

Regional Winner

Month: November 2011

NACURH, INC.
Diversity Program of the Month
Culture Fest at Cedar Apartments

School: University of Washington

Region: PACURH

Person in charge: Jen Connors

Nominator: Meagan Schuver

Target Population: 340

Time Needed to Organize: One Month

Number of People in Attendance: 55

Date(s) of Program: 11/22/11

Number of People Needed to Organize: 8

Cost of Program: 200

On-Campus Population: 5600

Chapter Size: 56

Origin of Program:

Cedar Apartments is a brand new apartment-style Residence Hall, and because it is a brand new building, and a brand new community, the programs are being designed with the new community in mind, and these programs are shaping how programming will look in the future. The program, Culture Fest, was organized by the Cedar Apartment Student Alliance (CASA) an eight-person group for leaders in Cedar Apartments at the University of Washington.

Cedar Apartments houses students that represent more than 25 countries. For some of these students this is the first time away from their home country during the holidays. CASA wanted to offer a celebration of all of these different cultures through food. So, CASA opened up the program to students in the building who were interested in sharing their culture with other residents. The residents were provided with grocery store gift cards so they could buy the necessary ingredients, and then they brought their prepared food to the Cultural Fest in Cedar's main lounge.

Word Count: 166

Please give a short description of the program:

The cultural fest enabled residents to take pride and ownership in their community as well as share the diversity of their own background by giving them the opportunity to provide a meal and history from their culture. Residents worked individually and in groups to cook traditional dishes to share with the rest of the building.

The program was set up as a buffet, where students from different countries were given space at a table to showcase and share their favorite food. Everyone that attended was able to sample a variety of different things while learning about the food and different countries that make up the Cedar Apartments community, or was able to taste some of the comforts of the home they

left behind to attend the University of Washington.

Also, Salsa and Merengue introductory lessons were taught by a CASA leader, to further diversify the cultural experiences offered.

The turnout was overwhelming, and residents not only stayed for food, but they remained for hours later to engage with one another, talk, and play games. Participants represented countries from all over the world including India, Iraq, Poland, China, United States, and Korea. Residents who participated had the chance to personally share with others about their foods and background, as well as the significance and the meaning it had to them personally.

Word Count: 221

Goals of the program:

The goals for this program focused on community development considering the fact that it is still early in the school year, and because of the diverse range of students in Cedar Apartments it has been difficult for past programs to bring a variety of people together. Were focusing on promoting a community, which included the diversity of the community. Cedar apartments comprises of freshman through graduate students from 25 different countries. Though this event only showcased seven out of the 25, it was more than a traditional program would have been able to accommodate successfully. Through this Cultural Fest CASA also wanted residents to learn first hand about the diverse community of Cedar, as some residents may not have been aware of the vast array of cultures present. By allowing residents to share their culture with one another in a positive way the goal was to create an inclusive community where residents feel like they can express their culture. Through all of this residents were given a unique opportunity to learn (and taste) cultures and foods that Cedar residents enjoy, and it was an opportunity for residents to sample a variety of foods that they might not otherwise experience.

Word Count: 200

Positive and lasting effects of the program:

All of the food was made within Cedar Apartments, by Cedar residents!

Derrick DeVera, a Cedar Community Assistant, reflected on the program by saying, "It was inspiring to see residents finding value in providing food for others, while expressing their own culture and individuality. This is the best kind of community, one in which residents proactively participate and engage with one another."

The purpose of this activity was to bring people together and provide a forum for them to show their differences while learning how many similarities they all share. The hope was that when student who attended this event see each other in Cedar and around campus they will recognize someone with whom they share a community.

Word Count: 119

Short evaluation of the program:

The Cultural Fest program was successful because it met the aforementioned goals – The

Culture Fest allowed residents to use the apartment-style amenities, kitchens, to participate in their community. It also fostered community development further by allowing residents to their individual culture.

Simon, a CASA Leader, shared a cultural experience by teaching Salsa and Merengue to the residents who attended the program. He has been taking classes at the experimental college here at the University of Washington, and through this program he was able to share what he had learned with fellow members of the Cedar community. Rachel Pendergast, a Cedar Community Assistant, said this was her favorite part of the event, she had never learned those kinds of dances before, and she thought the program offered a great opportunity for her to learn more about Simon, and her fellow attendees while being able to learn something new and fun. Residents teaching and learning from other residents was one highlight of the program.

This program also had one of the highest attendance rates of a program to be put on in Cedar Apartments this year. More than 50 students, ranging from freshman to graduate students attended this program.

Word Count: 199

How could this program be adapted to other campuses?

Any campus with a diverse student population would benefit from this type of program. Allowing the residents of the building to be the one sharing their experiences and food favorites does a lot to create a welcoming and inclusive environment. I believe the key for this program was getting residents to participate by making the food. It is an important element in the program because they were proud to share the food of their culture with others in the Residence Hall, and they brought along their friends and roommates, who helped promote the program, and attendance is another measure of success. Residents were able to both learn about new cultures, but also feel more at home by meeting others from their own culture. This created an appreciation of diversity while also making connection within smaller cultural communities. Any program that involves residents to share aspects of their culture in an inclusive environment would promote community in a similar way as this program.

Word Count: 163