

2025 Bed Build Reflection

Introduction

On Friday, February 21, more than 200 volunteers gathered at Skybarn on South Campus to build beds for children in the greater Syracuse area currently sleeping on the floor. This event, in collaboration with nonprofit Sleep in Heavenly Peace (SHP), was a powerful example of what joining forces can do to drive impact and change.

This year's event was a 100% increase from last year's build. The volunteer numbers doubled from 100 to 200 and the beds built doubled from 44 to 88. This significant increase did not happen by chance. It was the result of relentless effort, strategic planning and the unwavering commitment of the students at Syracuse University.

Overcoming Challenges

Reflecting on last year's event, I thought I had already learned some of the biggest lessons. The 2023 build was an uphill battle. I had to balance logistics and seek approval from campus leadership for an event that had never been done before at Syracuse University. After navigating this and seeing the event succeed, I assumed this year's planning would be smooth sailing. *How naive.* The 2024 event pushed me beyond what I thought were my limits.

As soon as the school year began, I learned that the Student Association would likely be able to fund less than half of what they had contributed to the build last year. Devastated by this news, I was determined to raise the necessary funds to make the build happen again. Though I had a vision of doubling the event size, I knew I had to take it one step at a time.

Initially, I considered seeking sponsorships from local businesses. However, upon reflection, I realized that one of the most special parts of this event was student involvement. Last year, I was overwhelmed by the support from students, and this year, that enthusiasm only grew. As the school year began, people I barely knew started messaging me, asking when the build would happen and how they could help. The event had caught on like wildfire.

Rather than seeking corporate sponsors, I decided to focus on student organization sponsorships. By keeping the fundraising efforts within the university, we empowered students to take action. The cost of a bed is \$250. This includes the wood, nails, mattress, sheets, comforter, pillow and a blanket. The pitch to student groups was simple: for every \$250 you raise, that is another child who no longer has to sleep on the floor. The groups then coordinated their own fundraising efforts to try and sponsor as many beds as possible. This approach fostered a sense of unity and collaboration across campus. Student groups, including Kappa Theta Pi, alpha Kappa Delta Phi, Alpha Phi Omega, Oxfam, the Franklin Supply Chain Club, Delta Sigma Pi, and the Hillel Center all joined in to sponsor beds. In just two months, we raised \$16,555 through donations from 245 individual donors. This strategy allowed students to engage directly and see the impact of their contributions.

It takes a village to do this type of work. Having seven student groups fundraise on SUVO's behalf led to something truly special. However, as is often the case in nonprofit work, anticipated funding sources do not always come through. In addition to what we had fundraised, I had been counting on additional funding from the Student Association. However, due to complications in the fiscal process our funding request and space request were ultimately denied. This decision crushed me. I remember crying in Professor Nina Brown's office, feeling like every effort I made was met with another roadblock. In distress, I told her that if this was what nonprofit work was like, I wasn't sure I was cut out for it. She looked me in the eyes and said, *Claire, the fact that you are still fighting, the fact that you have not given up, is proof that you belong in this field. We need people like you.* Inspired by her words, I picked myself up and decided to find another way.

Collaborating with the Student Association ultimately became a lesson in advocacy. I had to navigate fiscal codes, have difficult conversations and balance peer relationships while staying focused on the greater goal. In the end, SUVO was able to reserve the space again and partnered with SA's "Spring Into Action" initiative to secure an additional \$5,500. This was a hard-fought victory, but one that reinforced an important lesson: persistence pays off.

Legacy

Moving forward to host future bed builds, the biggest challenge is going to be funding. To navigate this, the budget request to Student Association must be perfect. Working closely with Student Engagement Consultant, Mackenzie Jackson, will be a huge asset while ensuring a strong proposal. Additionally, maintaining and expanding collaboration across campus will be key to sustaining this event. Partnering with student organizations, recruiting new groups and involving more students in the planning process will help streamline logistics and create a foundation for long-term success.

Most importantly, for this event to continue, the students leading it must believe in themselves. We, as students, are capable of incredible things. We are surrounded by a network of faculty and staff eager to support us. SHP provides a well-structured framework that makes execution seamless. I have full confidence in my peers to carry this mission forward, and I am excited to see how this event continues to grow and impact the Syracuse community in the years to come.

Conclusion

When I first began planning the 2025 build, I naively thought it would be easy. I chuckle now at that thought. Nothing about this process was simple but the challenges were worth it. Standing at the event, witnesses the hundreds of students, a multitude of media outlets and a palpable joy in the air: I have never been filled with such pride in my community. The event was a culmination of six months of hard work. Events like this do not happen overnight. You must be dedicated in your efforts. *And we did it!*

I do not have time in this reflection to list out every roadblock. But also, I do not have time in this reflection to list out all the wins and successes. The highs were high, and the lows were low. But what remained constant was the support of my community. I am forever grateful for the Mary Ann Shaw Center, Sleep in Heavenly Peace, my professors, family, peers and friends for their unwavering love and help throughout this process.

Organizing the bed build has been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my life. Project management demands organization, time management and strategic communication. It requires building relationships and rallying others around a shared vision. But more than anything, it demands relentlessness: the willingness to push forward despite setbacks, to seek new solutions when doors close and to keep fighting with the bigger picture in mind.

This event reinforced my belief that meaningful change happens when people come together. As I move forward, I will carry these lessons with me knowing that with determination and collaboration I can continue to create meaningful change wherever my path leads.

This event was never just about building beds... it was about proving that students can drive real change. And if we can do this, what else is possible?

- Claire Ceccoli
President, Syracuse University Volunteer Organization