

CHNS 3102 S-L Reflection





ABCD Foster Grandparent Program



LBFE Morville House

Alex Barrett: ABCD Foster Grandparent Program

“For my Service-Learning, I volunteered at Boston ABCD and held weekly Zoom meetings with Huang Jiankun, a Foster Grandmother who normally volunteers at the organization’s daycare. We met every Tuesday from 3:30pm to 4:40pm and while I was initially informed that I would be volunteering to help an elderly person, it quickly began to feel like an elderly person was volunteering to help me. During our meetings, Jiankun and I would discuss topics ranging from her grandchildren to my schoolwork and job to her experiences growing up in British Hong Kong and later Guangzhou. One week she recommended I watch a movie, *The Wedding Banquet* (喜宴), and after which we discussed the differences between Chinese and American culture surrounding marriage and the expectations of parents. We discussed all of these topics almost exclusively in Chinese and Jiankun would coach me through how to best express a thought or teach me the right word to get my point across. Over the last few weeks, we became fast friends and our conversations helped me improve my Chinese speaking skills greatly. My time with Jiankun was tremendously gratifying to me and my only hope is that our meetings helped brighten her day, at least a little bit.”

Nancy Hannon: ABCD Foster Grandparent Program

“I had a great experience working with my foster grandparents at ABCD. Working with them has really helped me to improve my conversation skills in Mandarin, and has given me a unique look into Chinese culture. In addition to that, speaking with Chinese people of an older generation has definitely helped me to expand my vocabulary. I also really enjoyed being able to meet more people in the Boston community. I was unable to really branch out and take part in service last year due to COVID, and I feel that my experience working with ABCD has allowed me to familiarize myself with a community here. The conversations I had over the past few weeks definitely gave me a glimpse into a different culture and lifestyle, and I am thankful for the opportunity to learn from this experience and have meaningful conversations.”

Diamond Poomijindanon: ABCD Foster Grandparent Program

“This Service-Learning experience with Chinese elder volunteers was very valuable to me. I had the opportunity to practice speaking, listening, and converse in mandarin. On the cultural side, I get to hear some southern Chinese accent which is different from the standard accent when I'm in class studying mandarin. The main job I did during the online meetings was chatting and getting to know the volunteers. Some attempts of teaching them how to use the iPad was attempted but failed online.

The iPad teaching, particularly on zoom and mail, was very successful when I went in-person to ABCD office near Boston commons. When I went there in-person, it was also the time an ABCD staff was interviewing the Chinese volunteers on their experience and life during the pandemic, and how ABCD have helped them. I was the translating the questions to Mandarin and the answers back to English with the support of Jingbo Zhang, the director of this Chinese volunteer group. I felt like I really put my Mandarin into use here. I also learned how the elders felt and the activities they did during the pandemic, especially during the lockdown period. Some were crafting art works out of dried flowers and some made a collection of sophisticated origami. I was able to see the art pieces physically and it was splendid. I'm glad I was part of this ABCD volunteer group and learned a lot from this experience.”

Lily Xu: ABCD Foster Grandparent Program

“Service Learning has helped me improve my conversational skills in Chinese. In this environment, I was able to learn more applicable terms in Chinese to help the Foster Grandparents understand what I was teaching. Although it felt very rewarding to make connections with these Foster Grandparents and also try my best to get over the language and age barrier, it was still challenging. One general thing I learned from doing this service is that I had difficulty being able to teach technology to the Chinese elderly. It made me reflect and even think that I would also have difficulty teaching the elderly who can speak English because there's such an age barrier with technology and there were some aspects of technology that I didn't even think to consider that the elderly did not know how to do. In general, I enjoyed meeting the Foster Grandparents who seemed eager to learn despite the obstacles we faced during some of the meetings. I appreciated their time and Jingbo's time throughout this service.”

Charlotte Yin: ABCD Foster Grandparent Program

“I really enjoyed this experience. I think it was really helpful in seeing where my Chinese level was at and helped me learn more Chinese. It has definitely helped me with practicing Chinese outside of class which I think is very important in order to maintain your knowledge, and not something I always find time to do. This experience taught me how to be more creative. A lot of times my foster grandparents had technological trouble and I didn’t always know how to explain it in Chinese so I started making little post it notes with drawings on them of the zoom icons so if they were on mute I could just show them the sticky note. One of my favorite moments in service learning was when my foster grandparents showed me all of their origami. I saw that they had a lot of artwork on their walls and asked them about it. They told me that over quarantine they did a lot of origami and said that they had hundreds of them. All of them were so pretty and intricate, but my favorite one that they showed me was a dragon that was 2 feet long!”

Kirby Chua: LBFE Morville House

“I think my favorite part of service learning was just interacting and talking with the elderly in the breakout rooms. Service learning helped me with the course material because speaking with the elderly helped me apply some of the words and sentence patterns we learned. I enjoyed this experience because it personally helped me bridge the generational gap that exists between us. I think this helped my communication skills, which is very important as a student.”

Hana Chalmers: LBFE Morville House

“Throughout my time working at Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly I was able to meet a lot of great people while also improving my interpersonal Chinese skills. When first starting out I was nervous to meet all of the elderly and communicate with them but I ended up looking forward to and loving my one-hour meetings with them. They were so passionate to learn English that it made it easy to teach to them. It forced me to think through how to explain more complicated topics with the simple Chinese that I know. I feel that after this experience I've learned how to communicate more clearly and I've also learned more about various cultures. I hope to take what I've learned in service-learning and put it towards my future endeavors.”

Eric Concannon: LBFE Morville House

“Service learning at LBFE has helped me with course materials by requiring application of mandarin in a different way than is usually required. Having to very explicitly explain things such as what something looks like and how to do something such as click a button can be difficult but is a very useful skill to practice. Speaking with them also just generally gave me more time to formulate thoughts in mandarin and convey my message.

It was also an interesting experience because it shows how a group of people can live in the United States for a long time without having fully assimilated. It speaks to the depth of cultures that exist within the United States and that no one way of living is correct. I have seen similar things abroad with people that stay within their cultural comfort zones and never fully match the average citizen of that country, but I hadn't properly seen that in the US.

My personal favorite moment in the program was when we broke out into breakout rooms and talked on a more personal level with some of the elderly people we worked with. It was difficult to properly connect when there was a large group of people, and I couldn't really talk to an individual. By speaking to a few people on their own, I got to hear about some of their families, as well as their lives. They all have a lot to talk about if you give them the opportunity and listening to their experiences can be a very worthwhile and fulfilling experience.”