

USU Students Reach Out to Retirement Community

04/07/2017



The start of a new semester usually means meeting new people, but a team of dietetic students didn't expect to make over two dozen new friends, all old enough to be their grandparents. But several months and one figurative trip around the world later, that's exactly what happened.

Twelve Utah State University dietetic students created and implemented a health and wellness program at a Logan retirement center as a part of their capstone projects. Twice a month during spring semester the students visited their "grandfriends" at the Williamsburg Retirement Community and taught topics relating to self-care and longevity. The students were led by Tamara Steinitz, a professional practice professor in the Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Sciences Department.

"I jumped at the chance to lead this project because it teaches the students practical skills while also giving back to the community," Steinitz said.

Titled "Living Life in the Blue Zones," the presentations focused on the lifestyle and the environment of the places where the longest-lived people are found. With inspiration from towns designated as "Blue Zones" like Sardinia, Italy, and Okinawa, Japan, the students taught about the habits and diets that lead to longer, healthier lives. The "grandfriends" had the chance to practice relaxation and mindfulness techniques, discuss the importance of having a "tribe," practice creativity and sample food from around the world.

"What these students are teaching fits perfectly with our mission of health and wellness here," said Rachel Bott, the recreation therapy director at the Williamsburg Retirement Community. "We always look forward to having them visit us. They've really instilled a sense of community here."

The students are enrolled in the dietetics practicum class, which is a service-learning course. Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates community service with instruction and reflection in order to enrich learning experiences, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities. Service-learning courses give students the opportunity to apply course materials and professional skills.

"In most classes, you're just told what to do," said Aubree Blackner, a student in the course. "It's a completely different experience to create something from scratch. With this project, we get to be creative and we get to see the results of our efforts. It's really been a growing experience."

The students involved in the project include Shawnel Stacy, Linzy Peterson, Mary Ann Jorgensen, Brooke James, Anna-Marie White, Shelley Heap, Lea Palmer, Liz King, Aubree Blackner, Kelly Gibbons, Marianne Olsen and Sandra Reynolds.

More information about USU's Department of Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Sciences can be found at <http://ndfs.usu.edu/>.

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