

Family Diversity and Identity Empowerment

I. INTRODUCTION AND SYNOPSIS OF PROJECT

My name is Destiny Kluck. I am an undergraduate student at Brandeis in the class of 2025. I aspire to major in Biology and Health: Science, Society, and Policy. First, thank you to the Rich and Collins Family for this opportunity to complete this passion project of mine. I think that this project allowed me to reflect further on my own strengths and weaknesses. To fully give the reasoning behind why I embarked on this project, I will start with my own story.

There are over 400,000 children in the US foster care community today. As an adopted child myself, I see this statistic as concerning. Foster care and adoption is not the daily headline on all newspapers. However, by providing a better life for the children in the foster care community, I not only help those children but also reflect on the privileges I have in my life.

At a day old, I was left at a Chinese bus station with one set of clothes and a note. Resulting from the One Child Policy, I was blessed to be adopted into the US. With my two adopted siblings, I am thankful that I have a family. Astonished by the lack of resources and donations in foster care, I personally felt obligated to give back to the community that raised me.

To improve empathy among teens in my community, I founded a volunteer organization in high school, Foster4Love Adopt4Life. Through this organization, I connect high school students to volunteer events in foster care. In three main objectives: spreading awareness, increasing donations, and encouraging volunteerism, Foster4Love Adopt4Life can aid in improving the life in foster care.

When arriving at the Brandeis Campus, I entered the Pre-Orientation Program of Volunteering and Advocacy. I was inspired by the director of volunteering at Brandeis, Lucas Malo and his story. In addition to this, I met Yohanno Otto who is a part of the first year class. With her inspiring story of her autistic brothers and passion to advocate, we both decided to apply to this program.

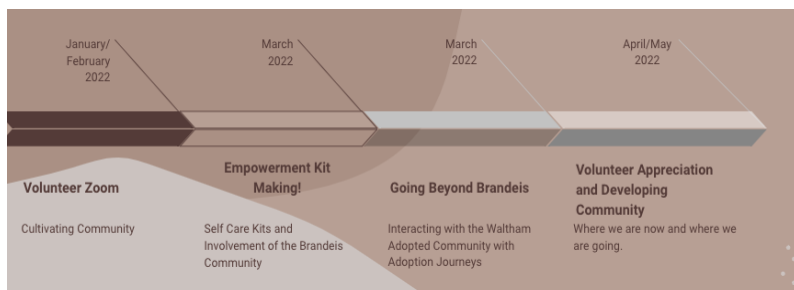
My program is called Family Diversity and Identity Empowerment. I began with the application process that occurred in November of 2021 with the support of Samantha De Melim. This application required many details which allowed me to fully implement my project in the following semester. The community that my project was towards individuals from the foster care, adoptive, and multicultural communities in Waltham, Massachusetts. I recognized the following needs in the Waltham community: lack of connections and the lack of self development programs towards these communities. I recognized this first need when attending the Waltham Mental Health Awareness Event in the Waltham Commons. During this interaction, I met the Regional Director Janice Novello of the Department of Children and Family Services. Director Novello recognized the same needs of the community and thus the objectives of my project were born.

The objectives of Family Diversity and Identity Empowerment are:

- To promote self development in the identity and advocacy of adopted children or those who have experienced a diverse family.
- To acknowledge and empower individual experiences and share with the community.
- To develop a connection with the Brandeis community and Waltham Foster Care and Adoption Community.

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I could have not completed these objectives without the support of my community partner: Adoption Journeys Child and Family Services 501(c)(3). Adoption Journeys provided me with great support in the application process, implementation of my project, and support. Adoption Journeys specifically supports adopted children in the Department of Children and Family Services with post adoption services. The way that my project connected to Adoption Journeys is by helping their support groups and social activity for the families. I would like to thank Hannah Tetrault, Hannah Hardiman, and Shannon Reily for their support in the process.



The timeline of my project is in a four step process: Engaging the community, empowerment kit making, and interacting with the Adoption Journeys families, and finally sustaining these connections. In the timeline of my implementation, the figure below best represents the progression of my project.

- I. Cultivating community: I held two zoom meetings and training to connect the Brandeis students of this niche community together. This section of my project was mainly to train for the main third event of interacting with the Adoption Journeys Children and Family.
- II. Empowerment Kit Making: I wanted to give the children that we will be interacting with a long lasting gift and sustainable tools to practice with. The self care kits were named empowerment kits to be gender inclusive. With a collection of volunteers, we reserved a space on campus in the Shapiro Campus Center to create the empowerment kits, decorate the bags and introduce the community partner to the volunteers. The empowerment kits included the following items: an adoption story book, Journals, Pens/Pencils, Stress Balls/Toys and advice from the Brandeis community. This included taking a table to occupy the SCC atrium and asking students to write on sticky notes messages of encouragement.
- III. In Person Event: This event included two main parts since the project is directed towards the family of the Adoption Journey community. The project included a circle discussion with the adoptee's parents. In this discussion, another adopted Brandeis student and I spoke in conjunction with two adoptees at University of Massachusetts Amherst. We spoke about racial identity, the meaning of being adopted, and encouraged a storytelling/Q&A environment for families to discuss and reflect. The second part of this project was a development and self care workshop with the adoptees themselves and Brandeis students. I hope to future produce a mentorship and connection between Brandeis students and adoptees. In these self care skills- there were five stations including painting, de-stress crafts, journaling, meditation, and mentoring.
- IV. Volunteer Appreciation and Developing Community: This included a get together of the volunteers and providing snacks and drinks to say thank you and connect them to future events.

The participants of the program mainly consisted of Brandeis volunteers (undergraduates). This is due to my marketing strategies. I used platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and the Brandeis Calendar to share this event. I used mass email chains including *This week in service* to gain interest among students and volunteers with the project.

II. EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENTS

The evaluation I took was based on the quantitative and qualitative reflections of the main projects. I have created four marketing tools and canva and it was successful in collecting volunteers and interest. I have used Google tools including forms, sheets, and documents to measure the effectiveness of the project. From the marketing posters, I have collected over 20 volunteers and had a 85% retention rate of the volunteers from their interest and attending the event. 37 empowerment kits were made during the second event with all of the materials used. Finally, in a survey, the volunteers (18) were all interested in all of the future of the foster care/adoptive initiative. There were no full assessments made towards the parents and participants of the project other than a google form that was sent. However, there were no responses from the Adoption Journey's families.

There were many unexpected successes and downfalls in regard to the volunteer recruitment process. I believe that my marketing skills were refined, as I learned specifically that This Week In-Service and physical posters are the best to market my events. Thus, I was able to reach more volunteers through the in-person event. The downfall was the retention of volunteers and getting them to show up to the event. I think that I can improve on this by collecting phone numbers and not having as many google forms to fill out.

III. FINAL BUDGET

Table 1- Budget and Expenses of Project

Item	Purpose	Total # Needed	Cost Per Item (if applicable)	Estimated Cost	Awarded	Actual Cost	Difference	Vendor	Status
Kellogg's Lunch Box	Snacks Event 1 & 2	4	\$10.40	\$41.60	\$41.60	\$41.98	-\$0.38	Amazon	Delivered
Choose You: A Guided Self-Care Journal	Empowerment Kit	30	\$11.83	\$354.90	\$354.90	\$68.40	\$286.50	Amazon	Delivered- 6
Acceptance is My Superpower	Empowerment Kit	30	\$12.69	\$380.70	\$380.70	\$359.40	\$21.30	Amazon	Delivered
24 Pack Bundle Sensory Fidget Toys	Empowerment Kit	2	\$20.99	\$41.98	\$41.98	\$39.98	\$2.00	Amazon	Delivered
Black Pens- 10 Pack	Empowerment Kit	5	\$1.57	\$7.85	\$7.85	\$11.71	-\$3.86	Amazon	Delivered
Blue Pens- 10 Pack	Empowerment Kit	5	\$0.97	\$4.85	\$4.85	\$24.68	-\$19.83	Amazon	Delivered
Post-it Notes- 16 Pack	Empowerment Kit	1	\$9.95	\$9.95	\$9.95	\$7.55	\$2.40	Amazon	Delivered
White Kraft Paper	Empowerment Kit	35	\$14.99	\$524.65	\$124.65	\$27.98	\$96.67	Amazon	Delivered
Orbee Stress Balls	Event 3- Stess Station	1	\$8.95	\$8.95	\$8.95	\$8.90	\$0.05	Amazon	Delivered
Yoga Mats	Event 3- Movement Station	5	\$8.99	\$44.95	\$44.95	\$6	\$44.95		
200 Paper Plates	Event 3- Paint Station	1	\$10.28	\$10.28	\$54.90	\$7.09	\$47.81	Amazon	Delivered
BranVan Certification	Event 3- Transportation	1	\$25.00	\$25.00	\$25.00	\$50	-\$25.00		
Paint- 24 Set	Event 3- Paint Station	1	\$14.00	\$14.00	\$14.00	\$25.99	-\$11.99	Amazon	Delivered
Paint Brushes- 32	Event 3- Paint Station	1	\$7.98	\$7.98	\$7.98	\$6	\$7.98		
Paint Paper- Roll	Event 3- Paint Station	1	\$21.30	\$21.30	\$21.30	\$14.97	\$6.33	Amazon	Delivered
Clorox Wipes- 3 Pack	Event 3- Cleaning	1	\$9.98	\$9.98	\$9.98	\$6	\$9.98		
The One Minute Gratitude Journal For Teens	Empowerment Kit	10	\$6.99	\$69.90	\$0	\$69.90	-\$69.90	Amazon	Delivered
The One Minute Gratitude Journal For Kids	Empowerment Kit	10	\$6.99	\$69.90	\$0	\$69.90	-\$69.90	Amazon	Delivered
Sandwich Bags		1	\$17.48	\$17.48	\$0	\$17.48	-\$17.48	Amazon	Delivered
Journals	Empowerment Kit	1	\$21.99	\$21.99	\$0	\$21.99	-\$21.99	Amazon	Delivered
Dunkin Donuts	Refreshments	1	\$33.98	\$33.98	\$0	\$33.98	-\$33.98	Dunkin	Fulfilled
Kung Fu Drinks	Refreshments	1	\$90.91	\$90.91	\$0	\$90.91	-\$90.91		
				\$1,508.92	\$1,153.54	\$992.79	\$160.75		

In the figure above, it is recognized that a majority of the items were used for the second part of my program (creating the empowerment kits). I believe that I was effective in my expenses and used all of the materials. In the table, striked out lines are the items that were not ordered nor used in the original budget. In the red code, these items were ordered in replacement of another budgeted item or added. I was originally awarded \$1,153.54 and only spent \$992.79 of these costs. I had \$160.75 in excess that will be returned to the budget of the Rich Collins Program. I believe that I conducted my budgetary expenses and savings well and allocated all the funds necessary.

IV. PERSONAL TAKEAWAYS AND REFLECTION

As this project is beyond my passion and completing this project, I aspire to connect these communities and continue to complete the objectives. I focus on connecting future projects with

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Community Connections (one-time volunteer events) and Community Service Projects with Big Siblings Waltham Group. I also am planning the next event with Adoption Journeys in the Fall of 2023 where it can be promoted to Community Connections and Big Siblings. I also hope to support the community by creating more Volunteer Appreciation Events & existing related projects like the Zion Cares Clothing Drive.

I have personally grown greatly from this experience. I have improved my strengths and recognized my weaknesses, and clarified my positionality and voice. There is a fine line between using my story for marketing and beyond but I was able to recognize details that are necessary versus personal. I believe that I am finding and building my community on campus and am hopeful for the future. Finally, I am becoming a better leader, and through the group meetings and leadership buildings, I think that I am a stronger leader.

My personal recommendation to those planning to apply to the program are the following:

- To apply with as much detail as possible
- To create a timeline and follow with booking
- To market 1-2 weeks ahead of the event
- To consistently keep in contact and emails (in-person communication is best!)
- To be open with your responsibilities and capabilities.