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Service Work in Youth Development: The Power Behind Extracurriculars

Lyndsy Cadet
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Service Work in Youth Development: The Power Behind Extracurriculars

Thesis Presented to you by
Lyndsy Cadet'20

Public & Community Service Minor Capstone
Peter Costello
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Section I: Philosophy of Service

Flashback to My Freshman Year Philosophy of Service Paper

I had joined the PSP department because I was convinced that out of all major departments on campus, it was there I could learn through experience how to be an effective service worker and social justice advocate. Within my first semester, I personally had to undergo one of the most conflicting moments as a minor. I had to come up with five pages explaining how my “service work” of Spring ‘17 relates to my idea of service. I automatically knew the semester of “service work” was the exact opposite of what I thought service was. As a young 18 year old, I didn’t know how to inform a department that their service work methods were offensive and wrong. On top of my reservations about being honest, I doubted my ability in whether I was doing service correctly or if I was being pessimistic. My service placement was at Esek Hopkins AfterZone, where we were told to hang out with the students and participate in the program activities. It was like I was back home at my own charter school’s program but instead of working I was shadowing the employees. As the semester went on, I came to the realization that these “service trips” were giving upper/middle class white students a chance to see the realities of Providence low income communities. Hanging out in areas that are more impoverished than your hometown is, and will never be service work. Subjecting one’s home as a lesson of systemic inequality will always be insulting because being the victim born into the unjust system should not have to receive a pity party in their favor.

It was mind blowing how students during our PSP discussions attempted to accept this idealization that they were doing service work for simply having conversations with the people who lived in the community. In fact this is a dangerous notion to live by. A person can not come into a community and truly believe, from the get go, that they are service members and are

contributing something to the environment. This could influence the person to give themselves a false perception of the power they have within the community that they are desperately trying to integrate. For example, let's say the community, one would like to enter, has its own democratic systemic for decision making. Derrida describes democracy as a rotation. He says it is hard to imagine "naming of [a] democratic space without the rotary motion of some quasi circular return or rotation toward the self" (Derrida, 10). In this sense, it would make sense that in a full democratic society, decisions were made as a reflection of everyone in the community. Despite how decisions are made within this particular community, in essence the law must reflect or benefit everyone in the community. If a non-member attempts to join the community and their democracy, they can negatively influence the lawmaking process. For if a rule benefits the outsider rather than the true members of the community, the power now shifts towards a non-native which throws the community off track. If we, as service members, wish to benefit the community we enter, then we must learn when to step back and recognize our place within the community we entered. If you want to do "service work" then we must speak to those in charge and have them make the call of what "work" needs to be done. If you are not a part of a certain community you cannot join the circle to make decisions for the community. If service workers are throwing themselves into political positions of power and determining new community rules, they are ultimately removing democratic power from the community and gearing it towards themselves. This is why I wished during PSP 101, they would come to the conclusion that none of us really did any service work because we are in no position to decide what a community needs to work on, when we are not inhabitants of the communities we visited.

Undoubtedly, the sites that PSP has connections with are amazing examples of what service work is and PSP/Feinstein should continue their partnership with these organizations. However, instead of convincing students that they are completing “service work” for simply existing in those communities, students should be analyzing what makes those organizations great service work areas and how it contributes (or doesn’t) to their own ideals. This way, time in a class can be more constructive and not based on forced idealizations that we are contributing to a community that will continue to move on in the same mannerisms with or without us. Understandably, PSP/Feinstein have good intentions but all service workers understand that genuine service work takes time and relationships cannot be forced within a small time frame.

What is My Definition of Service?

From Spring 2017 to present day, my definition of service has yet to change. During my years of being a PSP minor, I believe that service is helping people gain access to resources and opportunities that will help them achieve personal or collective goals. True service work is being able to provide equitable resources and opportunities in a manner that does not remove agency from the person or community that is being assisted. As I continued my journey in service work I realized the rise of service work is the effect of how social injustices are creating a gap between equality, wealth, and others forms of power. Therefore, service work should coincide with social justice movements where there is a dismantler of the power hierarchies and unjust social inequalities that plague societies. Service work done right, has a vision of a world that will no longer need service work due to the removal of unjust social constructs.

Distinction Between Service Work and Charity Work

As mentioned before, I believe that service work works in conjunction with social activism in which it dismantles systemic oppression while establishing access to equitable resources and opportunities. Both service work and social activism should lead us into a world where everything is truly equitable without the prevalence of discriminatory bias. Currently, our world has thousands of volunteerism, public services, and non-profit opportunities globally where people can help others out. All terms tend to be synonymous with service work which I disagree with. Service work are acts of community service that take part in disrupting the power hierarchy of whichever societal injustice is at power. While charity work, are small acts of kindness that directly aid the victims of societal injustice but do nothing in providing a long term effect. Service works aim to remove unjust power hierarchies while charity work are acts of kindness that provide moments of support and comfort. For example, homelessness is a major social issue in our world. Churches holding soup kitchens for homeless people, veterans, and families is an example of charity work because they are providing food during a homeless person's moment of hunger. The soup kitchen provides a moment of comfort but no long term solution. On the other hand, there are non profit shelters that take in homeless people and help them build resumes, look for jobs, find an apartment, etc. Organized shelters are doing a form of service work because they are providing opportunities that homeless people would struggle to find on their own. Those shelters are working to ensure that people are no longer homeless and hopefully will not return to being homeless.

There is a importance behind both service work and charity work because short term and long term effects work hand in hand. However it is important not to conflate the two terms

together because charity work will not have the same results as service work and vice versa. When communities are asking to see a long term plan, they do not want to hear endless ideals like soup kitchens; they want to hear policy changes. When communities are asking for short term relief, they do not want to hear about policy making but rather quick relief strategies/accommodations. When working in this field, it is important to make the distinction between the two acts of work to better provide for the community at need.

The Passion Behind my Service Work

As I continue to grow in my career my service work lies in supporting programs in low income neighborhoods that help families break the poverty cycle and transform into generational wealth. When living in a neighborhood terrorized by redlining, institutionalized racism, environmental racism, gentrification, and broken infrastructure; it is inevitable to identify the disproportionate access to resources within the state alone. From middle school age, students can identify which area is wealthy vs poverty stricken. In addition to recognizing the wealth discrepancies, students subconsciously recognize the wealthy areas have the most white people while non white people (Black and Latinx people) are in the low income spots. Racism and classism has been intertwined in these communities for generations. Low income neighborhoods are not struggling because the inhabitants are not intelligent enough to succeed. The neighborhoods are struggling due to racist infrastructure the US government has enforced on communities of color. Communities who are economically failing are the victims of government leaders who have failed in providing equitable resources based on their elitist bias.

Systemic oppression is a tool that leaves people feeling the loss of agency and power because it is a structural power that relies on the oppression of people of color. Even for those

who are well versed in infrastructure and systemic terminology, it is easy to feel lost and lose sight in a brighter future. Imagine how those who lack the vocabulary to explain how the effects of systemic oppression and the lack of economic wealth in their family affect their success rates. In a capitalistic world where money defines everything, people need tangible success not empty promises. Communities receiving emotional solidarity are no longer enough. Communities need bridges to accessible resources and opportunities to be created. Equality is the standard but equity is how one makes equality a reality throughout the masses.

I am a product of countless years in afterschool programs and summer camps with the help of vouchers and obtaining leadership positions. The support and reality check my after school teachers of color have given me will forever be ingrained in my memories. It was them who taught me about how dysfunctional the world but there is still room for everyone to succeed despite the financial struggles. It was them who showed me how to balance my academics and social life. It is because of those adults, I feel inclined to pass down the same mentorship experiences to future students of my own; whether in classrooms or after school programs. Both my undergraduate and master degrees will be in Elementary/Special Education because the curriculum needs to be adjusted to fit the both the historical and cultural backgrounds of the students being served. The United States curriculum is flawed and hides the painful reality of how communities of color are treated. The education system administration/faculty members are not even as half as diverse as the student body they serve; yet there are only a few changes being made in behavior management, curriculum change, and quantity of resources. My goal as an educator is to help students understand their level of innate potential is not defined by the environment that has been a victim of systemic racism. Students can use their potential and skills

to create a life that is more promising despite the odds against them. As an educator my mission is to provide for my students as well as motivate them to develop a tangible plan to success.

Section II: Reevaluating Systemic Structures

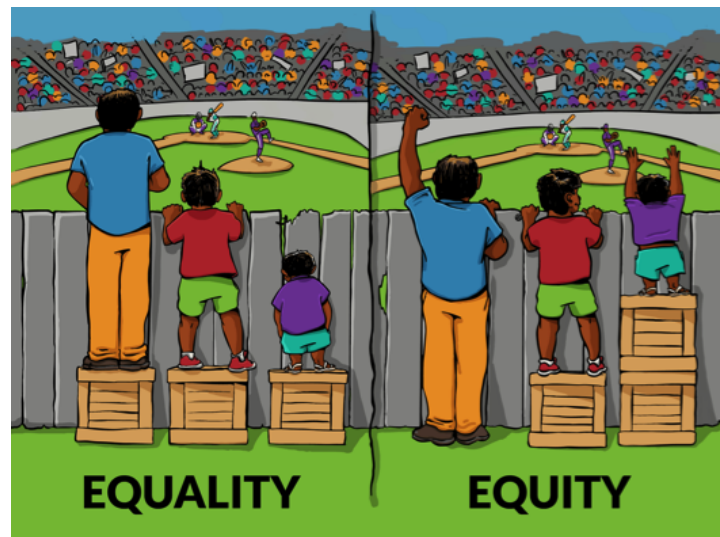
Equality vs. Equity

The United States of America prides itself on representing equality. The country's motto of being the "land of the free or land of opportunity" are often mentioned in history lessons as it discusses the USA's long journey to freedom. These terms were highlighted because the US boasts that every citizen can achieve the "American Dream". Ironically, in fine print, the early government decided which demographic had the right to achieve this "American Dream". It took the country centuries to provide everyone that did not identify as either white, male, heterosexual, Christian, or rich, their innate human rights . It took multiple social movements like Civil Rights, Women Rights, Gay Rights, Anti-Xeniphohia, etc for the US government to finally adjust the laws to protect the human rights for all demographics. It may be written in official government documents that all American citizens are equal in the eyes of law but is every American citizen treated with equality in regards to political, economic, or social success? Have the demographics who have been oppressed received adequate resources that negate the generational push back they were the victims of? Or are they expected to catch up now that the US no longer oppressed them through the law? In order for equality to be an American reality, the US government needs to push for equity nationwide.

The United States holds on to the belief that capitalism is the best method for the government to protect the economic rights of all people. However, the capitalistic attitudes of the government drives people to immerse themselves into an extreme individualistic attitude. Money

becomes the center of our survival and people are looking for ways to turn anything to profit because everyone is trying to be a CEO rather than a consumer. Everyone wants to be a CEO and loses the value of having a business partner. Unfortunately “capitalism calls itself liberal, but it is not an economic system based on freedoms; it is an economic system based on privilege” (Derrida, 2003). Throughout United States history, job opportunities are not simply based on experience but rather networking conversations that take place behind the scenes. On top of having personal connections; the result of white flight, redlining neighborhoods, lack of job employments in inner city areas, exploitation of undocumented immigrants and non high school graduates leads to the ever growing gap between financial social classes in the United States. While there are multiple billionaires, there are hundreds of thousands of people living, in hunger, under the poverty line, struggling to find a well paying job, or suffocating underneath the rising costs of living. How is it possible that CEOs of major corporations are filthy rich while their workers are struggling to keep their family or themselves afloat? Capitalism only awards those who have the privileges to access multiple resources that are not easily accessible to others. The more money one has, the more resources they have access to. The less money one has, the less resources they have access to. It is unethical for the government to make no effort to spread financial opportunities equally across the nation in order to close the ever growing wealth gaps. Capitalism does not protect the people of the United States but rather the profit that they create off the exploitation of their employees. When American citizens' rights to being financially stable are thwarted by the government, there is no such thing as equal rights or opportunities but rather a classist hierarchy is being enforced.

If there is no equity, then there is no equality. Equality means that everyone is treated the same in the eye of law and is provided innate legal human rights and opportunities for success. However, in order for everyone to be equal, then they must all receive equal access to rich opportunities in order to obtain personal success. This is where equity comes in. Equity is ensuring that everyone receives the accommodations necessary in order to receive the same level of access as everyone else. An example of equity is Special Education services in public and private schools. It is a school's responsibility to teach all students the National Common Core Standards. Due to the fact that some students may be born or develop with a learning disability, schools are expected to provide extra academic support so that these students can fully comprehend the information being taught. Despite the extra academic services given, both general education and special education students are graded on the same academic scale and now have similar opportunities to succeed academically. Henceforth, if the US government truly cares for the wellbeing of its citizens, it is time to put in place policies that allow citizens, who need the extra accommodations, a realistic chance to achieve their "American Dream".



Education System: The Opportunity & Achievement Gap

Comparatively, the unequal distribution of resources can be seen negatively affecting the United States' education system. Due to the ever prevalent opportunity gap between

neighborhoods, school districts are either performing well or underperforming and falling behind national standards. The term “*opportunity gap* [the unequal or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities] refers to the ways in which race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, community wealth, familial situations, or other factors contribute to or perpetuate lower educational aspirations, achievement, and attainment for certain groups of students. The opportunity gap connects to the *achievement gap* [which] refers to outputs—the unequal or inequitable distribution of educational results and benefits” (Education Reform, 2013). When schools are unable to afford the same resources or experiences, the ultimate victims are the student’s learning journey and academic performance. Research over the years has shown how schools districts in more affluent areas are performing way above school districts in low income areas. For example, some schools are able to provide well kept textbooks for all students, while in other districts teachers have to pair students up to share beat up textbooks or make several photocopies. Some schools can renovate new gym areas and equipment while other schools have to substitute the cafeteria as a gym space. Some schools have extra money aside to support their band and theatre programs while 2 districts away, schools are cutting music and art programs. Students across the state are living two different schooling experiences and are internalizing a certain message. If you live in a wealthy neighborhood you have access to more options, whereas if you live in a low income neighborhood you have little to nothing. The appearance of a school sends an indirect message to its students implying that their education and future success is not a priority which contributes to the social/emotional/behavioral issues amongst the community. In an attempt to standardized student academic performance nationwide, the US government adopted the claim “No Child Left Behind” and nationalized the

academic standards but they overlooked how school's access to materials and sources could continue to widen the academic performance gap between districts. It is hard to imagine that students across the nation will retain the same academic materials despite the uneven access to educational resources. As long as students are unable to receive similar access to instructional materials and extracurricular programs, both the opportunity gap and the achievement gap will continue to grow.

Changing the Narrative: Youth Development Non-Profit Organizations

While students living in low income neighborhoods are falling behind academically, they also lack the opportunity to participate in extracurriculars inside and/or outside of school, in comparison to their peers living in affluent areas. In the 2015 Atlantic article "*The Activity Gap*" written by Alia Wong, discusses the factors that influence the decline of children in low income families' participation in extracurricular activities versus their peers who come from wealthier incomes. Wong also discusses how extracurricular activities can be developmentally beneficial for all children. Being compared in the article, are the lives of two children; Ethan, from a middle class neighborhood and Nicole, a girl from a low income neighborhood. It depicts how Ethan's family encouraged him to join the Boy Scouts, play soccer and track, and play in the orchestra. Throughout his youth his family were able to cover the costs, drive him around from place to place, and explore the world outside the neighborhood. On the other hand, Nicole lives in a dangerous neighborhood and spent most of her childhood watching tv as her parents worked long hours to stay afloat. Nicole tried joining the dance team but had to drop out because her family could not afford the uniform and travel expenses. The article uses their lives to showcase the discrepancies of their childhoods.

Extracurricular activities outside of school hours play an essential role in a child's development. "Research shows that the skills, habits, connections, and knowledge that kids develop in these activities help them gain self-esteem and resilience and reduce the likelihood that they'll engage in risky behavior such as drug use, delinquency, and sexual activity. They could even lead to higher wages and more opportunities for career advancement, as well as increase the likelihood of voting and engaging in politics" (Wong, 2015). Extracurriculars provide children the opportunity to learn about their interests, how to socially interact with their peers, and have higher expectations of success for themselves. When children engage in positive social activities there is a smaller chance that they would engage in dangerous lifestyles that would have a negative effect on their educational and financial advancement in life. Through various data, researchers see a connection because the amount of extracurriculars a student participates in and their college admission rates. College admission teams are looking for students who can balance their academics as well as their social lives. Consequently, students from low income families tend to be unmarketable due to the lack of opportunity to participate in inexpensive extracurriculars. Hence, while Ethan is comfortably beginning his freshman year at an elite college; Nicole is a single mother, working two jobs, while trying to complete a one year college program on a \$9000 loan.

Researchers are discovering there is an "Activity Gap" between middle class and low income families participation in extracurriculars. Researchers highlighted that "...it's worth noting that they limited their analysis to "non-Hispanic white" high school seniors to emphasize that "the gaps we find are driven by social class and not by race or ethnicity" (Wong, 2015). While it is important to understand that finances play a major role in the lack of opportunity it is

important to highlight which demographics are being targeted into a lifestyle of disadvantage. It is no secret that environmental and institutional racism is a reality and some neighborhoods are not supported well enough to ensure that its members are living comfortably. In order to attempt to solve this issue we must face the problem at its roots rather than the surface. Researchers are correct that family income plays a role in the level of participation in extracurriculars but we must also pay attention to how certain demographics have access to these funds and why.

With the rise of the awareness of institutionalized racism issues affecting large communities, various non profit organizations are appearing to help restore access to resources that a community may lack. There are countless Nonprofit Organizations (NPOs), centered on youth development, housing, immigration, food, research projects, etc growing throughout the United States. The areas I am choosing to focus on are Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Based on a given map there are 29,983 registered in Massachusetts (5 per thousand people), and 4,393 are registered in Rhode Island (4 per thousand people). Although they are constantly growing throughout the years, the definition of non profits is not quite understood. NPOs are organizations designed to provide welfare to various demographics or circumstances that allow them to be exempt from certain tax laws. “Each [Section 5 law] identifies certain conditions that must be met to be exempt from paying federal income taxes. The one common condition is not paying out profits (“no part of the organization’s net earnings can ensure to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual”); hence the term, “nonprofit.” Section 501(c)(3) of the tax code refers to “public charities” (also known as charitable nonprofits) and “private foundations.(NCN, 2020)” Since NPOs are designed to provide aid on behalf of the community one person or a select group of people cannot obtain the money for their own private account”.

The money accumulated is designated for the NPOs to continue pumping resources into their local communities.

It is important to recognize the impact of NPOs, big or small. NPOs are essential because not only do they aim to combat social issues of modern day society but they help foster community relationship building. NPOs dedicate their time to “ provide a way for people to work together for the common good, transforming shared beliefs and hopes into action...They foster civic engagement and leadership, drive economic growth, and strengthen the fabric of our communities”(NCN, 2020). All around us are organizations built to help people, no matter how big or small. NPOs play a role in school children’s lives by funding the museums, zoo, aquariums and field trip locations that every school child looks forward to. A huge population of society has learned how to swim through various YMCA facilities. NPOs are all around us through the presence of The Food Project, Boys & Girls Club, YMCAs, public libraries, homeless shelters, refugee camps, immigration services, etc. Whether we know it or not, NPOs helped cultivate our lives as we know it.

Thesis

The focus of my thesis is deciphering how afterschool programs are appropriate examples of my definition of service work. I believe true service work is battling against social injustice issues and bridging the access to resources to those who are underprivileged. The lack of equitable resources being properly distributed to low income, disadvantaged neighborhoods has an effect on the level of education students are receiving in their hometowns. Through the evaluation of how the mission and values of The Possible Project, AS220, and PASA AfterZone

(after school programs located in Massachusetts and Rhode Island respectively) align with how they are contributing to closing the opportunity gap for students in underprivileged districts.

Section III: After School Programs 101

Student Participation vs Adult Supervision

The research study ``*The Impact of an Academic Sports-Mentoring Afterschool Program on Academic Outcomes in At-Risk Youth*'' by Heather Kestner Green was a formal thesis that was written for Green's doctorate in Philosophy at Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her thesis researched how youth's academic and behavior development in school was affected based on the participation, or lack thereof, in after school or extracurricular programs.

Her study highlights that the youth are being left unsupervised between the hours of 3pm to 6pm due to a variety of home factors. Research shows "a nation-wide survey found that 44% of families did not have any regular after school care for their children (Families and Work Institute, 1997). More recently, the National Institute on Out-of-School Time estimated that at least 8 million U.S. kids ages 5-14 are unsupervised afterschool on a regular basis (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2003)" (Green, 2010). Potential factors concerning why students are not attending after school programs could be limited program space, price variations (parents may or may not have access to vouchers), and transportation. While Green does not specify which factor is most prevalent, it is important to consider why some students are left to supervise themselves. Green reports a research study by "Snyder, and colleagues (1996) and Sickmund and colleagues (1997) [who] reported that juvenile arrests occur most often between 2:00 and 6:00 pm on school days. More specifically, the rate of juvenile violence is four times

greater from 4:00-7:00 pm than it is from 10pm to 6am, and 57% of juvenile violence occurs on school days” (Green, 2010). The danger behind leaving young adolescents to supervise themselves is the lack of boundaries set in place to prevent them from engaging in “a set of high-risk behaviors, such as skipping school, skipping classes, not attending to the teacher, and not completing required classwork or homework” (Green, 2010). Students who are left alone are more likely to exhibit these high risk behaviors and have a higher chance of becoming a high school dropout or not maintaining strong academic performance.

When looking at the percentages of dropouts based on racial demographics “African American and Hispanic students have, at times, been found to have higher rates of dropout than students of other racial/ethnic groups, particularly when they attend inner-city schools (Finn & Rock, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Other studies have found that the effect of racial/ethnic status can be reduced or eliminated when socioeconomic status is controlled (Kaufman et al., 1992)” (Green, 2010). A thought provoking line is “when socioeconomic status is controlled” hinting that if African American or Hispanic students have a higher chance of staying in school if they came from a higher socio-economic status. It's true that when a family is more financially stable, their children will tend to have a higher success rate in high school. However I find the terminology “controlled” off putting in this context because in the United States it is very hard for one to adjust their socioeconomic status depending on the access to various resources which are ultimately controlled by the government. While one can control their own financial spending , being within the poverty circle or not coming from generational wealth is almost always intertwined with systemic oppression.

Moreover, the lack of adult supervision in post school hours can lead students to engage in high risk behaviors that may ultimately result in increasing school dropout rates or low academic performance due to lack of motivation or academic/social support. While there are many economic, social, or familial factors that can play a role into why students are left unsupervised, it is clear there needs to be a solution provided for millions of students living in underprivileged neighborhoods to increase their academic success rates.

On the other hand, there is research that displays the effects in student academia when supervised or supported after school hours. Attendance Works is an organization that works towards decreasing the levels of chronic absences in elementary, middle, high schools nationwide. They aim to create, revise, and improve federal state laws in regards to school absences laws. In addition to working with governments they partner with organizations that help with decreasing chronic school absences. They completed a research project highlighting how student participation increases in schools connected to student attendance in schools. They collected information from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Minnesota, and California.

Within the New England and Northeast region, Attendance Works analyzed the PASA AfterZone program that works in the Providence School District. “According to a 2011 study by Public/Private Venture. Middle school students in the program had a 25 percent lower absence rate than their peers” (Arberton, 2009). In Massachusetts “Middle-school students attending the Citizen Schools after school program in Boston attended school 11 more days than their peers who did not participate, according to a 2009 study. They also were more likely to attend high school regularly, even though the program stopped in middle school. For example, in the 11th

grade, participants attended school 13 more days than their peers” (Policy Studies Associates, Inc., 2009). This research showcases that students in afterschool programs connected to their schools, were more likely to be in school in comparison to their peers. Not only did the middle school attendance increase; in Boston, students were more likely to attend more days in high school.

Attendance Works also did research nationwide and along the west coast. One of the organizations they analyzed was Boys and Girls Clubs, which can be found in most, if not all states. They discovered “A 2009 study of 322 7th and 8th grade students at Boys & Girls Club for 30 months found that those attending after school programs skipped school fewer times, increased school effort and gained academic confidence. The first two indicators increased with the number of days attending after school programs. In the west coast “L.A. 's BEST program found that students’ regular school-day attendance improved once they began participating in the afterschool program. That led to higher scores on standardized tests of math, reading and language arts. The June 2000 report summarized five studies and findings from tracking BEST students in 2nd and 5th grades in the 1993-94 school year” (Huang, D et al, 2000). This data shows how students became more motivated to remain in their class when they were actively staying in their school. In LA, Attendance Works was able to see an increase in SATs scores in the students. Most likely, the students were able to retain more academic skills during their school year which helped increase the test taking skills as well.

Through the research data Attendance Works has collected, they are able to showcase the role afterschool programs play in school attendance. When students are in school for longer periods, they are able to learn, practice, and retain information. It is critical that students remain

in school so that they are able to increase their academic skills and be less prone to falling behind national performance skills. Academics will be taken seriously when students become invested into the school, its staff members, the value of education. Attendance Works has shown us the positive effects of productivity after programs in student lives. Now it is time to recognize what characteristics afterschool programs need to have in order to successfully attend to its members.

After School Program Definition

Due to the variety of afterschool programs, Green has developed a definition of afterschool program that accurately describes the programs she will analyze. After school programs are “contemporary afterschool programs serve four major functions: (1) to increase the safety and supervision of school-age children; (2) to enhance cultural and community identification and appreciation; (3) to develop social skills and increased competency; and, (4) to improve academic achievement (Cosden, Morrison, Albanese, & Macias, 2001). They simultaneously reduce risk for delinquency, violence, and substance abuse (Afterschool Corporation, 1999) and improve adjustment and socialization (Fashola, 2002). Thus, after school programs will be defined as safe places that are supervised by adults where school age children and adolescents go in the hours after school to engage in a range of recreational and/or academic enrichment opportunities” (Green, 2010). Green will look into how student achievement statistics differ when students attend after school programs that contain the four functions of after school programs, supervisions, development of social skills, enhancement of cultural and community identification, and the improvement of academic achievement.

Characteristics of Effective After School Programs

When evaluating the effectiveness of after school programs, Green examines the type of relationship students were exposed too. After school programs that foster a safe space and strict expectations of respect being given to one another, their environment, and themselves. When programs offer a sense of stability to its youth, it creates space for its members to foster social skills where they are working together, playing together, or achieving a community goal together. It allows the youth to explore their personal interests, learn from the adults, and find a purpose and love in learning. In order for the youth to feel comfortable to take the initiative to form relationships, the adults working need to ensure that they are positive role models and build a positive rapport. “One study found that providing opportunities for growth and the formation of relationships with caring, stable adults were associated with higher levels of self-esteem, lower frequencies of getting into trouble (Roffman, Pagano, & Hirsh, 2001). Two other studies found that negative interactions between program staff and participating children was associated with poorer grades for boys, while positive interactions with staff and flexibility in program structure were related to better social skills and behavior (Pierce, Hamm, & Vandell, 1999; Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996) (Green, 2010).” In day to day relationships, people thrive when they feel support from each other. Where there is support, there are grounds for constructive criticism, praise and advice. When someone is treated with importance, their self confidence will build leading them down the road to self discipline and independence. These life skills can translate into school which would be highlighted when students choose to persevere through academic and social challenges rather than fall through the cracks.

It is important to realize that despite the level of authority school administration may have, the students are the ones who have to work for their success in return. Like the quote “You

can bring the horse to the river but you force it to drink the water”. Teachers can provide the information but the students ultimately choose to participate or internalize the information. “The psychological aspects of such engagement include having an interest in school and learning, feeling connected to school, and being motivated to participate in academic tasks (Marks, 2000). Behavior associated with academic engagement is demonstrated by regular attendance at school, participation in educational activities, effort applied to academic activities, and the quality of social interactions at school (Marks, 2000)” (Green, 2010). When students have secure relationships with adults they feel a sense of purpose and confidence to overcome challenges. They can put down barriers and explore their personal interest and mannerisms to help learn how to adjust their world to fit their needs.

While every after school program has their methods that reflect their own mission and values that they want to provide to their youth, all after school programs understand the importance of hiring the right employees, who aim to be role models for the youth and carry out the program’s mission. It is vital that after school programs have high standards for the mannerisms and professionalism of their employees; seeing how adult-student relationships can drastically alter a student’s perception in and outside of school.

During the regular academic year, students are in schools 8 hours a day, 5 times a week, for a minimum of 10 months. It is simply not enough for schools to just cultivate bright academic minds without providing assistance in student’s social/emotional development. In fact, it is hard for adults to form genuine relationships with students without taking their emotions and behaviors into consideration. The youth are “little people” that are attempting to navigate not only the world, but their emotions in terms of being self confident, feeling accepted and nurtured,

and communicating vulnerability. It takes a village to raise a child and it should be indisputable that youth facilities teach the youth about emotional intelligence.

An example of a program with a mission to increase emotional intelligence in the youth can be seen in the article “Learning Systematically from Experience through a Research-to-Practice Pipeline in Chicago Wendy Fine, Jiffy Lansing, and Marshaun Bacon. Fine, Lansing, and Bacon are researchers evaluating an in school youth program, Becoming A Man (BAM). BAM is a counseling and mentoring program that is led by Youth Guidance (YG), a community organization that works with Chicago schools who cater to at-risk-youth. The researchers discussed with the young men in the group about the program’s mission and benefits. The young men discussed how the program’s objective is for the young men to learn, internalize, and practice social cognitive skills, make responsible decisions for their future, and become positive members of their school and community. BAM was created to help young men discover how to foster positive relationships with other men without having to participate in the gang activity around them. The BAM curriculum teaches six core values: integrity, self-determination, positive anger expression, accountability, respect for womanhood, and visionary goal-setting. The boys review over their core values in addition to sharing their personal experiences with their mentors as they learn how to process these emotions and how to handle social situations. During the school hours, students have a room named the “BAM Room” where they hold meetings. Students even have access to the BAM room if they feel as though they needed a quiet space during the day to recenter themselves emotionally.

While the BAM program was specifically created to teach young men how to properly handle their emotions and use decision making skills in times of conflict, they showcase a

behavior management system that every after school program should have. Behavior management is not solely based on discipline unwanted actions but teaching the youth how to behave in a respectful manner that accurately communicates their emotions. It is about treating emotional intelligence as a strength rather than a weakness. All programs may not have set a specific behavior management program like BAM, however, there should be training provided to employees on teaching social/emotional development strategies. Youth will only connect with those who create a secure environment for all ranges of emotions. Emotional support goes hand in hand with stabilizing emotional connections with adults in the program.

In addition to having professional and productive employees, it is important that activities are created in reflection of the students or based on their interests. The content of the program must relate to its members in order to spark an interest within them and form personal connections. An example of this can be found in the short article “ A District-wide Approach to Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices in the Boston Public Schools” by Colin Rose and Mwalimu Donkor Issa, where Boston Public Schools has been taking a new initiative to

incorporate culturally and linguistically sustaining practice into the curriculum.

One of the schools that began revising their curriculum is Snowden International School located in Copley Square. Faculty are adjusting components of their school curriculum that display any one of the *7 Forms of Bias*, “invisibility (erasure of particular cultures), stereotyping (categorizing students based

7 FORMS OF BIAS IN INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

OFFICE OF
OPPORTUNITY GAPS

1. INVISIBILITY: What You Don't See Makes a Lasting Impression

The most fundamental and oldest form of bias in instructional materials is the complete or relative exclusion of a group. Textbooks published prior to the 1960s largely omitted African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans from both the narrative and illustrations. Many of today's textbooks are improved, but far from perfect. Women, those with disabilities, and the LGBTQIA community continue to be missing from many of today's texts.

2. STEREOTYPING: Shortcuts to Bigotry

Perhaps the most familiar form of bias is the stereotype, which assigns a rigid set of characteristics to all members of a group, at the cost of individual attributes and differences. While stereotypes can be positive, they are more often negative.

3. IMBALANCE AND SELECTIVITY: A Tale Half Told

Curriculum may perpetuate bias by presenting only one interpretation of an issue, situation, or group of people. Such accounts simplify and distort complex issues by omitting different perspectives.

4. UNREALITY: Rose Colored Glasses

Many researchers have noted the tendency of instructional materials to gloss over unpleasant facts and events in our history. By ignoring prejudice, racism, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, sexism, and inter-group conflict, we deny students the information they need to recognize, understand, and perhaps some day conquer societal problems.

5. FRAGMENTATION AND ISOLATION: The Parts Are Less than the Whole

Did you ever notice a “special” chapter or insert appearing in a text? For example, a chapter on “Bootleggers, Suffragettes, and Other Diversions” or a box describing “Ten Black Achievers in Science.” Fragmentation emerges when a group is physically or visually isolated in the text. Often, racial and ethnic group members are depicted as interacting only with persons like themselves, isolated from other cultural communities. While this form of bias may be less damaging than omission or stereotypes, fragmentation and isolation present non-dominant groups as peripheral members of society.

6. LINGUISTIC BIAS: Words Count

Language can be a powerful conveyor of bias, in both blatant and subtle forms. Linguistic bias can impact race/ethnicity, gender, accents, age, (dis)ability and sexual orientation.

7. COSMETIC BIAS: “Shiny” covers

The relatively new cosmetic bias suggests that a text is bias free, but beyond the attractive covers, photos, or posters, bias persists. This “illusion of equity” is really a marketing strategy to give a favorable impression to potential purchasers who only flip the pages of books.

limiting generalizations), imbalance and selectivity (the curriculum is omitting one or multiple perspectives), unreality (ignoring unpleasant facts), fragmentation and isolation (isolating the accomplishments of non white people/history), linguistic bias (language can display bias, subtle or unsubtle), and cosmetic bias (text is deemed “unbiased” but the photos/advertisements surrounding it is propaganda for another view)” (VUE, 2018).

Snowden is attempting to revise their curriculum because they are aware that the current school curriculum is not an active reality of the students that they serve. The current curriculum purposely deviates from the historic oppression that Black people have faced for centuries that lead to the current disparities between class, race, and institutions. The school administration understood that in order for students to become engaged within the school they needed to indulge in content that speaks to their history and experiences. The school realized that if they wanted their students to have agency over their own learning and begin participating in class, they needed to provide topics that would ignite a sense of passion. The United States is indefinitely a diverse country but there is a need to turn multiple communities into inclusive areas that allows people from all backgrounds to grow. Snowden using the list of 7 Form of Bias to critique their own school curriculum is a bold move in the right direction. Adjustments like these allow for people to learn and internalize inclusive behaviors that helps create a safe environment for whomever passes through.

It is inspiring to see some schools moving in a progressive manner to help their students thrive in a manner that fits them best academically, emotionally, and socially. Removing bias from our personal thoughts helps us form bonds and relationships with people we typically would not surround ourselves with. Through the relationships we make with people different

from ourselves, we learn how to respectfully communicate and understand people's behaviors despite the differences in upbringing. In order for after school programs to be able to reach out to students from different upbringing, it is important that both the youth and staff learn to remove their own bias in the mannerism they display when interacting with various people.

A strong foundation of an after school program includes a well balanced, inclusive curriculum, passionate adults/caretakers, and positive social/emotional behavior system. Youth facilities are created to expand the youth knowledge and provide them a chance to apply new skills to future experiences. Research has shown that by sixth grade, middle class students who participate in extracurricular activities had 6,000 more learning hours in comparison to a low income student. Living life is a walking learning experience and students are young and impressionable people that need adults in their life that provide room for independence but constructive guidance and support when their decision making skills fail them. For this reason after school programs have an importance in disadvantaged neighborhoods who need more opportunities for the youth to participate in extracurriculars that promote health, social skills and positive engagement with adults/authority. With so many student's lives at stake, it is imperative that after school programs are done with the right intentions and methods.

Section IV: A Look Into The Programs

Opportunities to participate in service work are all around us, but we have to take the time to investigate whether those areas are fully committed to the cause. As a future educator, I wanted to research whether or not after school programs could qualify as service work. To my delight, I not only discovered that it was possible but I can now identify what qualities allowed after school programs are effective in participating in service work. To solidify my findings, I

examined three after school programs located in inner city areas in Massachusetts and Rhode Island respectively. In all programs, the youth they serve are youth that do not live in privileged neighborhoods that have multiple resources to engage in extracurricular activities. I will be explaining how each after school program is an effective environment that strives to eliminate the opportunity gap by identifying three key components; a well balanced and inclusive curriculum, skilled employees, and social/emotional support. This will demonstrate that after school programs are an example of concrete service work because they are working to establish a bridge of resources to those who are underprivileged while keeping their agency intact.

Program #1: PASA Afterzone - Providence School District, RI



PASA (Providence After School Alliance) Afterzone is a well known program dedicated to providing middle and high students free access to several organizations within Rhode Island throughout the four seasons. Providence students in selected schools are able to sign up and participate in “almost 100 programs provided by 40 Providence organizations, teachers and community-based educators. Students can dive into existing interests or explore new ones. Each class is offered in a multi-week session, giving students time for deep learning and for the opportunity to build lasting relationships with the adults who guide them” (PASA, 2020). On a regular school day, once students have finished with school they receive a meal before being sent off into the program of their choice. Transportation is provided to and from the program. Once

all programs have ended for the day, kids are able to return home through provided transportation, pick up from parents, or written permission to walk home.

PASA Afterzone was designed to provide students from low income families and equal opportunity to engage in extracurricular activities tailored to their interest outside of school.

“PASA’s mission is to help close persistent opportunity gaps by expanding and improving quality after school, summer and other out of school time learning opportunities for all the youth



of Providence by organizing a sustainable public-private partnership that contributes to student success and serves as a national model (PASA, 2020). The opportunity gap term describes the gap between the level of academic skills and college readiness between students from affluent families

compared to students from low income families. PASA aims to close the gap by providing

students opportunities to receive homework help, participate in collaborative group work,

practice good communication skills, and build networking qualities. Participating in

extracurricular activities outside of school can become expensive through transportation

measures, uniform and material purchasing, and cause strain on financially unstable families.

PASA Afterzone is removing the financial strain on families by providing all the above with no cost.

PASA runs in multiple middle and high schools which causes them to rely on multiple employees throughout the district. With so many moving pieces PASA dedicates a portion of their time training their employees through professional development throughout the school year.

Topics varies between “ideas and tips on operating an after-school learning system for middle school students, strategies for developing a community-supported and community-embraced quality improvement system that is rooted in youth development, informed by program quality assessments, and advanced through professional development, recommendations for establishing and sustaining an out-of-school time intermediary organization that works closely with your city, school system, and the nonprofit sector, and Ideas and tips on operating an out-of-school time learning system for high school students that includes clubs, career pathway opportunities, and credit-bearing programs”. It is important that administrators and staff of PASA move as a unit that guarantees them success in all their PASA locations. Their goal is to help provide educational resources to as many students as possible to help increase academic scores. If the employees are unable to build a community within themselves, it will be hard to create a sense of community with the students they work with.

PASA Afterzone values self reflection in both their students as well as their program. In fact, PASA collects data and information on their program’s performance to confirm whether or not they are actively helping the students and their families. In a recent study, they compared the performance between non participating AfterZone Youth and AfterZone Youth. Students who participate in AfterZone “Had 25% fewer school absences and had math grades that are 1/3 of a grade higher (e.g., a B- to a B). Those who attend 32 or more days of the AfterZone per year had higher scores on standardized math tests, had higher math, ELA and science GPAs, and reported greater school connectedness. Students who reported high levels of engagement in the AfterZone thought more about their future, had better social skills, and demonstrated more positive behavior” (PASA, 2020). The data presented shows that PASA is doing a great job in attending

to their students by providing programs or interests and welcoming environments for the students. As previously mentioned in order for after school programs to be effective they must have high quality programs and staff.

Thanks to PASA, middle schoolers have the option to pick between the following programs; wrestling, ballet classes, acting lessons at Trinity Rep, NASA club, fashion design, Hip Hop classes, comic book design, basketball program, cooking classes at the YMCA, English/ELL classes, and more. As the seasons change, the programs change, repeat or rotate. In the high schools PASA offers workout classes, gentlemen's club, girl's club, choirs, outdoor environmental club, various art clubs, Culinary Institute, boxing, and robotics. Most of the middle school programs happen off campus, while at the high school majority happens in school and some programs are off campus. Upon application students apply for their top 3 choices although they are not always guaranteed their top choice. While PASA would like to accept every student that applies, due to student to adult ratios and space, not every student is enrolled every season.



PASA AfterZone works all year long to give their students the best extracurricular options outside of school. They understand the importance of filling the student's schedule with learning opportunities that will reflect in their academic's performance. It is an organization dedicated to allowing students to worry about being kids and learning what interests they have outside school. By participating in these various programs students tend to grow more motivated to attend their school and remain in the AfterZone. Through these excursions students are able to look into the world with new interests and aspirations for their own lives. PASA Afterzone is

passionate about providing structure and new fun opportunities to the youth in the Providence School Districts.

Disclaimer: Due to multiple locations of PASA I was not able to come across direct evidence of their social/emotional development skills or routine that they have in place. However, their data does provide a sense of emotional impact they have on the children they serve

Program #2: The Possible Project - Cambridge, MA



Located in Central Square, East Cambridge lies an 10 year old organization, The Possible Project (TPP) who is dedicated to providing high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors a tangible opportunity to expand their business dreams and ambitions. TPP recognizes that within low income neighborhoods there are students who have potential to become progressive entrepreneurs but need resources provided to them to turn those dreams into a reality. TPP opens its doors to ambitious high school students who are actively willing to take their business ventures ideas and turn it into a success through various “entrepreneurial tasks, including research, product development, marketing, negotiations, customer service, and sales”. In order to be an employee or volunteer at TPP, it is required to have experience with high school students and be a local business professional or entrepreneur. Students who have outgrown the program are invited back to become a mentor or volunteer if they wish. Student businesses are treated

with the utmost seriousness as students are meeting with actual business professionals who choose which business to financially sponsor as students advance through the program.

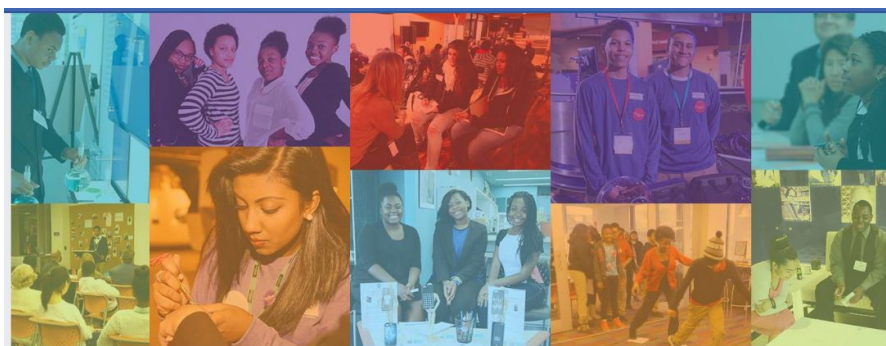
The mission of TPP is to inspire youth with untapped potential by empowering them with the skills to ensure personal and professional success. They created a curriculum that involves hands on work experience, assistance with entrepreneurial endeavors and careers goals. They are committed to providing students with challenging but positive experiences that teach them through hard work and commitment “ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE”. TPP uses a six tier level system to ensure their students receive purposeful and detailed assistance in their projects. Levels One, Two, and Three students are expected to design and finalize their business plans based on lessons provided by hands-on and experienced staff members. At the end of each level students are to present their business ventures to a panel where they receive donations and /or more feedback. Most students are able to start running their business by the end of Level One. During Level Two and Three, students are getting the hang on handling their responsibilities as young entrepreneurs. Level Four through Six is where business ventures are working alongside actual business advisors who provide individual consultations. Students at this stage are able to attend a special panel that holds sponsors who have larger amounts of resources to provide them. Students at these Level Six are typically bringing semi-large revenues. Through TPP six tier level systems, students are able to stabilize a business venture that they can run well into their undergraduate years and beyond.

As a high school student, a jarring reality is deciding what to do with your life after graduation. TPP has tailored a portion of their program to give high schoolers a chance to plan their life post high graduation. TPP recognizes the emotional reality that high schoolers have to

face and creates an environment that attempts to soothe those emotions. For this reason TPP developed a system to help their mentees transition from high school and beyond. TPP's College and Career Pathways program provides individualized guidance for each student on his or her post-high school education and career. Their students continually work on a written Career Plan, in which they articulate their post-high school aspirations; reflect on their strengths and areas for improvement; justify their current coursework and extracurricular activities; conduct research relating to education and career interests; and list the steps for reaching their post-high school goals". TPP was able to find a balance in providing an extracurricular activity for their high school students while understanding that high schoolers also need a space to plan out their lives during a stressful time period.

Due to their successful program design and supportive employees, TPP has strong partnerships with various charter and public schools in the Cambridge and Boston areas such as Community Charter School of Cambridge (CCSC), Prospect Hill Academy (PHA), Cambridge Rindge and Latin (Rindge),

City on a Hill, and Madison Park Technical Vocational High School. Projects that students have made from PHA alone are Manetain



(Hair Products), African Beaded Jewelry, Blended (Face Mask Line), Curls n Go, etc. From other schools, students have created business ventures such as reFLEXion (women of color empowerment clothing line), Sole Survivor (old and news shoes are clean and resold at

affordable prices), Little Packers (gift boxes filled with hands on interactives activities for young children), and TCUP (handmade, all natural tea line). As showcased, students have bright ideas and through the assistance of TPP they turned their passion into a reliable profit.

One of my high school colleagues participated in TPP and became passionate about attending Bates College to obtain a business degree to take her hair products into even bigger ventures. She is a prime example of a high school student who found a passion, cultivated a business using TPP's resources, and left the program and is continuing on to bigger opportunities utilizing the information she was presented back in high school. While she was always in charge of her work, TPP was the stepping stool into her path of success. Stories like this are powerful because shows how TPP motivates high schoolers to take their education seriously and envision ways they can be a contributing member of their community. High schoolers often struggle with finding a purpose in education or in life. TPP not only helps students focus on their present goals but pushes them to prepare for a future with bigger doors for networking and marketing opportunities. TPP is what after school programs dedicated to youth development embodies, by providing a safe and promising space for students to grow into goal-orientated and ambitious young adults of the future.

Program #3: AS220 - Downtown Providence, RI

AS220 (A-S-2-20) is an art inspired youth development program cultivated around their motto "Hateration gets no Toleration ". Their mission is "We, the people of Rhode Island, associate ourselves for the purpose of providing a local forum and home for the arts, through the maintenance of residential and work studios, galleries, performance and educational spaces. Exhibitions and performances in the forum will be unjuried, uncensored and open to the general

public. Our facilities and services are made available to all artists who need a place to exhibit, perform, or create their original artwork, especially those who cannot obtain space to exhibit or perform from traditional sources because of financial or other limitations". AS220's goal is to



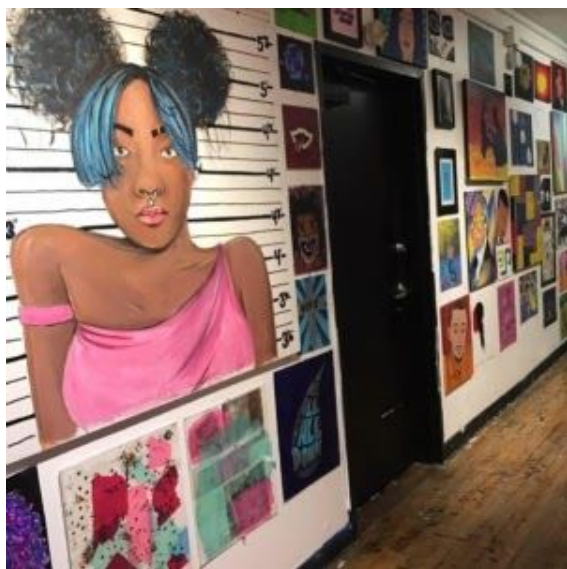
collect and fund materials that allow their members full access to express themselves in unconventional ways. Employees of AS220 are well experienced in their art form, are current live performers and artists, and have a

career in their art form. Additionally, AS220 opens its doors to previous members who are older than 21, that wish to continue their journey in AS220 as a volunteer or employee. Their target audience are youth members from ages 14-21, that are able to take free art classes ranging from drawing, sewing, instruments, music productions, rapping, live performance, dancing etc. It is a little hub that allows youth members the opportunity to explore their creative hobbies on a deeper level.

In addition to working towards their mission, AS220 declares to “recognize that we all harbor prejudices, but we are dedicated to challenging ourselves against them. We will not stand for bigotry or oppression. We stand for embracing, celebrating, and educating”. The beauty behind this youth program is that they accept people for who they are despite their past or their upbringing. They allow youth with criminal records a chance to rebuild themselves without the harsh treatment of society. They allow youth to steer themselves away from legal trouble to lead themselves towards a path of success instead. They teach the youth how to use the system in favor of them rather than allowing the system to break them down. Everyone has their own

methods to express their emotions and for these young adults they learn how to confront and release their emotions through their preferred art form at AS220. There is power in helping the youth find an outlet to release negative emotions to then develop resilience.

It is no secret that in low income neighborhoods music and art programs are often affected by budget cuts and can rarely provide materials to expand student's performing or visual arts experiences. Art and music teachers struggle to design projects based on the lack of materials or even space. In my middle school, we did not even have a music room. We sat in the cafeteria and sang songs while our music teacher played on his personal keyboard. Too often our youth are not exposed to the creative arts and when they show interests or take their creative matters into their own hands they are being silenced.. Art is a form of expression for multiple people and it is important that as a society we recognize that. Creative arts is always looked down upon in society because it does not seem to be a "profitable" career thus pointless. AS220



restores the youth's faith that their artwork is important and can be an essential tool to help clear their minds. Art can be a tool for success as long as you remain passionate about your talent and use it in a manner that benefits you. For this reason, AS220 works hard to apply for grants so that they can keep art materials in stock for paintings, drawings, sculptures, fashion designs, music

production equipment, music instruments, etc. With these materials AS220 develops programs for young adults to try and participate in. Rhode Island youth from all over are able to come into

Downtown Providence to dedicate hours of their lives on hobbies or talents that they hold dear to their hearts.

AS220 is spread across Providence through three buildings. The main building is located a 5 minute walk away from Kennedy Plaza. Attached to the building are apartments open to youth who outgrown AS220 and a small restaurant. Members over 21 who grew up with AS220 can live in these apartments and work in the restaurant as a means of income. The money generated from renting and restaurant business (in addition to grants) helps AS220 keep their doors open. Although AS220 has three buildings they extend their services to RITS (Rhode Island Training School), the state's juvenile detention facility. In addition to wanting the youth to express their art without restrictions, they want to help slow down the school to prison pipeline.

A lot of the youth in AS220 are living poverty-stricken, high crime rate areas all over Rhode Island. The artwork created in both RITS and AS220 facilities showcase the lives of the youth as they are forced to deal with their realities in and out of their neighborhood. Despite the harsh environments the youth may encounter, AS220 aims to teach their members how to be activists for themselves through their artistic talents. Consequently on Empire St,

young artists are working on a annual project called FutureWorlds, where artists expressed their thoughts on social justice issues and oppression through their preferred art medium. Students are supervised by the AS220 mentors and teachers who push them to perfect their craft until their



piece 100% communicates the young adult's thoughts and opinions. Anjel Newman (a live arts performer and Director of AS220 Programs) defines ***"FUTUREWORLDS [as] a multimedia mixtape. A living collage. A walking anthology. A breathing literary magazine. The purpose of Futureworlds is to give young people the space and resources to create highly visible work that transforms the way we think about art, community and justice. We use design thinking as a framework to develop projects that not only create social awareness but that also offer***



potential solutions and/or ways of being". Rhode Island definitely has some rough areas that experience the pressure of the social injustices which takes a toll on the affected community. Even while being as young as a middle schooler, the racial disparities between neighborhoods are evident. When growing up black or as a person of color, the inequalities of the world become so apparent that it gets extremely overwhelming. Dealing with external pressure of being a non-white person while living in a white supremacist country takes a lot of energy and strength. Youth across the nation under these circumstances have to learn how to deal with those emotions on top of their personal matters. Despite their young ages, social inequalities and oppression are a reality and they need a way to release that stress in a constructive manner that benefits their conscience. FutureWorlds is one of the many projects that tells youth that their voices matter, their emotions are real, and there are resources nearby that will allow them to express their inner feelings in a manner that they choose.

AS220 is an art based, young adult program located in Providence, Rhode Island that focuses on teaching young adults that there is power in their voices and they can transfer that power into a creative art form without being judged or censored. Once they walk through those doors, the space is free for them to live their truth without hurting their neighbors in the process. It is a place where discussions are held, dancers can move freely, performers can perform as loud as they want, and artists can be as explicit as possible. At AS220, truthfully and righteously so, Hateration gets no Toleration.

Final Thoughts

This goes to show that if you look close enough there is service work all around us within our society where there are social inequalities that thrive due to systemic structures that are tough to dismantle. After-school programs mentioned above have a mission and aim to support as many youth members from all backgrounds. They believe in a child's right to educational and positive childhood. Despite the odds set up against the oppressed, people remain resilient and focus on the work necessary to fight the social inequalities in our personal communities. Students born into low income neighborhoods shouldn't have to be punished for the income their families make. If schools are public or funded through the government, then it is the government jobs to ensure that students receive quality education and resources. This includes funding after school programs within the school as well. In the United States, people cannot and should not boast about being the land of the free and opportunities if there are systemic structures that oppress those due to racism and classism.

Section V: Takeaways

Our communities consider children to be the future leaders of our world. Adults understand that as they grow old, it is their children that have to take charge and be the next leaders to take care of the next generations. Generations are in charge of passing down information to the next generations after them. The cycle will always repeat itself like how Gen X took care of Gen Y, and now Gen Y has to guide Gen Z. For this reason education is considered to be a very important attribute in society's attempts to educate the youth. Schools are supposed to be the place where the youth grow up to be contributing members of society. It is no secret that the level of education correlates to the amount of professional and financial opportunities one will have access to. If someone does not at least have a high school diploma, they only have a good chance of obtaining a minimum wage job and living paycheck to paycheck. If someone has a college degree, they have more job salaries opportunities available to them. For some careers (i.e. lawyers, doctors, business, psychology) you often need a masters or PhD in order for your professional opinion to be heard. However, the lack of funding placed into schools begins to create a gap in the quantity of resources available between certain districts. When underprivileged area's schools are not properly funded, the government is essentially saying they would rather the people living in those areas do not (or should not) have the potential to engage in society through higher level paying jobs that are extremely influential. Due to the equity issues in schools districts nationwide, adults have the responsibility to speak on these issues while supporting the students who are victims of this harsh attack on their educational futures. As growing leaders of society we should want to participate or work underneath organizations that recognize how wealth disparities affect children living in underprivileged

areas and properly provide services to those same children to close the opportunity gap. The point of being a leader is to take the initiative to advocate for people who don't have the chance or well deserved respect, to be heard by those in power. Facilitating or working under after-school programs and extracurriculars opportunities, like mentioned above, is a way for us to become advocates in the stabilizing educational futures and opportunities for students who reside in areas that lack the appropriate leadership to protect their futures. We must remind society that education is not a luxury or privilege but rather an innate human right. As we grow to be contributing citizens, we need to recognize and address the mistakes of our predecessors rather than remaining compliant behind the term "tradition". The United States has detrimental traditions like classism, racism, capitalism, and others that need to be appropriately addressed. As progressive, well educated adults the goal is to develop an environment far better than the one we grew up in. As we embrace our career choices it is important to aim to better the world as we build our own families and shelter the new youth members of our communities.

In Public & Community Service classes we are constantly asked to define service work. While I grew to believe in my own personal definitions, I started looking for examples of service work in my life. I heard about the various organizations students went to go do "service work", the "service work" Urban Action fellows completed, and thought about the "service work" I did on my Guatemala trip my junior year. In service work we aim to turn bad experiences into good ones. This needs to involve paying attention to the community we are serving and asking questions rather than assumptions. A part of service is learning how to observe, interact, and reflect before attempting to "do" anything. Our intention to help does not override the impact we create in our moments of service. As we go out into the world it is important we look back and

see what type of path we are leaving behind before moving on. Service work is work that people commit to with the idea that one day their services will no longer be needed because the social structure they aim to deconstruct will no longer exist. While charity work helps provide temporary support and hope while battling the issues on the frontlines. With the rise of charities and non profit organizations it is important that we, as community organizers, understand whether the work we do is service work or charity work and not conflate those terms. As I continue my career as an educator, I aim to find organizations and schools who are dedicated to increasing a student's jar of knowledge inside and out through academic, extracurriculars, and social/emotional development. Educators and administrators of youth facilities and schools play a huge role in a student's future based on the quality of services we provide. The opportunity gap was created due to lack of equity across school districts. The reconnections of those resources could help provide kids, like me, hope in changing the poverty circle effect in our neighborhoods one family at a time.

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