

Project Sunny Day

By Linda Brown

Students in the Culinary Arts program complete a variety of service projects through our curriculum. The following describes one of many projects created to benefit elderly and disabled citizens -- Project Sunny Day. [Best practices:](#)

- The students discovered that there are many elderly and housebound citizens with special needs. In collaboration with a local church, the students chose to prepare a nutritious hot lunch once a month for a group of senior citizens. The group members have grown to love the food, the nourishment, fellowship, and the youth that prepare it.
- Numerous food preparation skills are required in the curriculum. The students plan the menus around the skills that need to be met to complete the required units. For example, if the class has not completed the pasta unit, they may select stuffed ravioli for the entree that month. The monthly luncheon actually helps complete the curriculum as there is a direct need for preparation mastery.
- The students reflect often throughout the project. They express great excitement to be able to serve this special population. The students always express a desire to attend to all details as the audience is so receptive. Every dinner is recognized with notes and thanks from the guests. One guest writes, "That was a really good meal!! I ate every bit of it!" Many of those who attend the Sunny Day Lunch live alone and can do minimal cooking so you can understand how much the tender roast beef, green bean casserole with cheese and crouton topping, along with the roasted potatoes and carrots, tasty apple salad, cheese and plain rolls were enjoyed and nutritionally good for them. Another guest wrote, "thank you for sharing your skills with us, we are eagerly looking forward to next time." Reflection builds confidence and purpose for the students.
- The student responsible for the menu plan follows through with a detailed work schedule including assignments for each class member to accomplish toward the goal of a completed dinner. Included in this plan are shopping and skill lists so that all resources are present on the given day. Students must be responsible to prepare the appropriate number of servings of high quality food, ready at a given time.
- This project requires a partnership with a local nearby church. Retired members of the church provide the transportation to pick up the people who are shut-in and elderly attendees. The meal is funded in a combination effort between the church and students. The students use monies earned from catering other events outside the school day to help support the food supply needs. The church members also come to the school and pick up the food as the students do not have the flexibility to leave.
- In this project, students are involved in several stages of planning. Students plan the menu items, keeping in mind the special needs of their audience. Appropriate food choices are made. Students plan menus according to the time of year and any special holiday that may be close. Students plan ways and means for presentation that will stand transportation. Time and lab schedules are planned so that all food items are ready and at their prime for a specific pick up time.
- After menus are planned, students identify what skills and expertise are need to add to their existing knowledge bases. The instructor plans lessons and demonstrates for student preparation. Practice and preparation follow. Students are also equipped with knowledge about the special needs of the population they are serving. The Sunny Day Luncheon project provides the perfect venue to teach a variety of skills as the

menu is left up to the students. The students develop empathy for their guests and look forward to the monthly activity. The guests physically, mentally, and emotionally benefit from the event. The project year culminates as the students and Sunny Dayers get together for the last fellowship of the season. From the anticipation of the visit to the bus trip back to school, the interaction is great. Everyone wins in a great service-learning project.