

**SUVO Bed-Build Reflection**

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March 22, 2024

## **Introduction**

On February 23, Sleep in Heavenly Peace, a nonprofit organization with a mission of “No Kid Sleeps on the Floor in Our Town,” collaborated with the Syracuse University Volunteer Organization (SUVO) for an on-campus volunteer event. 110 volunteers (88 of whom were students) gathered and built 44 beds from scratch to be delivered to children in the Syracuse area currently without a bed. While planning this event I strengthened my leadership, organization, communication and interpersonal skills. Yet, positivity was the skill that brought everything together.

Truthfully, I did not realize how ambitious the bed-build project was when I started. Launching a new on-campus event with a nonprofit organization at a large institution involves working with many people. Securing the funding, seeking approval from campus leaders, promoting the event and generating news coverage was a lot to balance; however, mindset was everything. This event was not about me, it was about the children who would receive a bed for the first time. My passion and enthusiasm for the mission not only helped facilitate a smooth event but hopefully also inspired those around me to invest their best efforts.

## **Successes**

I can only describe the actual event as surreal. The excitement was palpable. The energy was electric. The hands-on aspect of volunteering created a joy among volunteers. It was more than just the fun of building beds, it was the reason behind it.

I was overwhelmed with support from students at the university as many student groups eagerly reached out to get involved once funding was approved and promotion began. This reaction made me proud to be a Syracuse student. It reinforced my belief students want to be engaged but just may not know where to start. Opportunities such as this may help students spark relationships with community partners that ultimately become long lasting.

This event would not have been possible without my advisor Kathryn Bradford. Her continuous support during the process was invaluable. Meeting with her nearly every day to review my progress and brainstorm strategies for the event’s success gave me the confidence and empowerment I needed to move forward. I am eternally grateful to have a mentor with as much patience, compassion and leadership skills as Kathryn embodies.

Additionally, the fact that so many leaders at Sleep in Heavenly Peace were connected to SU proved to be beneficial. SHP Co-President, Jeff Pitt, and Build Manager, Dave Hoalcraft, had a rich understanding of how the university works and were patient with me as I navigated logistics.

About halfway through the building, as students grew weary, Dave gave a speech to volunteers about the way they were changing these children’s lives. This talk reignited the passion in the

students as they returned to work. I think this break was needed and should be done at any future building events.

Another success was the support from the Shaw Center Leadership Interns and SUVO members who infused an abundance of excitement into the event. It truly takes a village: a village that the Shaw Center has built into an incredible team of motivated individuals passionate about community engagement.

Not only did I learn how to balance a heavy workload, I also learned how to ask for help. I learned how to delegate tasks to my peers who were there to back me up and support me through every step of this process.

### **Challenges**

While the event was a success, there were a few challenges along the way. Applying for funding was not a simple process. It took some time to navigate how to break up each section of the budget application because there are limits to the funding that can be asked for in each. Working with RSO Consultant, Mackenzie Jackson, and finance board member, Deji Owoseni, was a great help as SUVO asked for just about the maximum amount of funding it was eligible to apply for.

The most difficult part of the budget process was the estimated attendance. Parts of the budget cannot exceed \$45 per student. This meant that SUVO needed to try and recruit at least 100 volunteers to the build when SHP normally works with between 35-40 volunteers. This begs the question, how do we support a community partner without overwhelming them?

To manage this influx of volunteers SUVO partnered with another volunteer organization, Brighten a Day to set up a letter-writing station where participants could take a break from building beds and write letters to seniors in the Syracuse community. However, in future events other solutions may be considered.

At a future bed-build, shifts could be set for volunteers. This could help prevent overwhelming SHP with students and give more space in SkyBarn.

As I previously mentioned, I was overwhelmed with support from students. So many people were interested in signing up for the bed-build that we actually had a wait list! A great problem to have. Navigating these challenges allowed for personal growth in resilience, flexibility and effective problem-solving.

### **Conclusion**

I believe this event has the potential to grow into something even larger. Interest from students is clearly there! However, SUVO is already at about the maximum funding that can be requested.

In order to grow in size, SUVO could collaborate with other organizations or could seek out new sponsors for the event.

Overall, the collaboration between Sleep in Heavenly Peace and the Syracuse University Volunteer Organization for this bed-build was a remarkable testament to the power of community engagement. Through planning, dedication and the invaluable support of my mentors and peers, we were able to make a difference in the lives of children in need within the Syracuse area. I am excited for what comes next!

In reflecting on the journey of organizing and executing this event, I am filled with a profound sense of gratitude and pride. As I witnessed Syracuse students come together in support of a common cause, I was reminded of the beautiful potential we possess to enact positive change in the community we live in. Moving forward, I carry with me not only the memories of the build but also a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to serving others. I am inspired by the difference we have made and am eager to continue the work we have started.