old twins Emily and Megan DeYoung, daughters of Bill and Amy (Chan) DeYoung, ’89 and ’87. The twins love both soccer and tennis, but their parents know that’s not enough. “We want to encourage them to choose to be active during the down time instead of watching television or being on the computer,” said Amy, an accounting clerk at Linfield.

Henderson House has served survivors of domestic and sexual violence in Yamhill County and surrounding counties since 1981, providing more than 35,000 shelter nights to women, men and children. For more information or to seek help, contact the following organizations.

Henderson House
www.hendersonhouse.org

National Domestic Violence Hotline
www.ndvh.org/educate/index.html

Family Violence Prevention Fund
www.endabuse.org

National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence
http://www.ncdsv.org

Tips for healthy families

• Make cooking an activity and eat at the table as a family.
• Make fun snacks, such as trail mix or fruit-kabobs.
• When baking, use applesauce instead of oil or butter and use whole-wheat flour.
• Make homemade pizza with lots of veggies.
• Avoid fast food, or choose a grilled chicken burger or salad.
• Ride a bike or walk to school.
• Join a sports team.

Students Emily, left, and Megan DeYoung take part in a wheelbarrow race with the help of Janet Peterson, left, and Julie O’Neil ‘07.

Julie O’Neil ‘07, left, and Janet Peterson, assistant professor of health and human performance, increased the importance of exercise and nutrition during an afterschool program for youth. The program culminated with a one-mile Fun Run coordinated by the Order of Omega, Linfield’s Greek honor society, on May 6.

“The fact that Monica is always willing to do anything to help is amazing,” said Rhonda Fabreth, executive director of Henderson House. “We need more volunteers like her who are willing to lighten our load so we can focus on helping our clients.”

This spring Nelson participated in the 30-hour Henderson House volunteer training, which allowed her to interact one-on-one with clients. She took part in a fundraiser organized by the Order of Omega Honor Society collecting donations at home basketball games for “A Generation of Change,” which was a benefit for Henderson House.

Nelson’s actions speak for themselves. “Monica’s experiences with Henderson House have not only taught her about working for a non-profit organization, but have also affected her life. I have always known domestic violence is a reality, but when I worked at Henderson House, I saw it firsthand,” Nelson said. “It has made me all the more passionate about wanting to do something about domestic violence and work in an area of social services.”

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By the time she reached her senior year, Nelson, a sociology and Spanish major, wanted to find an internship that involved helping others and did not confine her to an office. “I wanted to be working directly with people as much as possible,” she said.

While surfing the Internet, she found Henderson House, an organization that provides services to victims of domestic and sexual abuse and maintains a shelter in McMinnville for women and children escaping abuse. Here, Nelson knew she could put her Spanish language skills to use and help people.

Nelson began working with Henderson House in the summer of 2006. She organized donations, worked at fundraisers, provided child care for the children living in the shelter, transported clients and helped with renovations to the shelter.

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Nelson’s experiences with Henderson House have not only taught her about working for a non-profit organization, but have also affected her life. “I have always known domestic violence is a reality, but listening to people’s stories has been really personal to me,” Nelson said. “It has made me all the more passionate about wanting to do something about domestic violence and work in an area of social services.”

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But with cutbacks in physical education classes and the growth of the video game industry, today’s youth often don’t get the recommended 60 minutes of daily activity. And, Peterson said, 70 percent of overweight kids are likely to become overweight adults.

“If we can give them tools to make good decisions now, we can also work on adult obesity as well,” she said.

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