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Giving Back to the Military

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Giving Back to the Military

Honors Thesis

Lauren Martin

Western Michigan University

Abstract

This paper will cover the development and growth of the non-profit student organization Broncos for Heroes. The mission statement of Broncos for Heroes is to support our servicemen and women both past and present. This paper will cover the main event for Broncos for Heroes: Care Package Drives.

The Development of Broncos for Heroes:

Broncos for Heroes was founded in 2012 by Michael Bearup and David Reed. Bearup wanted to send care packages to servicemen and women deployed overseas as he had done during his high school years, and Reed saw the opportunity to create something larger than himself. As a result, Broncos for Heroes was formed. The mission: To send care packages to troops deployed overseas.

I joined the organization in Spring 2014. At the time, there were two permanent members, Reed and Bearup, and a couple of other members who participated in meetings and events hosted by the organization. From 2012 through 2014, Broncos for Heroes had sent out a total of 50 care packages to servicemen and women deployed overseas. In addition, the organization hosted a total of two events, and gained two new members to the leadership board, including myself.

Spring 2015 was the semester that Bearup and Reed decided to phase me in as president of the organization. Although we had begun to see growing support through individuals and small businesses within the community, I had a vision that this organization was capable of much more. The first leadership meeting of 2015 was designated to rebooting the organization. While meeting with the leadership board, round-robin style, we developed several large ideas for the year. First, we wanted to collaborate with other student organizations on campus for events. Second, we decided to collaborate with local school districts to send a minimum of 100 care packages overseas every four months. Finally, we broadened the mission statement to “Supporting servicemen and women both past and present” so that we could extend our reach beyond sending care packages and continue giving back to the military community.

Spring 2015 through spring 2016 was a whirlwind of support, expansion, and success for Broncos for Heroes. We had successfully completed five care package drives, four Honor Flights, one student veteran scholarship, and donated over thirty cases of food and toiletries to the Veterans in Progress program at Battle Creek's Haven of Rest. In the midst of this activity, we increased our volunteer base from four members in 2014 to roughly thirty active members and seventy five total members who associate themselves with Broncos for Heroes.

The main event that we pride ourselves in is our Care Package Drives. This event has gone through major changes from the first drive to the most recent drive.

1st Care Package Drive:

Care Package Drives became an important event for Broncos for Heroes to accomplish because we felt a great need to give our servicemen and women a little piece of home during their deployment. With several members of our organization either in the military or who have family in the military, we tried to think of how we would want our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, or even ourselves to be supported during our time of service.

Holding a Care Package Drive was first contemplated during our January 2015 leadership board meeting. The idea was to have a local elementary school collect care package items such as toiletries, treats, games, etc. and then we would come in with volunteers and materials to pack them up and send out the items as 100 care packages to servicemen and women overseas. Several important factors had to be decided before we could really dig into the meat of the

project. First, which elementary school would accept this event? Second, what items will we ask the elementary students to collect? And finally, who should we send the packages to?

Riverside Elementary School in Battle Creek, Michigan, became the host of our first Care Package Drive. I have family connections and have volunteered there for several years so Riverside Elementary School was eager to be a part of our first care package drive. We started off by giving them our overall goal for the event: to pack up 100 care packages with items that the elementary school would have collected throughout the week prior to the Pack it Up event. The staff at Riverside Elementary was eager to come up with the rest in a way that would accomplish our goal, as well as make it easy and organized for themselves.

While the staff at Riverside Elementary drafted an idea on how they were planning to complete this event, Broncos for Heroes was working to comprise a list of items that could be collected by the elementary students to put into the care packages. We began with a needs assessment which included consulting active and veteran members of the military and asking them what they would like to receive in packages from home. Once we assembled a list of the items that were recommended, we turned to the Office of Military and Veteran Affairs who had already comprised a list of items that they collected to send to servicemen and women overseas.

Finally, we were left to find recipients of these care packages. At this time, the “Nominate a Hero” portion of the Broncos for Heroes website was formed. This page allowed members of the community to give us the name and address of a friend or family member who was currently deployed. This also gave them the ability to tell us what the recipient's favorite treats or toiletries were so that we could send them a personalized package from home.

With all three factors of the care package drive determined, we returned to Riverside Elementary School to see what plan they had developed for how they would like to have the care package drive. After this meeting we had determined to send a note home to parents of students alerting them of the event, who Broncos for Heroes is, and how they can help. Each grade level was assigned a care package item such as toothpaste, oreos, playing cards, etc. per grade level to collect throughout the next week. Once the week was complete, Broncos for Heroes arrived at Riverside Elementary with 30 volunteers, while the school provided another 9 volunteers to stay after school and assist with packing up the care package items. In roughly one hour, we exceeded our goal by having 125 care packages packaged, taped, and loaded into vehicles to be transported to the post office.

It was amazing to see the amount of time and effort dedicated to send out these care packages to our servicemen and women overseas. During the time of our Pack it Up event for the care package drive we had several staff members of Riverside Elementary School come up to Broncos for Heroes with tears in their eyes saying how amazing it is that there are students in the community who would take the time to organize such an event. They talked about their husbands, sons, and daughters who have served or are currently serving and how they are so grateful for the efforts that Broncos for Heroes had put into creating the event.



Filling out customs forms.



Packing up boxes.



Volunteers at Riverside Elementary School.



Attempting to send out the packages same day.

Once we left Riverside Elementary School we arrived at the Battle Creek post office at 4:50pm, ten minutes prior to the post office's closing time. We were then informed that they

would not be able to process the 125 care packages before they were closed for the day and instructed us to come back the following morning.

Once we arrived we discovered that we had not filled out the correct customs forms or addresses and only had the list of items taped onto the box with notebook paper. While the four volunteers from Broncos for Heroes hurried to write out the addresses and fill out the correct customs forms, the employees at the post office informed us that multiple care packages contained items that could not be shipped and that others were not specified and needed to be opened and rechecked. This was a very time consuming way to learn that mouth wash or wipes containing alcohol, lithium batteries, and any product containing aerosol is not allowed to be shipped through the mail. After four hours at the post office spent writing 125 customs forms, addresses, and opening/retaping packages to ensure that they contained the correct items, our first batch of care packages were sent to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Below is a thank you letter that we received from one of the recipients of the care packages:

"Dear Lakeview Spartans,

What a treat it was to receive all of those wonderful gifts from Michigan. Everyone here is extremely appreciative of how you took the time to send as a little taste of home. We received the most thoughtful care packages that everyone here got something they really wanted out of them. Mostly my boss who loves those Oreo Cookies.

Afghanistan is a very different place, and many of us are missing our families back home. Receiving those packages gives everyone here just enough glimpse of home that it makes our time here much more bearable, and reminds us who we are over here to protect. It seems like a small thing to send a box in the mail, but it has the ability to lift the spirits of your soldiers and bring our world a little closer to home.

I am a Captain in what is called TAAC-East. Our job here is to help the Afghans protect their country from their enemies. The United States has been doing this for a long time now and we are getting closer to finishing our role in this country. We want the children in Afghanistan to be as

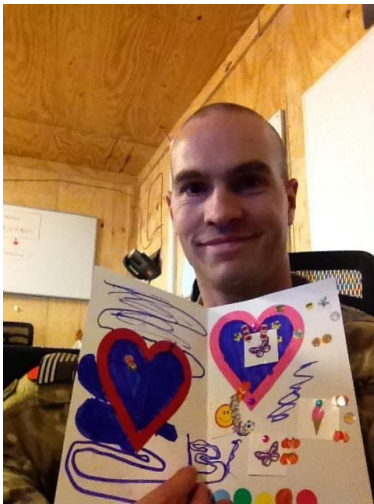
safe as our children are at home. If we are successful, Afghan children can go to school and grow up in a safe place like American children. As a father myself, I can appreciate the importance of this as much as anyone. Wish us luck, and thank you again for your wonderful gift. I have attached pictures with the cards that you sent me.

CPT Dennis N. Gable

CPT, AR

3rd Infantry Division, TAAC-E

Afghanistan"



CPT Gable



CPT Davis

When the letter from CPT Gable had been received I read it during our leadership meeting. After I finished reading what CPT Gable had wrote, I looked around the table to see many of our leadership board members teary eyed as they exclaimed how proud they were to be a part of a group who could make such an impact on the lives of those who sacrifice so much.

Most Successful Care Package Drive:

In one year we excelled past our goal of sending out 100 care packages per every four months by sending out 125 care packages from Riverside Elementary School in Battle Creek, 100 care packages from Amberly Elementary School in Portage, 45 care packages from Starr Elementary School in Plainwell, 100 care packages from Andrews Elementary School in Three Rivers, 75 care packages from Haverhill Elementary School in Kalamazoo and 3 care packages in between Care Package Drives creating the grand total of 448 care packages sent to Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Germany, and Liberia.

Broncos for Heroes' most successful Care Package Drive took place at Andrews Elementary School in Three Rivers, Michigan. At this point as an organization we had refocused our attention to build up and create a strong leadership team. The Vice President and I developed event manuals "for dummies" by tapping into our countless hours of experience learning what to do and what not to do when it comes to holding a successful care package drive. The big idea behind *Care Package Drives for Dummies* was that any member of Broncos for Heroes could execute the event at any time with minimal guidance required from the President or Vice President of Broncos for Heroes. Andrews Elementary School was the first time that *Care Package Drives for Dummies* was tested to see how the timelines and new means of organizing the event would pan out. Examples of forms, letters to parents, and how the boxes should be assembled were included in the guide. The following is a copy of *Care Package Drives for Dummies*:

Broncos for Heroes

Care Package Drives for Dummies

100 care packages every quarter

Lauren Martin
10/11/2015

Care Package Drives for Dummies

Before Care Package Drive:

3 months prior:

- Find school/business to host care package drive/pack it up event
- Send list of items we can/cannot accept to schools (pg. 2)

2 weeks prior:

- Send info letter home to parents of students (pg. 3)
- Care Package Drives can last anywhere from 2-4 weeks prior to pack it up event

Before Pack it Up event:

2 weeks prior (pg. 5):

- Make sure there is a min. of 10 addresses to send packages to
- Ask teacher to have sign-up times during the school day for classes to come down to pack boxes
- Order "Hope you enjoy your treat" letter with B4H email from office max (100)
- Order "Send us a picture!" card from office max (100)

1 week prior (pg. 6):

- Pick up 100 boxes, customs forms (the small ones), and shipping labels from post office
 - Let them know the date/time that we will be coming to ship the boxes
- Fill out shipping labels and customs forms prior to Pack it Up event

During Pack it Up event (pg. 7-8):

NEED:

-Min. of 24 volunteers

-1-2 trucks

- Arrive one hour prior to the event's start time
- Call post office 1 hour prior to arrival to let them know we're coming
- Line up tables to put donations on
- Organize items from largest to smallest, notes from students at the end
 - Ask teachers to send notes from students before event's start time so they can be read through (no gory images please)
- A. One volunteer assemble/hold boxes, one volunteer tape bottom of the box closed (X2)
- A. Put strip of notebook paper and clipboard in box, set next to table
- B. One volunteer per child, write down what items the child puts in the box, set at end of table
- C. One volunteer tape box closed (X2)
- D. One volunteer tape notebook paper to box (X2)
- E. One volunteer tape address to box (X2)
- F. One volunteer tape edge of customs form to box (X2)
- G. Set completed boxes on wagons
- G. Take wagons out to the truck
- H. Fill first truck with 50 care packages, send straight to post office
- H. Fill second truck with 50 care packages, send to post office

Items that can/cannot be accepted:

Can:

1. Cookies
2. Deodorant (stick only)
3. Crackers
4. Granola bars
5. Chips
6. Trail mix
7. Candy
8. Beef jerky
9. Toothbrush/paste
10. Lip balm
11. Baby wipes
12. Playing cards
13. Cereal
14. Pop tarts
15. Magazines
16. Books
17. Pens
18. Pencils
19. Hair ties
20. Socks
21. Tshirts
22. Chewing gum

Cannot:

1. Anything with aerosol
2. Batteries with lithium
3. Anything with alcohol
4. Homemade goods (unless made by family member of care package recipient)



_(name of school)___ Parents/Guardians,

From now until Friday, _____, (name of school) is partnering with Broncos for Heroes for a **Care Package Drive**.

Broncos for Heroes is a non-profit student organization at Western Michigan University and our mission is to support our servicemen and women both past and present. One of the ways that we accomplish our mission is to send care packages to our troops deployed overseas. Our first goal of 2015 is to send out 100 care packages, so that they will be delivered in time for **(holiday, optional)**. We need your help collecting items for these care packages. Examples of items to donate are listed below (we cannot use anything homemade, store bought only please):

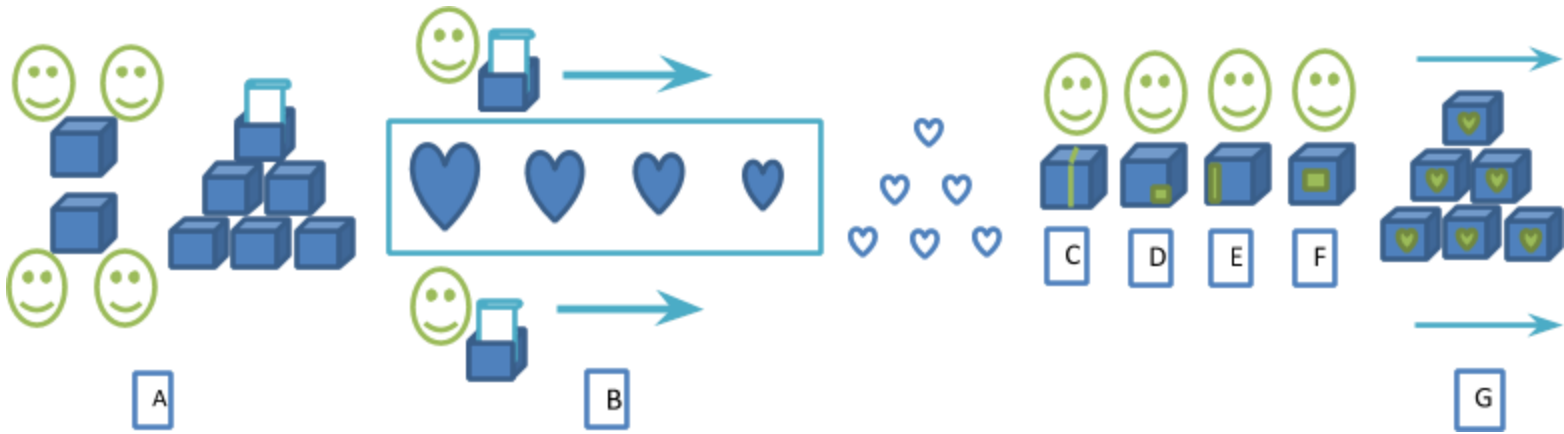
Breakfast Foods:	Sweets:	Drinks-Powdered Mix:
Mini cereal boxes	Cookies	Kool-Aid (Stick Packs)
Granola Bars	Crackers	Propel Power sticks
Pop tarts	Candy	Crystal Light (on-the-go packets)
Toiletries Full Size:	Snacks:	Fun:
Toothpaste	Peanuts	Deck of cards
Toothbrush	Pringles	Books
Chap-stick	Slim Jims	Magazines
Baby wipes	Trail mix	

If you would like additional information about Broncos for Heroes, you can go to our website at www.broncosforheroes.org, or feel free to look us up on Facebook.

Thank you for helping us support ours servicemen and women who are serving overseas. For any questions/comments/concerns please feel free to contact us.

Lauren Martin
 Broncos for Heroes President
 (269) 419-3580

Pack it Up Event/Set Up



A. One volunteer assemble/hold boxes, one volunteer tape bottom of the box closed (X2)

A. Put strip of notebook paper and clipboard in box, set next to table

B. One volunteer per child, write down what items the child puts in the box, set at end of table

C. One volunteer tape box closed (X2)

D. One volunteer tape notebook paper to box (X2)

E. One volunteer tape address to box (X2)

F. One volunteer tape edge of customs form to box (X2)

G. Set completed boxes on wagons

G. Take wagons out to the truck

H. Fill first truck with 50 care packages, send straight to post office

H. Fill second truck with 50 care packages, send to post office

After meeting with the Care Package Coordinator several months prior to the Andrews Elementary School Care Package Drive, we began preparations for the event. Right from the start the preparation and organization of the event greatly differed from the Riverside Elementary School Care Package Drive. We had created our own forms and means of completing tasks whereas during the Riverside Elementary School's Care Package Drive we relied heavily on Riverside's staff to direct us on the best way to complete the drive.

The three biggest lessons that were taken away from the Riverside Elementary School Care Package Drive was to make sure that only permissible items were put into the care packages, have forms completed prior to arrival at the post office, and to have an assembly line set up for the Pack it Up event. These processes were implemented before we met with the principal of Andrews Elementary School. At this meeting we provided the principal of Andrews Elementary School with a copy of all materials from *Care Package Drives for Dummies* that applied to the school itself. These materials included the letter home to parents, information about Broncos for Heroes, and of course the list of items to bring as well as items to avoid. The second process that was implemented for the Andrews Elementary School Care Package Drive was having the necessary forms filled out prior to arrival at the post office. A volunteer meeting was held one day before the event to have addresses and customs forms completed and ready to be attached to the care packages. Finally, the volunteers were briefed on how the assembly line for the Care Package Drive was set up, given copies of the diagram from *Care Package Drives for Dummies*, and assigned a role in the assembly line.

On the day that the Care Package Drive took place we had plenty of volunteers present, everyone knew what they were doing and where they were supposed to be, and care packages were filled efficiently and effectively.

Below is the thank you letter that we received from care package recipient COL Quarles from our Andrews Elementary Care Package Drive:

Dear Sir, or Ma'am,

I'm writing to express my sincere thanks and that of the Soldiers with whom I serve here in Afghanistan. Over the last several days we have received dozens of care packages from your organization. I provided all the packages you sent to our Chaplain who restocked the morale and welfare shelves in his office and made your gifts available to all our deployed personnel.

Your generosity and kindness are greatly appreciated by the entire team. Thank you again and best wishes for a Happy Thanksgiving, ours just got a whole lot better!

v/r COL Kevin J. Quarles
TAAC-E CofS
TB Gamberi, Afghanistan

Throughout the planning and execution process of the Care Package Drive it became apparent how many people were willing to donate their time and resources for an event that benefits our military. The organization went from a tiny RSO to being nationally recognized in just one year. 446 care packages, five Talons Out Honor Flights, a food drive for local veterans, and one student veteran scholarship later, and I have wrapped up my time with Broncos for

Heroes. I am so thankful to have been a part of an organization that was able to bring a community together to give support to our servicemen and women both past and present.