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RWU Students Help Gloria Gemma Research Programs for Children Whose Parents Have Cancer

The hands-on experience provided students with teamwork, research and writing skills they can use upon graduation



RWU sophomores Molly Cleveland and Maggie O'Callaghan look over the plan they and their classmates put together for Gloria Gemma Breast Cancer Resource Foundation's Gidget's Corner. As a Community Partnerships Center project, their technical writing class worked with Gloria Gemma to help develop age-appropriate programs for children whose parents have cancer.

December 26, 2017 | Juan Siliezar

BRISTOL, R.I. – Getting diagnosed with breast cancer can be devastating, not only for the person diagnosed but those closest to them. For parents, they have to balance self-care while also considering the emotional toll the illness can have on their children. To address this, [Gloria Gemma Breast Cancer Resource Foundation](#) started Gidget's Corner, a collection of programs to support children whose parents have breast cancer.

After initial success, Gloria Gemma now hopes to expand the initiative. And to do so, it has turned to Roger Williams University.

As a Community Partnerships Center project, Brian Hendrickson, RWU assistant professor of writing studies, rhetoric, and composition, and two of his interdisciplinary technical writing classes worked with Gloria Gemma to research programs where children who have a parent diagnosed with breast cancer can ask questions, get answers and interact with others going through similar experiences.

The project is a continuation of a previous CPC project for Gloria Gemma, where education studies interns researched programs that have been successful in supporting children who have a family member diagnosed with cancer.

Students in the current project expanded on the previous research and found additional programs Gloria Gemma could integrate into Gidget's Corner. Students then put together a list of those programs and a full plan of how they could be incorporated, which they presented to representatives from Gloria Gemma.

Included in the students' plans and presentations were suggestions on how to market Gidget's Corner and improve user experience on Gloria Gemma's website.

Both this current project and the previous one filled key needs for Gloria Gemma, which didn't have the resources to conduct the initial research necessary to begin program development.



Representatives from Gloria Gemma Mandy Zito and Carol Ann Donnelly listened to two presentations from Brian Hedrickson's Writing 311: Technical Writing courses.

"You guys are laying the groundwork for what's going to happen in the future," said Mandy Zito, patient and survivor navigator at Gloria Gemma. Zito and Carol Ann Donnelly, communications and Passport to Wellness expo manager, were the representatives who heard presentations from the two classes and provided feedback.

"You really did quality business work," said Donnelly to the students. "This is something you can present in a boardroom."

Equally as impressive as the work itself was the effective technical writing, teamwork and research skills students developed producing it.

“This experience gives students the opportunity to work on real-world problems with a client,” said Hendrickson. “I want to give them as real an experience as possible – the kind of things students are going to do for the rest of their lives.”



Students in the from Brian Hedrickson’s Writing 311: Technical Writing classes prepared a full plan of programming to develop ageappropriate programs for children whose parents have cancer and presented it to representatives from Gloria Gemma.

Hendrickson’s students broke into teams in their respective classrooms. The teams then strategized, researched, analyzed data, wrote individual sections and then brought it together as cohesive documents – one from each class.

Sophomores Steven Hartnett and Casey Klein said the experience taught them how to work on a large team toward a single goal and will serve them well when they enter the professional setting in two years.

Not lost on them or the rest of the class, however, was the impact their work can potentially have in the near future in supporting children whose parents have breast cancer.

“The kids kind of get lost in this,” Zito said. “We want to make it so that they’re not so fearful.”

At RWU, we develop Civic Scholars who believe in community-engaged work. That’s why we commit to providing every student an opportunity that empowers them to put their knowledge and skills to the test solving real-world problems and creating meaningful change with community partners. Learn more about the [Civic Scholars](#) program and how to help us reach our goal of every student participating in civic scholarship.

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