

Manhattan Area Habitat for Humanity's Women Build Project – Rebuilding a community one person and one home at a time.

Manhattan, Kansas

Alec Hathaway – November 2019

In May 2019, the Morse Family Scholarship aided me in spearheading Mannhattans first-ever Women Build – a community-inclusive event designed to garner community support, specifically women, for the restoration of Habitat homes throughout the Manhattan area. Sixty women volunteers gathered over four days across Manhattan to partake in Women Build restoration activities.

This project was mutually beneficial for the Manhattan community and organization due to the lack of women volunteers on Habitats construction sites. This lapse comes from women not feeling comfortable taking on male-dominated roles. Statistically speaking, women only constitute 9% of all construction-related jobs and projects within the United States (Women in the labor force: a databook, 2018). We wanted the Women Build project to help women in our community feel more comfortable with their hands-on abilities by breaking the stigma that women are incapable of occupying spaces in male-dominated roles. The Women Build project was also a great catalyst to disseminate information and raise awareness about Manhattan Area Habitat for Humanity's mission and purpose within this community.

Outcomes:

The Women Build event garnered sixty participants, which were all women. This event gained momentum by using social media marketing, which resulted in all sixty spots filling up within two days of the social media rollout. The sixty women participants worked alongside low-income homeowners to complete home repair projects.

These projects included works such as:

- Aging-In-Place repairs – a program designed to help repair elderly community members homes who are unable to complete home repairs singlehandedly
- Weatherizing repairs – repairs done on low-income homes to ensure they met weatherized standards
- Habitat home repairs – repairs focused on current homeowners who live in homes provided by Habitat for Humanity.

Habitat was able to bring in a total of \$1,420 to use toward future Habitat projects. This was only possible thanks to \$850 of sponsorships from various local businesses (Frontier Construction, ERA High Pointe Realty, and Hayden Kohlmeier Orthodontics) and \$570 raised by the signup fee from the sixty participants.

Following the on-site repairs, the participants were all added to Habitat's volunteer roster, creating a larger database of potential volunteers for future projects.

This project also helped Manhattan Area Habitat for Humanity gain publicity from local media outlets, circling back to one of the original goals of spreading awareness of the organization and their overarching goal.

What I Learned:

This project supplied me with an abundance of new knowledge in terms of future work endeavors, such as information and hands-on work with cultivating and implementing a communications campaign, leadership roles and overseeing others and obtaining monetary donations. I gained more than just academic knowledge, I also learned how to positively impact a community and how fulfilling that impact can be.

Through this work, I was able to gain insight into the work that I want to do post-grad. Elevating marginalized and underprivileged individuals is something that I would like to dedicate my future to and is also the topic of research I have aligned myself with while acquiring my master's and Ph.D.

However, not everything happened as originally proposed. In my original proposal, I stated that my work with Habitat would carry over beyond this project and would span until the end of summer 2019. This did not end up happening due to Habitat's lack of need. After the Women Build was complete, Habitat's main income generator, The Habitat Restore, went through a move in location. This was the focus of Habitat's workers and volunteers for the entirety of the 2019 summer and the help of interns was no longer needed.

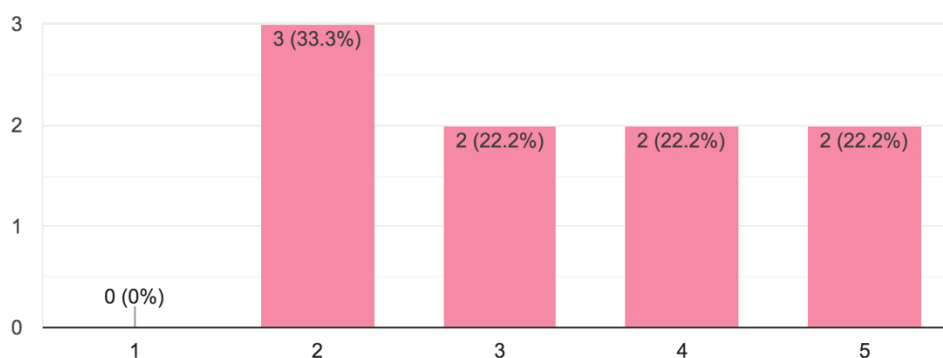
Moving forward, Habitat has decided to continue with the Women Build projects as an annual event. The logistics and completion of the first year's event were extremely successful with it being the first roll-out of a philanthropic event of its type. The only suggestion that can be made on my part for future years is to try and start earlier to try and get more sponsorships and donations from organizations. The \$850 we got for the first year was a great indicator that the community cares for this type of event, so reaching out sooner in years to come would allow Habitat the possibility of receiving more substantial sponsorships.

Quantifiable Data from participants:

After conducting a post-event survey, we were able to quantify the participant's viewpoints on repair projects before and after the women build event. The results that follow are from nine out of the sixty Women Build participants:

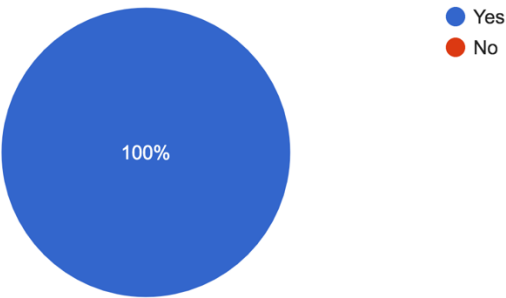
How did you feel about handling your own homes repair projects before the Women Build event?

9 responses



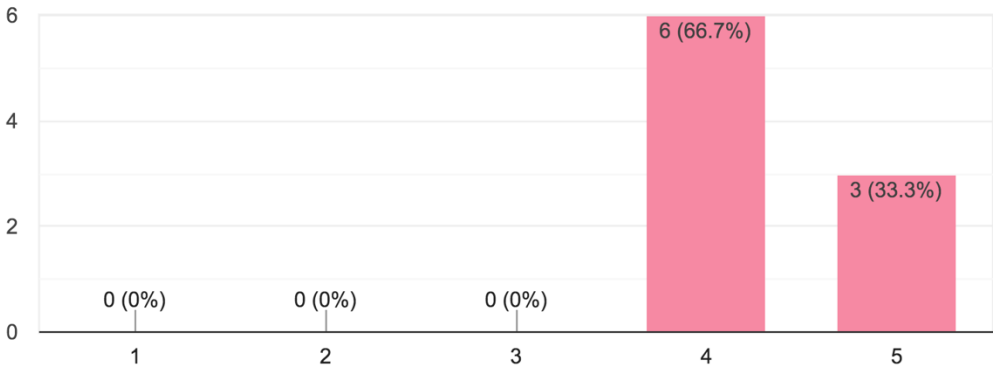
Would you feel comfortable volunteering with Habitat for more projects like the Women Build in the future?

9 responses

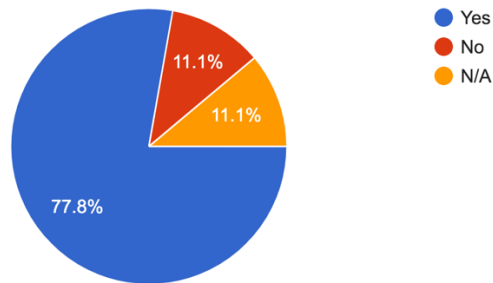


How do you feel about home repair projects following the Women Build event?

9 responses



Did this event make you feel better equipped to take on more hands-on projects?
9 responses



Melody Sexton, office director for Manhattan Area Habitat for Humanity had a few words to say on the impact of the Women Build:

“Manhattan area Habitat for Humanity’s first-ever women build was a success on many levels. From a marketing standpoint, the excitement and buzz surrounding this event helped us reach a population previously unaware of our programs and services. Our donor database was expanded as excited community members and participants committed to supporting our efforts to provide affordable housing. Most importantly, low-income homeowners in need of assistance were able to work side-by-side with volunteers to complete critical home repairs. Whether aging-in-place improvements, weatherizing or repairs, our Women Build participants enabled these homeowners to safely maintain their homes in a manner that would otherwise have been impossible. The popularity of this program guarantees that MAHFH will proudly host a Women Build as an annual event.”

To me and the workers and volunteers at Habitat, this project was extremely successful. We were not only able to generate new supporters, expand our donor base and help low-income

homeowners feel safe in their home, but we were also able to work together, as a community, to find ways to include and elevate marginalized individuals and effectively breakdown barriers to actively include everyone from this vibrant community.

In terms of future interns taking on this project, I have only a small piece of advice:

Put in the work for those who need it. Our main purpose is to elevate those around us who cannot do so themselves. Lead with compassion and a desire to see others succeed in life.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Morse family, Dean Goetsch and Jane Schillie for this amazing opportunity. This allowed me to help a community that I care for so deeply and is an experience that I will take with me in all my future endeavors. It was a great honor being the 2019 Morse Family and Community Public Policy Scholarship recipient.