

Despite my elective being so far away, I had a great experience over my two weeks at HealthBarn USA. I was hoping to get more of the business and entrepreneurial side of things with the founder, but most of my time was spent observing, leading, setting up for and cleaning up after the classes and field trips for pre-K to middle school children/adolescents. I went off-site two days for presentations, one for under-served first graders in Fairlawn, NJ, and the other at a Ridgewood middle school for a health and wellness fair.

Another day, I worked on pediatric letters, which consisted of some back-office computer work, a trip to make copies at the UPS store, and a trip at the end of the day to the post office. The letters were to notify the pediatricians on file for each student (of the classes, not field trips) of what the student's program entailed and what they were expected to gain from the experience. There are classes offered for different age groups, and although some of the materials cross-over, the nutrition education and cooking skills level is tailored to the age of the students. There are Seedlings (3-5 years old), Sprouts (5-7 years old), Harvesters (8-11 years old), and Master/Teen Chefs (12+ years old). There are exceptions to those categories, based on each child though. These classes are enrolled with 8-12 children, from what I noticed. Field trips are usually larger groups of students from different schools or scout troops.

Field trips are broken up into 3-4 activities based on how many students are attending. Each activity is led by a different nutrition educator, if the group has 50+ students. Activities include newspaper pot making and pea seed planting; seasonal foods game; rainbow swirly smoothie making with lesson on natural v artificial ingredients; and a trip to the garden for various lessons including composting, herb garden tour, and seed planting followed by watering the garden. Each group/activity usually has 17-20 students at a time, with one nutrition educator and the teachers/chaperones to help if needed.

There really were so many things to see in my two weeks there. I was able to lead all the activities after observing them once or just watching a training video. I wanted to spend my elective at HealthBarn because I envision myself with a similar type of place one day, or so I thought going in. I see myself mostly offering adult classes and mini-retreats, but am open to programming for children too. I would not want to host large groups of children like the HealthBarn does, and I do not think that I want a bunch of employees working for me either. Though it may not be healthy all the time, or sustainable, I like to control things with my name on them. I believe that most people leave HealthBarn pleased with their experience, but seeing the behind-the-scenes, I do not think that all the founder's programming is being delivered as intended or in full, all the time. This may be due to lack of time, which is understandable, in my opinion. It does not seem unreasonable to me that things may take a little longer than planned when working with 8+ 5–10-year-olds, or a group of developmental challenged and hearing-impaired students. Unfortunately, what seemed to get dropped by the nutrition educators was the lesson, which seemed to be one of the most important parts of each session. I only led one class that had a lesson in it, about the Farmers Almanac and weather predictions, and the class was timed well, and we achieved all the tasks on the lesson plan. I did not see any other nutrition educator teach any lesson during my two weeks there.

This experience solidifies that I want to have a place that combines time in the garden, cooking skills, nutrition education, and some form of physical activity (probably yoga), and that I want it to be myself and Anderson, my fiancé, maybe with some extra help on the land. I do not think that I want others to teach classes or lead groups though. I will open my facility (God willing) to groups of adults, children,

and adolescents, but not to large groups. I am excited to see what the future holds and the possibility of creating my own greenhouse and garden to table experience!