

FINDINGS: FORMING COMMUNITY ATTACHMENTS AND ATTAINING A DESIRE TO CIVICALLY ENGAGE

The following chapter presents the results from the thematic analysis of the qualitative data, including the individual interviews, focus groups, field notes, and written service journals. The photographs taken by the participants and myself (e.g. the students' artwork and storyboards) are used to illustrate the themes. The three overarching themes developed were: *existing attitudes towards engagement, creative art activities act as a catalyst to engage youth,* and *active engagement in the community can lead youth to care more about their community.* I also identified several subthemes that further elaborate these themes. Tables 10-12 lists the themes and subthemes, as well as the list of descriptive participant responses that support them. These findings addressed the overarching research question by describing what the participation in the art-infused civic activities reveal about the participants' engagement with the community, their self-perceptions, and their plans to be civically engaged in the future.

The Existing Attitudes That Influence Their Engagement

The theme of *existing attitudes that influence their engagement* was emphasized by how most of the participants reported feeling let down by their school and community. This sense of lacking support discouraged them from demonstrating care for their school and community. The one commonality amongst the majority of the responses was the expectation of a reciprocal exchange between the students and the school. For example, just like the school expected students to be responsive to school regulations (e.g. dress code), the students also expected the school to take action on issues that were important to them.

According to the participants, if they felt the exchange was balanced, they would likely be more engaged in school and service activities. This reciprocity was considered valuable and

needed, as some students voiced facing challenges that forced them to work or help at home. These added responsibilities also prevented them from helping others. Although they felt powerless to help their community now, the majority of them mentioned that they do plan to help their community in the future. Moreover, through the service opportunities, most participants realized that they were capable of making an impact on their community, and it boosted their motivation to serve their community in the future. The following sections describe these attitudes, which are framed by five subthemes (see Table 10).

Table 10.
Theme 1 – Existing Attitudes That Influence Their Engagement

Subthemes	The Participants' Descriptions
<p>A noticeable lack of care within my school has led to me feeling disillusioned, and this affects how I value the school community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Even though we voice social issues these are not addressed. (Tadeo) * At school we are treated like prisoners. (Tadeo and Tammy) * I'm unhappy with school administrators, I feel disrespected and that school concerns are not addressed. I feel like a prisoner because the school focuses on rules such as dress code restrictions rather than emphasizing on improving the education. I do not plan to serve my school in the future because I have feelings of dislike for the school. (Tahvo) * At school we don't do much thinking and learning, instead there is a strong focus on tardy sweep and phone usage. (Cheryl) * Having the support from the school principal could have encouraged service at school. However, the principal didn't make the announcement of the food drive as requested by us and this was discouraging. (Lisa) * I feel that the school does not care about matters that are meaningful to me. As a result, I have no desire to serve my school due to the deception that I experienced there. (Teodoro) * I don't have a desire to return to help my school because I see the school as not being receptive of help or being willing to change. The teachers and fellow students act sometimes like they do not care making me feel like change is not possible. (Xiomara) * I do not consider my school as being a part of my community. (Desta, Xiomara, Tadeo, and Tamara) * To me school is somewhat part of the community but mainly people, such as my classmates are part of my community. (Tahvo)

Table 10 - Continued

Subthemes	The Participants' Descriptions
A noticeable lack of care within my community has led to me feeling disillusioned, and this affects how I value my community.	<p>* School is part of my community, because this is where me and my friends interact. (Tammy)</p> <p>* The employees of the service organization where we volunteered were very unresponsive and rude, and this affected my experience, but nonetheless I enjoyed helping the community. (Tamara, Teodoro, Ashanti, Kenya, Cheryl, Erika, and Lisa)</p> <p>* The unresponsiveness of the staff at the service organization made me not want to return to serve that specific organization but it doesn't discourage me to serve other organizations. (Xiomara, Nala, and Kenya)</p> <p>* The staff at the service organization lacked patience and ability to train us on how to best serve. Instead she was frustrated with us. (Tamara and Xiomara).</p> <p>* I disliked the rude staff at the homeless shelter that treated the homeless receiving food services in a very rude manner, sometimes yelling at them. (Tadeo)</p> <p>* In my service experience I discovered that people who are even in need are ungrateful. (Tamara, Cheryl, Erika, Ashanti, Tahvo, and Tadeo)</p> <p>* Some members of the community cannot be trusted to being truly in need. (Tadeo)</p> <p>* I expect that people are going to act rude/negatively. (Teodoro)</p> <p>* The things in the community are not how we would like it to be but I guess it's okay. (Desta)</p> <p>* The community to me does not mean anything because it's not what it used to be. (Tamara)</p>
I came to realize that I cannot help others before I try to help myself.	<p>* Although I feel a sense of social responsibility, I also feel a need to focus on my own stability. (Tahvo)</p> <p>* A prize or reward (e.g. money) would have encouraged donations for the food drive. (Xiomara)</p> <p>* I acknowledge that my peers need to help themselves before being able to think about how to help others. (Tammy)</p> <p>* I feel like if you don't benefit me (monetarily) then why would I be involved in service. (Nathan)</p> <p>* Making money in exchange for my service hours is a priority to me, but nonetheless I enjoyed the volunteering process. (Tahvo)</p> <p>* I have to work and so I'm too tired to actively participate/serve at school. (Tadeo)</p> <p>* It was challenging to focus on the project activities with so much going on in my personal life. (Kenya)</p> <p>* My grandma, mom, and sister are often sick and I have to stay home to help. As a result, I often miss school. (Nala)</p>

Table 10 - Continued

Subthemes	The Participants' Descriptions
<p>I'm not in a position where I can help the community on my own, but in the future, I want to help.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I know that my community needs help but I feel that I can't help now. However, if given an opportunity in the future I will help and volunteer. (Xiomara) * I feel powerless to help my community now because I'm just a teenager but I feel that I will be able to help later. (Lisa) * I don't feel like I have an obligation to help but if I make it big I can be a role model and give hope. (Teodoro) * I feel powerless now but in the future I will be able to guide youth in my role as educator and help students make the right choices. (Tahvo) * I feel that in the future I can make a major impact in the community. (Tamara) * I plan to volunteer in my community once I become a correctional officer. (Xiomara) * It's important to help kids in the community and I hope to help them in the future through my music career. (Tadeo) * Through my future career in food science, I plan to contribute to food banks. (Lisa) * I plan to help my local church with food collections in the future. (Desta) * I do plan to do service in the future as part of my career as a chef, perhaps by feeding those in need. (Tammy) * I plan to help in the future by feeding those who are in need. (Nala)
<p>Experiencing service opportunities in my community led me to realize that I was able to have an impact after all.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I feel that I made a difference through service. (Tammy) * The service at the shelter was an example of how to serve someone that can't help themselves, which gave me a positive feeling for doing it. (Xiomara) * By helping out I feel that I can make a difference. I didn't know that through service activities I would feel that I contributed to the community. (Lisa) * I had an impact on the community, because I stepped out of my comfort zone. (Tahvo) * I like volunteering in general because I get to see smiles on people's faces. I get to know when I go home that somebody else will also be eating tonight. (Nala) * I do feel that beyond a social responsibility, I have made the choice to help my community and give back. (Nala) * I can have an impact in the future by volunteering. (Lisa, Tammy, Kenya, and Cheryl)

A Noticeable Lack of Care Within My School Has Led to Me Feeling Disillusioned, and This Affects How I Value the School Community

As part of the end-of-the-project interviews, participants were prompted to discuss attitudes and behaviors related to school service. A commonality among the majority of the participants' responses emerged. Most students expressed feeling that the school had expectations from the students, but that they did not reciprocate to the students' needs. Their perception was that there was no even exchange between the students and the school, and as a result they developed resentment, detaching themselves from their school, which resulted in apathy for future school service. For example, Tadeo shared in his interview that he was often able to speak to the principal about school concerns as often as he felt that there was a need to do so, he said:

I am, as the principal says, the speaker of the student body at [my school]. I speak to him on every issue that I feel is wrong, what he needs to do and what he does not need to do. I try to help the student body if it's a reasonable thing to speak about.

He further elaborated by adding:

I just go straight up there. He loves, as he stated, he loves for me to come to his office and give my personal opinion on what needs to be done because he says I have the right set of mind and I'm very mature.

With much pride, he continued by stating: "My mind is very mature. I have a mind of an adult or older male. And I have the mindset to state what are the disciplinary issues, what we need to do, what he needs to do." For example, Tadeo had shared with the principal his concerns about the younger students. He explained that he felt that the principal needed to hear from him about the importance of education and the consequences of skipping school. However, despite

having an opportunity to voice his concerns, when I asked him how his concerns had been addressed, Tadeo told me, with much frustration, that these had never been addressed.

Furthermore, after completing all the activities, during the last focus group, Tadeo and Tammy mentioned that they felt like prisoners at school due to all the regulations and restrictions. This was a feeling shared by several other students throughout the fieldtrips, who would often exclaim, “we are back in prison!” as the bus was returning to the school campus. Tahvo and Cheryl further elaborated about this sense of imprisonment. During his individual interview, Tahvo explained that the school has a strong emphasis on dress code, but not much attention to issues about education. Tahvo said that he felt that “in order to get respect you got to give respect,” and as a result of feeling ignored and disrespected, he did not wish to perform any service in his school in the future. Similarly, during the last focus group, Cheryl mentioned that the school focuses on rules and restrictions, such as tardy sweeps and cell-phone usage, but does not make efforts to make education meaningful and fun. She mentioned that as a result of the lack of engaging curricula at school, one of the challenges that she experienced with the project activities was thinking critically.

Several other examples of deception with school practices and lack of support were also mentioned by some of the students. For example, Lisa stated in her interview that it would have been encouraging if the principal had made a morning announcement about the food drive to encourage all the other students to participate. Instead this request was never met. Another example was provided by Teodoro. He expressed feeling let down when his football coach was not replaced in time for his team to adequately train, which cost them a chance to win a championship. This dislike for his school resulted in Teodoro not wanting to perform future services at his school. Xiomara also expressed feeling that she did not see herself contributing to

her school after graduation because she felt that her school was unwilling to change and therefore not open to receiving help.

This lack of resources and support at school made students feel disengaged with their school. Several students mentioned during their individual interviews and group discussions that in addition to not wanting to serve their community after graduation, they also did not consider their school to be a part of their community. For instance, Tahvo and Tammy were the only two students who acknowledged that their school was part of their community, but only because it provided a venue for them to see their friends, who were considered a part of their community.

A Noticeable Lack of Care Within My Community Has Led to Me Feeling Disillusioned, and This Affects How I Value My Community

Just like with their school community, the students expressed similar feelings of being deceived about the larger community. The participants commented about instances that occurred during the service activities that affected the way that they valued their community. These negative experiences initially discouraged them from future service participation. For example, the majority of the participants who attended the service activity wrote in their service reflections about the incident when they found a dead rat at the food bank. As written by Tamara, one of the most worrisome facts about this incident was that “they had a dead rat lying on the floor and nobody bothered to pick it up.” Although the students notified several food bank staff about the dead rat, none of them reacted to this by taking action. As Xiomara further elaborated in her individual interview, after finding “the very large rat,” it is hard for her to go back to that site.

In addition, most participants also mentioned disliking the way in which some of the service organization staff treated them. Tamara wrote in her service reflection that she did not like that some of the staff were impatient with them, and Teodoro referred to them as “very

angry and ungrateful people.” In her interview, Tamara further elaborated about the way in which the service organization staff behaved, saying that:

When we volunteered at [the food bank], the hostess or whoever she was, caught an attitude at us and she thought we had moved something where it wasn't supposed to go, and instead of asking us, she had already blamed it on us, like we did it. She didn't ask, she just told us like “why did we move it?” and stuff like that, but we [had not moved anything].

Similarly, Xiomara wrote in her service journal:

Some of the things I didn't like was the way that some of the people/volunteers/workers were really rude, and it was only our first time there. Treating us like we've been there forever. People were not even willing to say excuse me, or to even help us.

For these participants, it was apparent that the staff were quite critical of them instead of trying to train them or be supportive of their efforts.

Lisa mentioned in her service reflection that with this behavior, the food bank staff did not seem to be thankful to have extra help and did not appreciate their voluntary efforts. This was a sentiment also shared by Nala and Kenya. For example, Nala wrote in her service journal that she would not volunteer again for this organization because they were unprofessional, and that instead she would rather volunteer for another organization. Moreover, regarding this experience, in her interview she strongly expressed the opinion that “if you have people coming there to volunteer, to help, [then you] should be appreciative.” Similarly, Kenya wrote in her journal “I actually wanted to work there after graduation until the people wasn't so nice. I refuse to be somewhere I don't feel welcomed.”

There was an incident of similar behavior by a staff member in the second service activity; however, this time, only one student voiced this concern. In his interview, Tadeo told me that he had seen one of the employees of the soup kitchen site being rude while she directed the homeless individuals who were in line to get food. He expressed feeling powerless when he observed this; he said: “She was yelling at them and all in a disrespectful way. I would have told her something, but it’s not my place, so I did not.”

In comparison, several participants recorded the rude behavior from a homeless woman in their service journals. Witnessing this behavior made them realize that even those who are in need can be ungrateful. In her interview, Tamara elaborated about this incident with a homeless woman and said: “The food was free and everything. Everyone else except her was grateful for their meal, but she just threw hers in the trash like she wasn’t homeless, like she didn’t need the food.” Tadeo also mentioned this incident in his interview, saying that when this woman threw her food away, she exclaimed that “she’s not going to eat this shit, and that it isn’t nothing but garbage and slop, she can buy her own damn food from Popeyes across the street.” Annoyed and angered, Tadeo shared that when he witnessed this event, he thought to himself “but you’re homeless and stay in a shelter; how are you going to do that? You shouldn’t have [gone there] in the first place...Spend your little five dollars or something if you got it.”

When further discussing these incidents during his interview, Teodoro mentioned that he felt that these rude behaviors were expected and that there was not much that could be done: “People are going to do what they do. Can’t help how other people act...it’s normal [behavior].” This sense of normalcy was also shared by Desta, who also mentioned that she considered her community to be okay, even though her community is not how she would like it to be. Similarly, Tamara acknowledged that her community used to be better. Nostalgically, she said:

Growing up, community used to mean something. Now it's just like people do what they do, they don't really care about their actions now, but back then growing up community meant something, like if you leave home like, say if like my grandma is cooking and she had to go somewhere back then, she could have trusted somebody in the community or a neighbor or something to watch her house, but now you can't really trust nobody to do stuff like that anymore.

I Came to Realize that I Cannot Help Others Before I Try to Help Myself

The participants' own need to feel supported by their community was a priority to them, because as they disclosed in their interviews, some felt the need to be stable in certain areas of their lives. For example, in his interview, Tahvo expressed that feeling socially responsible depended on his ability to attain stability first. He expressed that he believed that before helping others, he needed to help himself first. Similarly, several participants mentioned that a motivator likely to increase their levels of participation, as well as that of other students at school, was having a financial reward. For example, Xiomara mentioned that having a monetary reward or raffle would have motivated more students at school to bring donations to the food drive. Tammy also elaborated about the need to receive a reward among her classmates. In her interview, she said: "Some people don't think that they have a responsibility to help because they need to help themselves, and sometimes they have problems too, so they're like more worried about them than everybody else."

Moreover, during the final focus group, Nathan, a student who did not participate in several of the project activities, said: "I feel that if you don't benefit me, then why would I get involved." Regarding the service activities, he further elaborated that they were "beneficial, but then again like, you need something for it, a financial gain." Similarly, but in a more apologetic

tone, Tahvo explained, “Lord forgive me, but, [my least favorite part was] working for free.” However, despite his need for a financial gain, Tahvo participated in all project activities and said that notwithstanding the desire to be paid, he did enjoy completing the service activities. He said: “I gained love. You gain love. I love what I did. I’d do it again.”

In some instances, this financial need and their efforts to resolve it became an obstacle for the students to be consistently on time to the project activities. As Tadeo explained in his interview, a motivation for him to participate would have been to have an opportunity to rest at school, because as he elaborated “I work so hard during the day and after school I have to go straight to work, and that’s a long night.” I also observed the students’ exhaustion during the implementation of the study. Often times, as I arrived to the classroom a few minutes early to set-up, I would find Tadeo and other students napping or playing card games. The classroom teacher would comment and tell me that he liked to give the students a chance to rest sometimes, because by the time that they got to his class period, they seemed to be very tired.

In addition to the effects of working due to having a financial need, some students also experienced personal issues that contributed to their lack of participation in school. For example, Kenya mentioned in her interview that it had been a challenge to focus on the activities at times because she had “so much going on at one time.” In her interview, Nala provided an example of a personal problem that she encountered which affected her attendance. She said:

My mom is sickly. My grandma is sickly. And my sister is sickly. So, most of the times I have to stay home. My mom, she be going back and forth to the doctor a lot, so I have to stay home with my sister when she gets sick.

I'm Not in a Position Where I Can Help the Community on My Own, but in the Future I Will Help

The participants also expressed that they were not in a position to help their community outside of this project. For example, when I interviewed Lisa, she mentioned that she did not have a responsibility to serve her community because she was “just a kid.” Similarly, in her interview, Xiomara said: “I do have a new understanding of the needs in my community. I mean I can’t do much right now, but if I can later on in my future, I plan to.” Teodoro also felt that he did not have a responsibility to serve his community now, mainly because he needed to establish himself first. In his interview, he explained that by establishing himself first, he would then be able to make an impact on his community because he could become a role model, inspiring other kids to follow their dreams. He concluded by saying, “if I make it big, if I go to the NFL, more high school players are going to want to be like me.” Likewise, when I interviewed Tahvo, he added that once he is more stable, he plans to make an impact on his community. He also mentioned that he plans to be a music teacher, and in that role he plans to mentor students, giving them advice and encouragement. As Tahvo elaborated:

Gotta keep the other generation going. I can tell them what not to do because I’ve been in situations, and the other kids don’t know anything about it. I would just tell them what not to do, and how to keep their heads on straight.

Similarly, Tamara also believed that in the future she would be able to impact her community. She said: “I honestly think that I will be the one to change [my community], and its reputation won’t be so poorly like it is now.” Throughout the interviews, the majority of the participants were able to verbalize how they would contribute to their community in the future. For example, Xiomara said that she hopes to help the local recreational center, and Tadeo plans

to sponsor music programs for kids in community organizations and clubs. In comparison, after finishing her studies in food sciences, Lisa planned to give back to the community by organizing food drives. Similarly, in the future, Desta, Nala, and Tammy planned to help feed those in need; for example, Desta intended to help collect food at church, and Tammy hoped to open a restaurant that offered food for the homeless upon finishing her culinary arts training.

Experiencing Service Opportunities in my Community Led Me to Realize That I Was Able to Have an Impact After All

Despite feeling that they could not make an impact on their own, the participants expressed that by having the opportunity to serve their community, they were able to have an impact on themselves and their community. For example, Xiomara mentioned that her favorite activity in this study was the service to her community because she was able to feel that she was benefiting her community. Similarly, Lisa also said that through the service activities she had an impact on her community, but she also mentioned experiencing an intrinsic reward. As she said: “I didn’t know that helping out, like contributing, doing service activities, will make me feel better, make me feel like I’m contributing to the community.” For Tahvo, service provided an opportunity to step out of his comfort zone and feel accomplished. He explained:

I stepped out of my comfort zone. I never fed the homeless before. I always said I would, but I never did that. I never stocked up, you know, all the food stuff and gave it to the shelter. I never did none of that. I always saw people doing it, but now I did the process.

Nala also mentioned that she enjoyed an intrinsic reward from volunteering. She added: “I get to see smiles on people’s faces. I get to know when I go home that somebody else will be eating tonight.” To her, this experience motivated her to help in the future, and for her, having a social responsibility was not an obligation but rather a choice. As Nala shared: “I feel like it’s my

choice, and my choice is I do want to help the community out. I do want to give back.”

Similarly, in the final focus group, Lisa, Tammy, Kenya, and Cheryl mentioned that through the service activities they felt that they contributed to their community, and in the future, they can continue to do so by volunteering and donating to different community organizations.

Creative Art Activities Act as a Catalyst to Engage Youth

Throughout the project, opportunities to be involved in creative art activities were provided to the students. As detailed in prior sections, these creative art activities consisted of art making (puzzle piece activity) and storyboards and videos illustrating fictitious stories made by the students, as well as photo reflections of the service experiences. Thus, the theme about *creative art activities act as a catalyst to engage youth* emerged. The participants reported that the creative art activities helped them attain awareness about things that mattered to them and their community, and that these prompted a critical discussion about their community and personal experiences that allowed them to identify with each other. Furthermore, the creative art activities impacted their perceptions about their peers, their community, and themselves. These opportunities for creativity, dialogue, and reflection are summarized in three subthemes (see Table 11).

Table 11

Theme 2 – Creative Art Activities Act as a Catalyst to Engage Youth

Subthemes	The Participants’ Descriptions
The creative art activities elicited awareness about things that matter to me and my community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The art activities were helpful to me as it provided an opportunity for self-expression in a tangible way. (Tammy) * The most memorable activity was the puzzle piece because it was a way to express myself, illustrate my community, and things that inspire me. (Tammy) * My artwork expresses how I want positivity in my life as I get older. Through positive words my artwork is portraying the positivity I want to be surrounded by in everyday life and positive words to live by. (Kenya) * My artwork included words about people putting me down and my desire to thrive despite them. (Nala)

Table 11 – Continued

Subthemes	The Participants' Descriptions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * My artwork is meaningful to me because it's a reflection of my feelings. I did two puzzle pieces. One of them is about love (which was co-created with a classmate) because I love my family and some family members who have passed away. The other artwork was about nature and the preservation of trees in the community. (Tammy) * My puzzle piece represents football which is an important part of my life. (Teodoro) * My puzzle piece represents music, to me music is everything. (Cheryl) * The puzzle piece that I made represented me. (Lisa) * From hearing storyboards of classmates I gained awareness of the issues that can be happening in the community. (Teodoro) * From the storyboard activities I realized that there are people out there who have experienced challenging issues in the community. (Kenya) * The art activity allowed me to think about the consequences of a social issue. (Tammy) * The art activities helped me look at the community and reflect about its social issues from a different perspective, and that of others. (Xiomara)
<p>The creative art activities prompted discussion on aspects of personal and meaningful experiences that we had in common.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The art activities helped everybody have a voice and hear from others. (Tahvo) * The art activities allowed me to get together with my friends, start a conversation, and forge friendships. (Nala) * As part of the art activities, I was able to caution others not to go to the local hospital because the quality of services is poor. (Cheryl) * I agree with the account represented in the storyboard activities about the lack of resources in the local hospital as I have been affected by it. (Desta) * From the storyboard activities, I learned that the local hospital should be avoided due to its limited resources. (Tammy) * The storyboard activities allowed me to identify with other students in class by discussing something that we knew might be going on in the community. (Teodoro) * The social issue in the video about school skipping was relatable to my prior school experiences. (Lisa) * Through the storyboard activities, I realized that we all come from the same place. (Tahvo) * Through group discussions students were able to speak about the same thing/topic. (Tadeo)

Table 11 – Continued

Subthemes	The Participants' Descriptions
The creative art activities impacted how I perceive my peers and myself.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The art activity allowed me to see the creative side of others. (Tammy) * Through the art activities I learned that others were creative. (Xiomara) * Through the storyboard activities I was able to see how creative my classmates were. (Kenya) * The art activities helped me to reflect and identify details about the service, and how much others enjoyed it. Through the art activities I gained a different perspective about my peers' attitudes toward service. (Nala) * By taking and looking at the community photos I realized all the work that other people do in my community. (Tammy) * The photos allowed me to remember what we had done and also to appreciate what others had done/taken photos of. (Tamara) * The photos and art activities captured the moment, which allowed me to reflect about the community and appreciate my contribution through the service activities. (Lisa) * The discussion of the art activities with other classmates made me feel confident. (Tahvo)

The Creative Art Activities Elicited Awareness About Things That Matter to Me and My Community

Throughout the art activities, participants shared aspects of themselves in relation to their community. In particular, through making puzzle pieces, the participants illustrated their attitudes towards the future, as well as things that mattered to them. A constant theme that emerged for several of them was being tenacious and having a hopeful outlook. In addition, the puzzle pieces became an outlet for participants to express their identity in relationship to their community and the topics that mattered to them. An example was Nala's puzzle piece (see Figure 49), in which she opted to include a poem as part of it. She wrote:

My destiny will never be determined by the world but by my actions, see you may never understand why I feel this way but it's okay, you don't have to understand me or my ways at all, just know my destiny will be what I decide it will be... I won't fear hurt, heartbreak, or the things I can't change, I would determine what I would do with my life,

it will not determine me, even though sometimes my heart hurts from all the voices I hear around me, sometimes it beats me down, but I won't give up.

In her interview, Nala shared with me that often times her mother and grandmother made her feel like they do not believe in her and that they expected her to drop out of high school. However, she was determined to prove their concerns wrong, and as she explained to me, proof of that was that she had met all the requirements to graduate from high school. She told me that she had forgiven those who had put her down, and she plans to continue to prove them wrong. Therefore, this piece became a reflection of Nala's sorrow as well as her persistence to thrive, despite the absence of support from her family or community.



Figure 49. Photos of Nala's puzzle piece.

Similar to Nala's approach, two other participants also created puzzle pieces that displayed aspects of their identity through words (see Figure 50). For example, in her interview, Lisa explained "well, the whole inspiration was like an outlook of me and what I believed in and what makes me myself...All of the clippings out of the magazines, like words, synonyms, that describes me as a person." Among the words used are "greatest girl" and "built to last." Similarly, Kenya also included words on her piece, which expressed aspects of her and her attitude towards life; among them the word "victorious."

Depicted a lot of stuff from our community, a lot of things that were going on. From violence to racism and any other particular situation that may be going on in our community...there were plenty of things that I already knew that was going on...but I'd never really took a look at them until we presented them in our storyboards...it helped me look at the world in another view, and appreciate the things that I have, and try to help out more people [*sic*].

As the creative art activities transitioned to incorporate collaboration and critical dialogue, the participants continued to describe these as opportunities through which they gained awareness about issues in the community that concerned them and their peers.

The Creative Art Activities Prompted Discussion on Aspects of Personal and Meaningful Experiences That We Had in Common

The participants reported that the photo and video activities provided an opportunity to establish a conversation with classmates, or as Tahvo' explained in his interview: "It helped everybody to have a voice." Nala also had a similar description about these activities, stating that it gave her an opportunity to talk to "a group of kids that were sitting in class who were not really connected with each other." Furthermore, she felt that these activities brought them together, and as a result "we gained a friendship from all of this." These comments denoted that the creative activities became a way to share community experiences and to critically think about ways to help peers and the community.

In addition, through the storyboard and video activities, students were able to focus on problems within the community by selecting pictures that represented relevant issues or aspects of their lives. As described in the first part of this chapter, the stories discussed included academic struggles, shootings, divorce, skipping school, poor medical care, and racism. For

example, one of the group's storyboards titled "Little Tae Tae," depicted the life of a boy who lived at home with his mother in a low-income community. This boy had experienced the dramatic loss of his father, who died during his service in the military. While living with his three brothers in a community with low resources, this boy continued to struggle with his physical environment.

This storyboard continued to illustrate the story of how a friendship blossomed between this boy and a new girl at school. At this point life was simple, and the two coexisted in a mutually beneficial relationship that provided them with a sense of harmony. But this friendship began to be influenced by factors in the community that were outside the safe haven of the school. This influence came in the form of racism when one of the parents forbid them to continue the friendship based on the boy being Black. The story also included struggles with the quality of medical care in the local hospital, which led to the death of one of the main characters.

While this was a fictitious story, the issues presented were very real in the students' lives and communities. Throughout the class presentation of this story, the students also made cautionary comments about the hospital center; for example, as Cheryl narrated the group story, she said:

And when he got to the hospital. The one in [our town]. She was sick. Now you all don't go to [our local] hospital, you go there and die for real. Listen to the story! So this hospital couldn't treat his mother and she didn't have the right insurance to go to a better hospital, you know, like places that would treat her diagnosis, her problem.

As the conversation of social issues evolved, issues with the medical care in the local hospital continued to be a prevalent concern for the students. As Teodoro further elaborated in the individual interview, these class conversations about the stories that they created allowed them to

“know that that’s what could be going on” and learn that the issues discussed had affected classmates and their community.

Just like with the storyboards, some of the students continued to identify themselves with the stories shared in class from the video activity. For example, when students presented a story about a group of kids that skipped school and as a result became injured, several students mentioned that they had skipped school before. This can be exemplified by Lisa, who added:

I used to skip, I mean now that I’m a senior, I know that it can hurt you, you need to go to class, and you need to have a certain amount of hours in each class to graduate... I learned that you shouldn’t skip, because it won’t help you in the long run, it will just hurt you...you could have learned something instead of skipping.

Throughout these conversations, the participants were able to have group dialogues, and even if all the stories were not directly related to their personal experiences, it allowed them to speak about a topic in common. Tahvo summed up the benefits of this neatly by stating in his interview that the creative art activities made him realize that “we all come from the same place.”

The Creative Art Activities Impacted How I Perceive My Peers and Myself

The participants reported that the creative art activities impacted how they perceived their peers and the community, as well as themselves. More specifically, the participants appreciated the creativity of their peers and realized their positive attitudes towards service in the community. An example is Tammy’s description of the impact of the photo and video activity. She said: “They were interesting because you got to see how creative somebody was to put it all together.” In particular, the video activity allowed Tammy and her group to brainstorm and enact scenes that illustrated their story about students who skipped school and became injured as a result. At the end-of-the-project activities, Xiomara and Kenya, who had also been part of that

group, discussed this activity in their individual interviews, and each mentioned that developing this story and seeing others do similar activities through the storyboards helped them acknowledge how creative their peers were.

In addition to seeing the creative side of others, some participants also reported gaining a different perspective about their peers' attitudes towards service, as well as their own. Participants reported acquiring this throughout the service reflections and the printed photos of the service work that I brought to class to discuss. For example, Nala explained that through photos, she acquired a different perspective about the service experience, one where she was able to appreciate the joy and eagerness that her peers expressed in the photographs through their smiles as they served the community. After the service activity, Nala explained that she had been very eager to go on the fieldtrip to volunteer at the shelter, more than she had expected. The day of the service activity, Nala showed up with a leg brace (see Figure 52), but despite that she was very cheerful and excited to go to the food bank to perform the service. She told me that although she was absent from school the week before due to a leg injury, she had been determined to come back to the school well enough for the scheduled service activity.



Figure 52. Photo of Nala walking with a leg brace to the bus after performing community service.

Tammy described another example of a gained appreciation through photo activities. Throughout the project, she continuously sent me photos of her community. These photos were mainly about her volunteering at events at church and community functions. During her individual interview, she shared with me that taking these photos and discussing them in class helped her realize the efforts that members in her community make. As Tammy explained: “When I was taking photos, I learned that or I gained that there’s a lot of people that do a lot of stuff and they help out a lot too and I didn’t think about it as that.” For her, having the opportunity to take these photos and then discuss them gave her a new glimpse about her community and an opportunity to see the efforts of others.

For other participants, the photo reflections provided them with a personal recognition of their own efforts. For example, Tamara reported that through photo reflections, she and her peers were able to remember their own service efforts, realize the impact that their efforts had, and see how others had perceived or recorded these memories. Similarly, Lisa said in her interview that the photos discussed “captured the moment...making me feel like I helped that community in a positive way.” Therefore, it appears that the photo reflections provided them with an opportunity to recognize the efforts that they had performed. For instance, Tahvo reported in his interview that he remembered through the photo reflections the love that students had while performing the service and the confidence that he felt when he interacted with his classmates.

Active Engagement Can Lead Youth to Care More About Their Community

The third theme arose from the group discussions about the impact that the involvement in service activities had, as well as the resulting understanding of the severity of the issues that affected the community, which transformed the students’ perceptions of their community. The theme that *active engagement in the community can lead youth to care more about their*

community and its corresponding four subthemes are presented in Table 12. For some of the students, reflections about their service activities led to an appreciation of the impact that community service has on those in need, regardless of the type of service performed. This appreciation motivated some participants to plan to continue to perform community services and to express having newly attained sentiments of care and compassion for their community.

Table 12

Theme 3 – Active Engagement in the Community Can Lead Youth to Care More About Their Community

Subthemes	The Participants' Descriptions
<p>I developed an understanding of the severity of the issues in the community and an appreciation for the resources that I do have.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I now know more about the needs of my community. (Tammy) * After the service experience I'm now able to identify hunger and lack of government assistance as a social issue in my community. (Nala) * After the service experience I'm now more aware about the severity of the issue of hunger in my community. (Nala) * I did not realize the magnitude of runaway youth and homelessness in my community, until I learned that from the service organization. (Kenya) * My perceptions about my community changed because I learned things that I didn't know before about community needs. (Xiomara and Lisa) * My service experience allowed me to see the severity of the issues in my community and helped me appreciate the things I have. (Tamara and Xiomara)
<p>I'm motivated to help others when I'm shown how and that it makes a difference.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I'm able to do more now for my community that I'm aware of the problems. (Tammy) * My motivation to serve came from seeing the need that people in the community have. (Lisa) * Learning how possible it is to help an organization, made an impact on my desire to serve. (Xiomara) * I engaged in discussion with my grandmother about my service experience and she praised and acknowledged the impact that my service work had on my community. (Tahvo) * The impact of serving homeless people was so big that I plan to do a similar service in the future. (Lisa) * I would participate in more service projects at school and I would help my community in the future because I feel a passion to do this. (Xiomara) * For me knowing the potential impact that service can have on multiple families is a motivator for service involvement. (Xiomara)

Table 12 - Continued

Subthemes	The Participants' Descriptions
	* I would participate in service projects at my school because it's always good to help people and make a difference. (Kenya)
Learning through doing brought about change in the way I value service in my community.	* I enjoyed helping the community due to the power of service and not because I was getting paid to do so (Tamara) * I enjoyed the service experience, as I was able to learn real life lessons. (Tadeo) * I think that giving back to the community/helping can save a life. (Tamara)
I believe that taking ownership for our community is important because we are part of the community.	* I'm motivated to help my community because this is where I live. If we don't help the community, then who will. (Xiomara) * As residents we have a responsibility to serve the community. (Tamara) * Taking ownership for our community is important because as members we should be the ones expected to take care of it and not outside people. (Tamara) * I think volunteering is important because we all are part of the same community and we never know if in the future we will also be in need. (Tahvo)

I Developed an Understanding of the Severity of the Issues in the Community and an Appreciation for the Resources That I Do Have

Through the service activities, the participants had a chance to see people who were affected by hunger and homelessness, as well as learn from the presentations that the service organizations gave. After the service activities concluded, some students expressed that they had developed an understanding of the severity of the issues that impacted their community. For example, in her interview, Tammy said:

Before we went on that field trip, I did not know that many kids went hungry every day, and then I realized that it is a lot more than I thought. I thought it was just like a couple, but it turns out there is a lot of kids who go hungry.

Similarly, Nala also identified hunger as a current issue in her community and said that through her experiences doing community service, she learned “that a lot of families aren’t able to feed their families” and felt that further governmental assistance was needed to help resolve

this issue in her community. Learning more about this issue made this experience memorable to her. In her first service journal, she wrote:

On February 11, 2015, we went to [the first service site] to do community service. At [that site we] distributed out food to the families in need. What I will remember forever is many families don't have enough money to feed their family and pay bills. I learned many children can only eat during school hours. My experience today will be remembered, because I know now that we should be more concerned. And 1 in 5 children won't eat and \$1 makes 4 meals.

In comparison, Kenya explained that she learned more about the issue of homelessness in her community as a result of visiting the second service site. She wrote: "Homelessness is real, people you don't think would be homeless is. And how teens/kids are actually homeless and they have a place to go to." At the end of her interview, she elaborated: "Learning things about runaway youth was surprising. I never knew it could happen in our city. Well, let me reword that; I never expected that such a large number of youth here is basically homeless." Similarly, during the last focus group, Lisa shared that prior to completing service activities for her community, she "didn't know that there were that many homeless people."

Likewise, in their interviews, Xiomara and Lisa said that their perceptions about their community changed because they had learned more about the needs in their community. For example, Xiomara said that the service experience had engaged her in learning about what is happening in her community. She said: "I've seen things that I wouldn't have expected to be happening in my community, and it's just changed my view of things." For some students, understanding the severity of the issues in the community helped them reflect about their own

life and gain an appreciation for it. For example, in her interview, Tamara said: “It was really sad [seeing those who are homeless], and this made me more appreciative of what I have.”

I’m Motivated to Help Others When I’m Shown How and That It Makes a Difference

For some participants, understanding the severity of the community issues led to feeling empowered with the notion that they could make a difference in their community. For example, Tammy said: “I can do more than what I did before now that I know what problems there are.” Similarly, during her interview, Lisa explained that being aware about the needs in the community and ways to address them became a motivation to help the community.

Another participant also expressed interest in helping her community when shown how small-scale gestures could make a great difference. When interviewed, Xiomara said:

I feel like the littlest effort going towards anything, or anyone helping, will help my community. Because if you could help one person, there isn’t any telling of how many people you can help by helping that one person.... If you ever see somebody homeless, you could just stop and give them a jacket, or just bring them some food, something simple. It doesn’t have to be anything major, you don’t have to give them money, just give them something to get their day going. Give them something to look forward to, to not give up.

Another motivating factor for one of the participants was receiving the acknowledgement from a family member about the impact that he had on the community. Tahvo detailed this during his interview, saying:

I was doing community service, a lot of work. But this all played out because we were doing something that nobody else wanted to do with their free time...I told my grandma

[about the service to the homeless people]...She said that's good, real good, what y'all do in the class there.

Several participants indicated that knowing the impact that community service can have on the community motivated them to think about helping the community in the future. For example, Lisa mentioned that participating in the service activities prompted her to want to pursue similar service activities in the future.

Similarly, Xiomara mentioned that as a result of her participation, she felt passionate about serving her community. She expressed that although originally she was motivated to perform the community service because it was an opportunity to leave the school campus, she also felt that in doing so, she was able to make an impact on the community. Furthermore, Kenya mentioned that although she did not consider her school her community, she would nonetheless be willing to participate in service projects at her school because she realized that by helping people she can make a difference.

Learning Through Doing Brought About Change in the Way I Value Service in My Community

The participants also expressed that their experiences volunteering throughout this project helped them value service in their community. For example, after the community service activities, Tamara learned something about her will to help. She wrote on her last service journal: "The best part of the trip was helping to give back to the community from my heart and not because I was paid or had to do so." In comparison, Tadeo expressed learning new things that happen in the real world through the service activities, which to him was "a lesson for life." Tamara also felt that through her volunteering efforts, she was able to make an impact on the community, allowing her to see that helping the community had a greater benefit. She expressed

this in her interview by saying: “If I can do it, anybody can do it. It’s not hard; it’s like helping and giving back a little bit of time to better your community and help somebody, save their life.”

I Believe that Taking Ownership for Our Community is Important Because We Are Part of the Community

Despite disclosing feeling disconnected from and resentful with their community, some of the participants acknowledged also feeling that helping the community is the duty of all residents. For example, in her interview, Xiomara said: “Community is important because it’s where you live. If you don’t take care of your community, who else will.” Similarly, in her interview, Tamara explained: “I feel like everybody should have some sort of responsibility because it’s our community and we live here.” She summarized her perception of social responsibility by saying, “I mean it is our community, if we don’t take care for it we can’t expect somebody from the outside to come in and take care of it because it’s ours.” For Tamara, taking ownership of her community was important because the community depended on assistance and care from the residents. Similarly, Tahvo acknowledged a necessity for mutual care and benefit. He said that volunteering in the community was important because “everybody lives in one community so why not? We see them fall, why not pick them up? When you grow old, you will also need it.”

Summary

This chapter presented the findings derived from the thematic analysis of the qualitative data. These findings provided information about the participants’ engagement with the community, their self-perceptions, and their plans to be civically engaged in the future. Importantly, the thematic analysis resulted in three themes: *existing attitudes towards*

engagement, creative art activities act as a catalyst to engage youth, and active engagement in the community can lead youth to care more about their community (see Table 13).

Table 13
Themes and Subthemes of the Thematic Analysis

Theme	Subthemes
Existing Attitudes that Influence their Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A noticeable lack of care within my school has led to me feeling disillusioned and this affects how I value the school community. * A noticeable lack of care within my community has led to me feeling disillusioned and this affects how I value my community. * I came to realize that I cannot help others before I try to help myself. * I'm not in a position where I can help the community on my own, but in the future I will help. * Experiencing service opportunities in my community led me to realize that I was able to have an impact after all.
Creative Art Activities Act as a Catalyst to Engage Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The creative art activities elicited awareness about things that matter to me and my community. * The creative art activities prompted discussion on aspects of personal and meaningful experiences that we had in common. * The creative art activities impacted how I perceive my peers and myself.
Active Engagement in the Community Can Lead Youth to Care More About Their Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I developed an understanding of the severity of the issues in the community and an appreciation for the resources that I do have. * I'm motivated to help others when I'm shown how and that it makes a difference. * Learning through doing brought about change in the way I value service in my community. * I believe that taking ownership for our community is important because we are part of the community.

In summary, through these themes, creative art activities were found to impact the participants' engagement by fostering awareness about community issues and prompting discussions between the participants, which led them to share meaningful and personal experiences in their community. Furthermore, the existing attitudes of the participants towards engagement changed. The participants reported having a different perception of their peers and themselves after partaking in the art-infused civic activities.

The participants also disclosed feeling disillusioned with what they perceived as a lack of care by the community. However, through the service opportunities that were provided as part of this study, the participants came to realize that even though they are not in a position to civically engage now due to their own personal needs, they do have the power to make an impact in the community. Engaging in the community through art-infused civic activities led them to care more about their community and to want to help their community in the future. This desire to be civically engage later in life came from understanding more about the severity of the issues in the community and valuing the need that communities have for their residents to help and take ownership of their community.