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Student Earns \$500 Grant for YWCA

Dec. 4, 2017

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— A \$500 grant earned by Illinois Wesleyan University student Savanna Steck '18 will enable [YWCA McLean County](#) to serve healthier food to more than 330 children throughout the school year.

As a student in Illinois Wesleyan's Grant Writing course, Steck and her classmates competed against one another on behalf of local nonprofit organizations for a \$500 grant funded by IWU's [Action Research Center](#). Each student completed a mini-grant application and presented to a panel of judges, who ultimately chose to fund Steck's proposal. The YWCA will use the grant money to begin a kitchen-update project by purchasing an industrial sink and faucet.

"This grant is so important because every child deserves the best possible care," Steck said. "The kitchen allows the YWCA to not only continue the amazing Young Wonders childcare and educational programs, but now, the chance to ensure the children receive quality, nutritional food. Many of the families served in the YWCA community are low-income. The kitchen allows the YWCA to provide care that is the best it can be, so the children can be the best they can be."

Within its Young Wonders program, the YWCA serves approximately 80 young children and 250 before- and after-school children during the school year, plus 250 children throughout the summer. Of those children, 70 percent come from low-income families with diets that often lack proper nutrition. A top priority for the YWCA is to update its kitchen – including the sink – so staff members can prepare more nutritious food for the children, while also saving money on catering expenses.

"The three-compartment sink awarded to us through a grant obtained by Savanna is a stepping stone for a larger dream," said Melissa Breeden, senior director of YWCA Young Wonders. "This is the first step on our journey to a functional on-site kitchen. This kitchen would allow us to save money (all meals are currently catered), it would incorporate cooking into our lesson plans that would relate to math and science, and it would allow us to provide parent education about healthy meals and cooking.

"We are a nonprofit organization, and for Savanna to provide us with this opportunity not only saves us money for the project, but also saves us staff hours," Breeden continued. "We are very grateful for Savanna's diligence, time and effort to help us obtain the grant."

Steck, who is an English major and hopes to pursue a career in corporate event planning, said it was challenging to condense the entire grant proposal into 750 characters. She attempted to make every word count while anticipating questions that the reviewing committee might ask.

Taught by adjunct instructor in sociology Holly Ambuehl, Grant Writing allows students to learn about fundraising strategies for nonprofit organizations. Members of the class research grant opportunities and best practices, and design a program and budget.

"Savanna is, in general, an excellent writer," Ambuehl said. "However, more than that, she did an outstanding job documenting how the provision of healthy foods at childcare centers improves worthwhile outcomes. Often, the most difficult part of writing a grant is connecting the proposal both to local data and to national best practices, and this is where her grant proposal received high marks."

Ambuehl's Grant Writing course will be offered again during the spring of 2018 semester, with another \$500 grant at stake.

In addition to Illinois Wesleyan students, the course is also open to members of the community. There is no fee or registration process required for community members who audit Grant Writing. They are simply asked to contact Ambuehl in advance: hambuehl@iwu.edu.



Melissa Breeden (L), senior director of YWCA Young Wonders, and Savanna Steck '18 (R) collaborated on a \$500 grant proposal which will enable the YWCA to purchase an industrial sink and faucet.