

Project: Basecamp Café



Project Team (left to right): Rachel Ooi, Emily Chan, Seerat Qureshi and Christine Wong

Project Aim: To help provide charity homes food and daily needs while building community spirit within a new school.

Background:

We had been brainstorming for days on what to do for our GSL project that could positively impact both the local community and our school, which recently opened in August 2016. As a new school, our students come from many different backgrounds; different schools; different countries — it was initially difficult for the seniors and juniors to interact with one another as we were a collectively shy group despite much encouragement from the teachers to do so. It was from this desire to start interacting with our school community that we conjured the idea of opening up a student-run charity cafe right on our school's basement floor - hence the name Basecamp Cafe.

By serving a variety of home-cooked meals and food sourced from Malaysian restaurant-owners to the diverse student body, Basecamp Cafe has not only allowed students across year groups to interact with one another at least twice a week, but it has also supported local small businesses and NGOs through its sustainable method of operation.

We decided that 100% of the profits from the cafe would be used to fulfill the needs of local orphanages, homes, and NGOs that we collectively and personally believed in.

What we have done:

Just a week prior to this idea, it came to our knowledge that there was an unused space meant for storage just next to the school's basement carpark. After bringing to the school's attention our intentions of making full use of the space, we had our idea quickly approved, thus giving us the creative liberty of renovating the space. We sourced out and renovated everything ourselves: from scrubbing the dirt off the walls with sponges and painting them during our free time and after school, a little-known unused space in the school's B2 parking lot was transformed into a pastel pink hangout space in the making in the span of a week. During this time, we were liaising with the school's administration to make use of any furniture already available from storage. We curated the furniture ourselves and had them moved in and arranged by the next week. The grey cement floor was mopped and fully carpeted. By the end of it, we spent nothing and wasted nothing on decorations.

We spent a total of 4 days renovating the space. During the process, our proposal to paint a mural on the wall was approved by the school. We decided to paint a mountain, which reflected not just our cafe's name Basecamp, but also on David McCullough Jr.'s quote from which we base our values on: "Climb the mountain not to plant your flag, but to embrace the challenge, enjoy the air and behold the view. Climb it so you can see the world, not so the world can see you."

Since our opening, we have raised over RM5000 with a net profit of almost RM3000 -

an impressive number considering that we serve only twice a week, fifty minutes each time. The profit made goes towards buying fresh groceries and needs for the underprivileged children who usually only eat canned food. To these children, fresh fruit, vegetable and meat are considered a luxury. Any leftover food from each service that hasn't been touched or bought goes to the children of Rumah Kanak-kanak Impian (RKKI)/Home of St. Vincent de Paul, which houses 7 children ranging from the age of 7 to 17. This no-waste policy of ours has also aided another GSL team within our school, whose project is to reduce the overall food waste in the school community. We also actively encourage and involve the students of SJIIM through our social media platform to donate any items which are needed by the home. We have had students reach out to us, donating essential items to this home out of their own goodwill.

For the duration of this competition, we made sure to instil a sense of community spirit within students who would come down to the cafe. Therefore we open the cafe on Mondays and Tuesdays for students to mingle around and have fun.

What we have learned:

We have learnt that running a business like this is challenging. There is so much Math and careful calculations that needed to be done. Whilst studying for tests and completing homework, we've learnt to carefully manage our time so that we can make home cooked food for the students. Something like this takes a lot of commitment and we have learnt to persevere through every challenge we faced. Looking back at all the profit we have made and how much good we can do with it, makes it worth it.

Along the way we have also learnt the importance of friendship. This would not have been possible at all if we weren't friends. If we didn't treat each other like family and trust each other. It has also been educational for us to learn about the social problems that exist in our community and what is being done to help and how can we assist in helping them even more. Not only did we grow closer to each other but we formed a bond with people from other groups in school that we wouldn't have previously interacted with.

What we have in store for the future:

From our funds raised, we have divided it into short-term funds (shopping for fresh groceries for homes) and a small percentage goes into our long-term funds (a larger scale project). We plan on visiting a rural community within Malaysia which faces the prevalent issues of hunger and poverty at the end of this year. We aim to use the long-term funds to buy supplies such as cooking material to address the UN SDGS which we focus on. In addition to this, we hope to teach them basic vocational skills such as teaching them how to sew items such as blankets and make bags using of old cloth which will help them to receive income to support themselves while promoting environmental sustainability. We have built up a strong community within different year groups of our school, and we wish to continue serving the school and reach out to more homes who need support. Although this project was supposed to be "short-term", we intend on making basecamp cafe a permanent addition to our school. A common question that we're asked is "what's going to happen to the cafe when you graduate and leave?". Well, we will continue running the cafe until then and will pass on the torch to younger members of the school to manage and run the cafe.