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KIN 471S, Powell

Boxing Strong Service Learning Report

This summer term, I partnered with Boxing Strong to fulfill my service learning requirement and contribute 30 hours of my time as an assistant coach. Boxing Strong is a fitness gym located in Monterey and founded in 2018 by Coach Masha Cavazos, a former competitive fighter with the title of NCBA West Coast Champion in 2017 in the 139-lb weight class as well as the Silver Medalist in 2015 Olympics in the 132-lb weight class. With Personal Trainer and Rock Steady Boxing Coach certifications, Masha's mission was to create a space where individuals of all backgrounds could build physical strength and mental resilience through martial arts, regardless of prior experience or ability level. As quoted in her bio on the Boxing Strong website, "We are only as physically strong as our minds are strong."

Boxing Strong offers various programs and training options that contribute towards the physical and mental fortitude of communities surrounding Monterey. To start with, there are weekly adult combat classes in boxing, kickboxing, muay thai, and wrestling. My first exposure to the gym came from a recommendation from a friend months prior to my service learning, in which I enrolled in kickboxing classes led by Coach Rios. As a beginner to the martial arts, I did not know what to expect from my first session. However, I found the location and the instructor to be very inviting upon entry and I was in awe at the variety of boxing bags and equipment available, eager to start throwing punches. Having free parking was also very much appreciated and helps increase accessibility to affordable, structured physical activity and fitness for underprivileged groups.

My actual service learning consisted of attending Tuesday and Thursday evening classes from 6-8pm to take attendance and aid the coach with demonstrations, drills, clean-up and maintenance, and to serve as an extra partner/guide for clients who may need one. Tuesdays consisted of boxing and muay thai classes led by Coach Mikael, while Thursday focused on boxing and kickboxing led by Coach Rios. As a service learner, I was given the opportunity to join each class's workout, so I took advantage of it and worked out for 2 hours straight each Tuesday and Thursday. Although this was quite a challenging amount of exercise to become accustomed to, I wanted to gain as much first-hand experience and knowledge as I could about martial arts in order to grow as a person and serve as another resource for others at the gym.

While each class started with a warm-up consisting of jumprope, shadowboxing, and stretching, the core part of the class differed based on the coach. In Mikael's classes, there is an emphasis on high-intensity interval training with exercises such as squats, push-ups, supermans, and sit-ups alongside sets of combos and techniques to practice. On the other hand, Rios focuses on developing individual techniques and building onto a combo throughout the session. Both coaches offer a great amount of challenge nonetheless and finish the class with full-body stretching. Each class, I felt so accomplished as I drove back to my home in Salinas, which is a half-hour drive that I always quite enjoyed.

Another part of my service learning that I really enjoyed and appreciated was being given the opportunity to be a substitute instructor for two senior strength classes at the off-site locations of Merrill Gardens in Monterey and Ivy Park in Salinas. This was my first time ever

taking over an exercise class and designing a 30 minute workout that would be appropriate for the elderly. As such, I am proud of myself for being able to successfully provide them with an exercise session that they all said to have really enjoyed. I also applaud Boxing Strong for contributing towards active aging and combatting isolation among seniors, a group often excluded from mainstream fitness.

Moreover, Boxing Strong offers youth classes and seasonal youth camps, which provide an outlet for children to become physically active and invested in the martial arts. The camps also serve working families who may not otherwise have access to summer physical activity opportunities. As a service learner, I was asked to arrive 15 minutes early on Thursdays to take attendance for the youth boxing class. This gave me the chance to witness the amount of fun that children can have being in an environment that encourages self-expression, growth, unity, and respect for one another.

Furthermore, Boxing Strong offers adaptive boxing classes for individuals with Parkinson's disease, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and developmental disabilities. These classes emphasize ability over limitation and build confidence, motor skills, and coordination through accessible training options. By removing physical and psychological barriers to participation, Boxing Strong contributes towards combatting ableism, which is the discrimination of disabled individuals based on the presumption that their abilities are inferior to that of able-bodied individuals. As described in a class reading by Cashman and Seifer (2008), environments that support reciprocal learning and social change help dismantle stigma and

empower individuals by addressing social determinants of health through inclusive, community-based partnerships.

Boxing Strong is crucial for this region. It provides an outlet for fitness, emotional release, and confidence building in a safe, nonjudgmental environment. It helps fill a gap in therapeutic physical activity in a way that's both medically supportive and community-centered. According to Salinas news sources, over 20% of Salinas residents live below the poverty line, which makes affordable exercise options essential (Salinas Californian, 2023). With accessible pricing, off-site classes, and community integration, Boxing Strong opens the door to those who might otherwise be priced out of boutique fitness programs. Their programming reflects the Social-Ecological Model of health behavior by making the environment, policy, and interpersonal systems work together to promote wellness.

My service learning experience at Boxing Strong has been both transformative and educational. It gave me a deeper appreciation for the importance of inclusive physical activity programming and how fitness can serve as a tool for community connection and social justice. I developed not only physical strength through participation, but emotional resilience and leadership skills by serving others. This opportunity allowed me to see the real-world impact of the concepts we studied in class such as dismantling ableism and classism to create safe, empowering spaces for all bodies. I feel confident that the tools I've gained from this experience will carry forward into my future career in kinesiology, where I hope to continue advocating for health equity and inclusive wellness practices.

References

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