

# Rich/Collins CLIF Grant Report

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## **Narrative**

This past semester has been a journey with my Rich/Collins project. I have learned so much about the challenges and obstacles to implement a unique service project that has never been seen before on the Brandeis campus. The goal or the objective of my project was to raise awareness about animal shelters in the Brandeis and Waltham community. Before I even returned to campus for the spring semester in January, I was already starting the process of implementing my vision for the project. My initial project had four parts including: (1) a supply drive, (2) a day of service at Prospect Hill Kids Club, (3) a documentary screening, and (4) a day of service at Buddy Dog Humane Society (Sudbury, MA). I am happy and proud to say that I was successfully able to implement three of those four events.

The success of my Rich/Collins project was greater than what I initially predicted. The pet supply drive, which was held on March 4th, consisted of six volunteers who went door-to-door in two neighborhoods - totaling 60 houses - in Waltham to ask for supplies for the Buddy Dog Humane Society. From this outreach, we were able to collect 85 items and make 6 no-sew blankets to donate to Buddy Dog. This was three times greater than the expected outcome, and the items consisted of things such as office supplies, bleach, and dog and cat food. The next part of the project consisted of going to Prospect Hill Kids Club - which is a community center for low-income families. While there, I worked with two volunteers and three children to make 1 no-sew blanket and 10 thank-you cards for the families to receive upon adopting a dog. The final part of the project that was successful was the actual day of service at Buddy Dog. One volunteer and myself worked to get 9 crates ready to be shipped to Puerto Rico in response to Hurricane Maria to help safely transport and save dogs. Additionally, we helped to

set up for a yard sale. The fourth component of my project, the documentary movie screening for “Second Chance Dogs”, unfortunately did not have any participants, which was an unexpected setback that led to the canceling of the event. I learned from that experience that the week before finals may not be the best time to try and host a documentary screening, which is something I will look to change in the future.

This project initiated the process of addressing a need that is not currently given much press on Brandeis’ campus. While many Brandeis students love to work with animals, there are no educational opportunities or events that discuss the work that animal shelters do on our campus . Since I was a young child, I have always been passionate about working to find each animal a home. Therefore, the Rich/Collins grant has given me an opportunity to take this passion and turn it into something tangible. This specific project addressed the needs of animal shelters - which suffer from a lack of staff and resources - by providing on-site volunteering and donations, and it also helped to address the mission of no-kill shelters by increasing awareness on campus. I made sure to talk with each participant to let them know that Buddy Dog is a no-kill shelter, which was one of the reasons I chose to work with them.

Of course, the project did not happen without unexpected results. In terms of unexpected success, I would have to say the day of the supply drive was more successful than I could have imagined. The fact that members of the Waltham community were willing to donate to a humane shelter that was not even in the city made me aware that this cause is important to people in Waltham. This is helpful because I know that I will have support when I continue with this project in the future. In terms of unexpected obstacles, I would have to say the biggest ones were the weather and volunteer retention. This spring was especially hard for me in regards to

organizing a trip to Buddy Dog, as the work we were doing required us to be outside. The original volunteering date was March 18th, but then, due to weather difficulties, it was moved to March 25th, and then finally, April 22nd. The weather obstacle made it so that I know now to plan volunteer events in April, where, thankfully, we were able to have a nice sunny day to volunteer. The other obstacle came from volunteers canceling at the last minute, as well as the film being canceled due to a lack of participants. This obstacle made it so that I had to adapt my events. For example, I downsized my pet supply drive plans by going to 2 neighborhoods instead of 4, and I also ultimately decided to cancel the documentary screening. The low level of attendance to my events reminded me that I need to work on spinning the project in a way that entices Brandeis students and makes them remain committed to the event, something that I am going to work on figuring out this summer.

As for the current status, I would say that my project is in the building stages of becoming something great. I have a great partner, Buddy Dog Humane Society, that has expressed interest in partnering with me again. I have seen some interest from students and community members that I can build off of to create educational opportunities that will help animal shelters even more so. Finally, this project has helped me to realize that I can turn my passion of helping animals into a reality. I would love to run my own animal shelter when I graduate college, and this opportunity has given me a taste of what it takes to build meaningful relationships and build support for a shelter. Overall, this process has taught me so much, and I am excited to continue building on this vision in my remaining years at Brandeis, as well as after I graduate.

## **Evaluation**

During this process, I realized that the best way to evaluate my project would be one-on-one discussion with the volunteers. This became especially clear after I only had one volunteer show up for the day of service at Buddy Dog. I wanted to assess things such as whether or not people knew about Buddy Dog, if they enjoyed the work they were doing, what successes they saw, and what could be improved.

After the day of the drive, I had the volunteers gather around and discuss their experiences going door-to-door to collect donations. A general consensus was that some people did not receive the flyers about the drive. I had gone around earlier in the week and put flyers in the mailboxes of the houses we were visiting, as per instructions from the Waltham Police Department. This piece of information made me understand that there needs to be a better process in informing people about when we are coming and what we are asking for. Another important piece of feedback was that the volunteers enjoyed being able to make the no-sew blankets during the day of the drive, as it was a more hands-on experience.

For my second part of the project, I made sure to adapt my questions for an elementary-school audience. The students generally were interested in knowing what the blankets were for, where the dogs were, and why we were helping them. This type of feedback helped me to evaluate that the school-aged children in Waltham, while interested in dogs, do not have as much exposure to animal shelters as college students at Brandeis. This information has inspired me to center a part of a project on working with elementary-school children if I receive another Rich-Collins grant in the future.

Finally, the discussion I had with my one volunteer on the drive back from Buddy Dog was helpful. One of her comments was that she did not know what to expect, but she was glad with the work we did. This means that I need to better communicate with Buddy Dog and the volunteers about what exactly to expect when we visit Buddy Dog again. Another comment made was that she did not realize how small Buddy Dog was. I think that, next time, I should highlight the impact Buddy Dog has on the community despite their size. That may draw more people in who may want to help.

Overall, I found that, by engaging and talking with volunteers one-on-one, I was able to get a sense of what they liked and did not like. I have attached a sample questionnaire of the type of questions that I asked during feedback discussions.

## Sample Evaluation Questions

1. What did you like about the project?
2. What do you think could be improved?
3. What did you learn about animal shelters?
4. What other activities would you like to see?
5. Did you know that Buddy Dog Humane Society was a no-kill shelter?
6. What time is best for an activity such as this?
7. Would you do this project again? If yes, why? If no, why not?
8. On a scale from 1 to 5, what would you rate this project?
9. Overall, how did you feel about your impact today?
10. Do you have any questions for me?

## Budget

Department of Community Service				
<b>Name of Program:</b>	Animal Rights Education			
<b>Expenses</b>				
Item	Purpose	Total # Needed	Cost Per Item (if applicable)	Estimated Cost
Fleece	Used for Blanket-Making Pet Project	9	\$11.84/1	106.57*
Bins	Used for Donations collected	6	\$6.26/1	\$37.57
Sodexo Food	Used for Day of Drive	1	\$66.50	66.5**
Projector	Intended for Film Screening	1	\$25.00	\$25.00
Posters	Used to promote Film Screening	20	.15/1	\$3.00
Star Market Food	Used for Day of Service at Buddy Dog	1	\$20.47	\$20.47
<b>NOTE: Items not bought were for the following reasons:</b>				
1) Cardstock - Used WG office supplies				
2) Markers - Used WG office supplies				
3) Speaker - Was unavailable on Day of Drive; I talked to volunteers				
4) Custodial Fees - Unneeded because I was able to reserve Shapiro Lounge, which does not need custodians				

5) Noise Permit - Unneeded because I chose to not use music				
6) Stickers - Unbought because I was unable to find a good company/ran out of time to purchase				
*NOTE: This is less than the proposed budget. I worked with less students than planned, so we only made nine blankets instead of 25				
**NOTE: This was cheaper than previous estimates. Sodexo was actually cheaper than going to the store and buying food.				
<b>Total Spent</b>		<b>38</b>	<b>\$259.11</b>	<b>\$259.11</b>
<b>Initial Amount Given</b>				\$1,327.02
<b>Remaining Funds</b>				\$1,067.91

## **Reflection**

The opportunity to participate in the Rich/Collins CLIF fund has been a dream come true for me. I was able to grow and learn more about myself while helping a community that I am passionate about.

One of the things I learned was that, with every project comes a need for quick adaptation. For example, I originally was going to have the film screening a week earlier, but my professor decided to change our class meeting time. While this earlier time may have resulted in more students, I am proud that I was able to work with Conference and Events to change the timing. Another change I had to make on the fly was when a snowstorm canceled our first volunteer session with Buddy Dog. This made it so that we went in late April instead of mid-March. This required me to be comfortable in persistent communication with the volunteer coordinator at Buddy Dog to ensure that we would still be able to make it over to volunteer. A final adaptation I had to make was on the day of my events when volunteers did not show up. This made me want to work even harder to show my passion to the volunteers who did show up, to show them it was worth coming out. It also highlighted the unreliability of students that I need to account for when organizing volunteers.

Another thing that I learned was that I am capable of working past my social anxiety. This project required me to, among other things, present in front of 150 people, talk on the phone with potential volunteer sites, and reach out to people on campus to attend events. For someone who would rather only speak up in class, this was a big jump for me. I learned that I can handle this, and that I will be able to handle anything that life throws at me.

A final thing that I learned was that Brandeis is here to help me. I would not have been nearly as successful without the support of the Department of Community Service, especially Will Brummett. With their check-ins and reassuring emails, they helped make every part of the process as smooth as possible. Not only that, but they were there to nudge things along. For example, the Department had direct communication with the administrators who approve for animals to visit on campus. Originally, I was hoping to have some of the rescue dogs come on campus. Now, I know that I have to work with animals who are trained. I am hopeful that, if I am to continue pursuing this project, that I can bring my own rescue dog to campus as part of the project.

Finally, I cannot reflect without thinking about where I would like to go. I am intending on reapplying to the Rich/Collins CLIF fund for next year, as I see my project being able to continue where I left off. Some ideas I have include an assembly at the elementary schools to talk to students about animal shelters, as well as a pop-up volunteer station on campus that educates the community about what they can do to help animal shelters. Of course, I would also like to go back to Buddy Dog to volunteer with them once again. I then hope to see this passion of mine continue after Brandeis, as I would like to continue volunteering at animal shelters until I possibly have the chance to start my own. Overall, the Rich/Collins CLIF fund was an amazing opportunity for me to realize the potential I have to turn my dreams into reality.