

# ***Servant Scholars***

## **Project S.E.A.M: Leaving Something Behind**

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### **Introduction**

Service, Education, Awareness, Mentorship. These are four words that encompass the culmination of our work in the Servant Scholars Program as the 2016 cohort: our collective effort to shape the lives of disadvantaged youth in LaGrange. The four words that make up S.E.A.M. represent the essential needs of students we worked with from the West Georgia Star after-school program, the Boys & Girls Club, Hollis Hand Elementary School, and our own campus.

Our passion for working with young people—including children, teens, and our peers—began with our experiences working with various organizations as juniors during the 2014-15 school year. Our service sites included Circles of Troup County, Teen Maze, Boys & Girls Club, Harmony House, Emmaus House, and First Tee, among others. Through our work with children at these locations—as well as exposure to the consequences of domestic and dating abuse, which affects young adults—we concluded that there are several youth-related programs in our area in need of improvement, and that the LaGrange College campus could benefit from student-led, relatable abuse awareness seminars.

Additionally, according to data from *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, the rate at which lower-class children partake in extracurricular activities has decreased in recent decades by around ten to fifteen percent, while upper-class students have not experienced any change in extracurricular involvement (Putnam 177). Statistics such as these, combined with our personal experiences during our junior year, informed our approach to this project for disadvantaged youth. Our literature review, which reveals many of the troubles facing youth today, serves to further rationalize our goals, which are fulfilled in the various projects outlined below.

## Literature Review

The books we chose for our literature review covered each of the four aspects that make up our project's title—Service, Education, Awareness, Mentorship. The literature delved into the deeper meaning behind these words and discussed how proper execution of programs for the betterment of youth can improve communities. Through reading these books, we learned dedication and were guided by the experience and advice the various authors gave when implementing the many portions of S.E.A.M.

We learned, first and foremost, that serving properly means giving an example, rather than freeing people of their duties. In *Toxic Charity*, Robert D. Lupton explains how many churches and charities, in spite of their good intentions, end up hurting others by making them dependent, and he proposes volunteers move from “toxic charity to transformative charity.” At the Our Daily Bread soup kitchen, for instance, we do not merely feed our needy guests but have conversations with them and build relationships. As a result of our example, they now help with the kitchen's operations, becoming less like our dependents and more like our partners in service.

While our philosophy of service was established with help from Lupton, in our approach to the second aspect of S.E.A.M.—education—we relied upon multiple sources stating self-confidence is essential to learning and future success. For example, Patrick M. Morley, in *Man in the Mirror*, asserts the importance of addressing men's insecurities, even if men are prone to ignoring them. Additionally, C. S. Lewis points out in *The Great Divorce* that people often function as their own greatest obstacle. Therefore, in order for students to learn and grow, they must be motivated and encouraged individually. In *It's Better to Build Boys than Mend Men*, Truett Cathy credits a healthy and positive search for self-identity as the key to becoming a thriving, responsible adult. In his view, children should be encouraged to find themselves from a young age, either at home or with a mentor. These authors' ideas helped us realize that the children we chose to work with would only be able to find motivation through our encouragement.

In addition to giving us an effective approach to education, we found our reading also revealed some important facts that were helpful in our efforts to run successful awareness campaigns. As a cohort, we felt passionate about the problem of dating violence and abuse in our culture, especially on college campuses. In her book *Tornado Warning*, Elin Stebbins Waldal gives a painful view into the reality of abuse and stresses that it does not discriminate even against the strongest and most confident people. As we planned our cultural enrich-

ment events on both dating violence and sexual assault, we kept in mind the misperception that abuse is uncommon and only happens to the irresponsible. Waldal's book helped us realize that our major goal would be revealing the unfortunate ubiquity of abuse in our culture: we needed to show that it takes unexpected forms, and even small incidents that would seem to not be abuse often point to a greater danger.

Although service, education, and awareness were significant goals in our project, our largest area of concern was by far mentorship. We read several books that illustrated how to better interact with youth in our community and learned the model of a good mentor. Before attempting to forge relationships with the children at our target after-school programs, we needed to understand their backgrounds. In her book *Place Not Race: A New Vision of Opportunity in America*, Sheryll Cashin researches the mentality of black Americans compared to their white peers. According to her research, in a "2009 Pew Research Survey on race, 80% of blacks felt that equality has not been achieved and 43% of blacks thought there was still 'a lot of discrimination,' while only 13% of whites believed that there was much anti-black bias" (Cashin 9). Further, Robert D. Putnam asserts in *Our Kids (The American Dream in Crisis)* that children in present-day, low-income families and communities struggle even more than children of past decades who were under similar circumstances. Keeping the perspective of many black Americans in mind, as well as the progressive deterioration of standards of living, we made a point to show empathy—we would be fair and prevent exclusion.

Because these children come from very different and unfamiliar backgrounds, we needed to find ways we could sincerely relate to them. According to Lois J. Zachary in *The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships*, we needed to practice "cross-cultural competency," which meant understanding, embracing, and using our cultural differences to communicate positively with people of other cultures. We learned some important ways to acquire this competency from Jamel Bragg in *Working with our Youth*. He provides several tips about how to reach youth effectively and reminds us that, when working with youth in the community, we needed to be genuine, as children can recognize forced attempts to relate to them. Additionally, in their book *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future*, Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van assert that today's children are often alienated in our society. Therefore, in order to reach our mentees, we had to welcome them, but not at the expense of presenting ourselves honestly.

Above all, however, we gleaned from our reading one basic principle of not only mentoring children but serving in all capacities: be loving and show gen-

uine interest. In *From Brokenness to Community*, Jean Vanier points out that communities are supportive, forgiving, loving, and caring. They recognize that every person in that community plays a role and is important, and they celebrate that fact. As such, we strived to create a community at our after-school programs, always telling the students they mattered and expressing concern for their wellbeing and academic and personal progress.

Last of note, in *The Paradox of Power*, Pat Williams provides a model for the ideal servant leader, which we found very applicable to our effort at West Georgia Star and elsewhere. He mentions on multiple occasions that true servant leaders should sacrifice their pride, put others first, work together, and act selflessly when working with or leading others. We exhibited these traits every day at West Georgia Star, making our mentees our first priority, and casting aside our own interests. Finally, in *Love Does*, Bob Goff illustrates this power of intention and full engagement that naturally comes when people connect on many levels. His main focus is simply that love is an action that transcends everything. We learned that in order for the youth in our community to respond to our efforts, we first have to show, through our actions, that we care. So this, of course, was how we approached each child, teen, and young adult as we implemented our lessons—with respect and love.

### **Observations and Implementation**

Throughout the fall semester portion of our project, we focused intently on making observations at West Georgia Star and our smaller service sites related specifically to the enrichment of elementary through high school-aged children. We considered features that each organization lacked and brainstormed improvements that could be made to established curricula. As such, we began, first and foremost, as tutors under the direction of teachers, as well as planners for ideas and goals we hoped to achieve with our community partners in the spring. The observations we made on-site, the initiatives our first experiences subsequently inspired, and how we implemented them during the spring, are as follows:

#### **West Georgia Star—"10 Lessons"**

The idea of creating lesson plans that would help mentor disadvantaged students was one of our original ideas, and we implemented these at our main site, West Georgia Star. We specifically wanted to make an impact at lower socioeconomic neighborhoods because, statistically, students with high test scores in the lowest quartile of socioeconomic standing are less likely to attend college than low-scoring students in the highest standing (Putnam 190). We

were inspired by the lesson plans that had been used and created by the first Servant Scholars cohort for Circles of Troup County. We first made the point to get acquainted with the kids to see which skills they were lacking or which topics most needed to be covered. Thus, our first semester of our senior project turned into a semester of learning on our part, where we worked with the kids, mentored them, and tutored them in the setting of their usual curriculum and schedule. We ultimately decided on ten weeks covering ten topics:

- “Proper Personal Introduction”
- “Goal Setting”
- “Listening and Communication Skills”
- “Bullying and Drama”
- “Dating Violence” or “Building Stronger Friendships” (depending on age group)
- “Self-Worth” and “Positive Body Image”
- “Nutrition and Exercise”
- “Financial Responsibility”
- “Test Preparation”

Each week, in addition to introducing a new lesson, we reviewed previous lessons in order to make sure the kids stayed accountable for what they had learned and did not forget the importance of the curriculum as a whole.

The impact “10 Lessons” made on West Georgia Star students is evident in the positive experiences of the Scholars prominent in this part of the project. Everyone in the cohort agreed from their fall observations that the children needed more structure and that the lessons were a great way to make the hours they spent in the after school program more meaningful. We agreed also that the lessons were more engaging and interactive than the program’s usual schedule and were a good break from traditional classwork.

These sorts of hands-on projects are well-known for being more engaging for students. In a 2009 study by Purdue University, for instance, students in five classes out of “126 eighth-graders in ten science classes,” were tasked with a

“hands-on project” to build a water purification device. As opposed to students in the other five classrooms (who were given traditional lectures), they “demonstrated a deeper understanding of the issues” of human impact on water supplies. “30 percent” of the students were “ethnically diverse,” and “57 percent” received “free or reduced-price lunches,” yet still learned more effectively with the hands-on project (Medaris 1). The fact that race and socioeconomic status had no bearing on the effectiveness of hands-on learning was more than enough to convince us our lessons would make an impact on these lower-class minority students.

Throughout the course of the lessons, we saw a lot of change for the better among the students. Chandelle, for example, noted how the children who participated in running workouts as part of the “Goal Setting” lesson “pushed themselves harder” in their goal to outrun the Scholars. For her, the children’s newfound dedication and perseverance in even a simple task was enough to show that our entire initiative at West Georgia Star was “worthwhile.” If the exercise in “Goal Setting” alone was enough to motivate the children, then they were likely to look for motivation in other areas of life as well, including making goals for the future.

Carmen, likewise, had a significant experience with “10 Lessons” that attests to the ability of our mission to transform students. She noted one girl in particular who was uninterested in the lesson against bullying, and considered herself “too cool” to participate. She noted that “as the lesson progressed,” the student “began to see that she could relate to the discussion.” Our lesson on bullying was able to arouse a student’s sympathies as well as help her see that she and her peers faced similar problems and had much in common. Such a revelation, we knew, would help them relate to others in academic, professional, familial, and even just simple social settings.

Indeed, ensuring the kids became more sociable was one of our main concerns; we focused intently on manners, so the children could not only learn sympathy, but also make a good impression when creating relationships with others—including, immediate friends and family, but extending to college admission boards and employers in the future. Justin, for instance, noted that it was “obvious” the kindergartners and first graders found the idea of a simple handshake both “awkward” and “funny.” He was pleased to find that, as he and Blessing progressed with the lesson, the students became more comfortable and were actually excited to participate.

The students’ general enthusiasm for the major themes in our lessons, includ-

ing proper social interaction and personal discipline, was more than enough to convince us that our time at West Georgia Star was subtly preparing students for a bright future, and we intend to leave a physical copy of “10 Lessons” with the staff for future reference. A 2011 study involving “kindergarten through high school students” in “213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programs” reveals that students who learn social skills in their school curriculum “demonstrate significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance” (Durlak et al). Therefore, this curriculum is effective, and our project’s goal of “leaving something behind” for children is fulfilled in its creation, delivery, and donation.

### **West Georgia Star–Swim Lessons**

When we first became involved with West Georgia Star during the first semester of Project S.E.A.M., we found the established curriculum was particularly lacking in structured physical activities. Therefore, in addition to “10 Lessons,” we began an initiative to create more opportunities for exercise, including a session of swim lessons. The idea for swim lessons first came from a few of the Scholars’ past experience as lifeguards and swim instructors for children, as well as the absence of a pool at the LaGrange Housing Authority. The West Georgia Star students, we observed, would benefit greatly from structured time in the water, something their low socioeconomic backgrounds could rarely (if ever) afford them.

In addition to providing this opportunity, we also sought to help the students escape the negative stereotype that African-Americans are poor swimmers. According to a 2010 study commissioned by the USA Swimming Commission and conducted by the University of Memphis, “69% of Black/African-American” children between seven and fourteen reported “low or no swimming ability,” compared to “42% of White respondents” (Irwin et al 7). Thus, the lessons sought to close the opportunity gap between the races by equipping the students of West Georgia Star with essential water safety skills and ultimately decrease their risk of drowning.

We implemented the swim lessons at the LaGrange College natatorium on Mondays during the spring. Two main instructors (Justin and Ben), several helpers, and two lifeguards (Will and Chris, who are certified) oversaw a group of no more than ten middle-school-aged West Georgia Star students. Notably, this portion of the project also began an initiative by Adam to document our interactions with the kids in professional photographs and videos, a process he continued for the remainder of the project as part of “leaving something behind.”

The lessons emphasized learning the technique of basic strokes, especially

freestyle and backstroke. For the children who were fast learners or already fairly skilled, we focused on improving their strokes, and for younger or less-skilled children, we worked more on confidence-building and the basics of floating, kicking, and taking forward strokes. We also paid particular attention to helping students overcome fear of deep water by practicing jumping and treading. The students were also allowed time to enjoy the water, practice on their own, or receive one-on-one advice from helpers while instructors were busy.

The swim lesson participants definitely showed enthusiasm and progress, even though many of them, according to Justin, mentioned having never even been in a pool. Ben, for example, was pleasantly surprised at how quickly they took to the water, how willing they were to learn, and how much fun they had. Many of the kids were already fairly skilled, and some learned faster than others. However, they were all, to some degree, intimidated by deeper water. It was rewarding to see them tackle their fears and overcome them. The fact that they simply were able to see that their swimming skills did not “go away” in the deep end was enough for us to know that a gateway of ever-growing confidence had been opened for them.

Carmen observed their trepidations and how they held onto the wall in the deep end. The coaching we implemented helped; however, as Carmen notes: “Through much encouragement, reassurance, and coaxing, each one of the girls ended up letting go of the wall to practice treading water.” This was rewarding, because treading water was the most essential part of the lessons, as it was the most basic way to avoid drowning. So, naturally, we spent the most time on that aspect. The relationships we built and the trust we established when in the deep end definitely encouraged the kids to want to continue working in the water with others. According to Ben, Faith, a younger student who was not very skilled, was especially eager to keep trying, and wanted to continue practicing in the water even when the lessons concluded.

The on-deck helpers also gave their perspective: “Even though I don’t get into the pool with them, I still get to interact and cheer them on,” says Abby Stuckey. “They are constantly looking to us sitting on the side for affirmation and praise, and that’s what we are. We are not only there for the safety of the kids, but I feel like we are there to be cheerleaders.” She was glad to be able to give the kids “positive interaction.” She observed that the students “underestimated themselves,” but were able to succeed with “positive reinforcement.” This philosophy of encouragement would inform not just these lessons, but every aspect of our project, no matter what form of enrichment we wanted to give the various children we worked with.

## Boys & Girls Club–Art Club

The Boys & Girls Club “Art Club” originated in plans for S.E.A.M. that did not come to fruition. Originally, the Boys & Girls Club was to feature just as heavily in the project as West Georgia Star. However, we found our plan was overly ambitious, and that we could not make equal time for both organizations. Because the Boys & Girls Club was already being assisted by employees and volunteers from the college (including junior Servant Scholars), we decided to focus our energy primarily at West Georgia Star, where such helpers were in shorter supply.

Regardless, we did not want to abandon the Boys & Girls Club altogether and decided to push forward on a smaller scale and offer senior Scholars as tutors at the organization. Chandelle briefly worked as a math and science tutor and noted that the children were missing a creative outlet. Ben, who could only volunteer on Fridays, found that the children participated in various activities away from homework at the end of the week. He mentioned he was an art minor, and Stephanie Chambliss, the director, agreed that the children could benefit from structured time expressing themselves through visual art.

The Boys & Girls Club is almost exclusively composed of African-American students, comparable to the all-black West Georgia Star program. Shelby, who volunteered to assist Ben with the club, was inspired by her experiences exposing black middle and high schoolers to performing and fine arts at the LaGrange College production of *Chicago* and the LaGrange Art Museum, respectively. Shelby was also influenced by her mother, who lived in the projects of New York, but was massively affected by the Broadway production of *The Wiz*, which she remembers in detail to this day.

Exposure to fine arts can improve student behavior and attendance, as a 2011 study by the Missouri Art Council shows: the districts included in that study with “lower levels of arts participation” reported an “average attendance rate of 94.1,” while those with higher levels of participation reported “an average rate of 95.1.” Further, districts with less arts participation reported “an average of 1.26 [disciplinary] infractions per 100 students,” compared to “.69 incidents for districts with high enrollment in the arts” (Scheuler 13-14). So, in addition to providing children with culture, the arts are also beneficial in shaping good behavior and academic discipline. Many of the students Shelby worked with had never attended a museum or play before, and according to the Georgia Budget and Policy Institute’s 2015 Fiscal Year Budget for K-12 Education, “more than 41 percent of districts reduced or eliminated art and music programs” (Suggs 3). Therefore, with the Art Club, our central goal was to give disadvantaged youth an opportunity to see and create art while reaping its benefits.

Ben, along with Shelby and Blessing (both art majors), created and taught a curriculum of art lessons at the Boys & Girls Club during the spring. These involved lessons on simple color theory, symmetry, painting, drawing, and cartooning and animation. To help the children relate to their African-American culture, we showed them the picture book *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold, as well as the art of black artist Jean-Michel Basquiat and encouraged them to try to emulate those artists' styles, if they desired.

We evaluated the children's change of attitude with a survey given on the first and last day of the club. While many children wrote "I don't know" or similar phrases in response to art's meaning to them, we found that, at the end of the lessons, the kids now associate art with "having fun" and even consider the purpose of art to generally be "to make stuff for people," indicating they believe in sharing art, a notion they had not had prior. A few girls, when assigned to draw a representation of their career goals, wanted to be art teachers. Further, they all expressed that they created art more frequently than before and showed much greater interest in visiting museums. In response to "Are museums important in your opinion?" many answered, "Yes, to me," when they had had little regard for museums before. From these basic survey answers alone, we are certain that we made a difference in their creative lives.

### **Hollis Hand Elementary School Field Trip**

One of the more successful parts of the project was a one-day event hosted by the Scholars in the fall. We decided that our local elementary schools, in general, could benefit from field trips that would teach children the challenges and rewards of life in college. Early campus visits are beneficial in that they excite grade-schoolers about the possibilities of college and, consequently, help them become more prepared for college applications. The Sallie Mae Fund's national program "Kids2College," for example, partners with schools in "low-income" areas with a college or university: students and staff from the partner institution participate with students in at least some Kids2College classroom sessions. Then, students "visit their partner college or university at the end of the program." According to a 2007 study by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, "two thirds" of that year's middle school participants "said at the start of the program that they'd definitely attend college after high school, increasing to 70 percent at the end of the program." Additionally, "52 percent of students said they could definitely imagine themselves in college, a 24 percent increase" (Cunningham et al 28-29).

With this in mind, we decided to host a field trip to the LaGrange College campus for fifth graders at Hollis Hand Elementary School. After contacting the

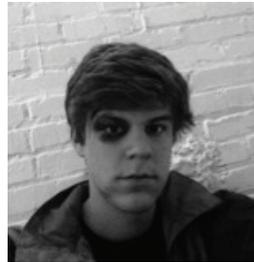
administration and preparing the event, we met several buses at different locations on both the main and south campuses. Several Scholars entertained and taught rotating groups of kids at the various stops on the college tour. The tour employed the help of LaGrange College faculty, such as Professor Colvin, who led a science experiment assisted by Abby Stuckey and Chris. We also toured the library, where the kids learned about LaGrange College's history. We gave a brief presentation on applications and majors and also entertained the kids with storytelling by Blessing, who, in dramatic fashion, related stories of ghosts who allegedly haunt the campus. In addition to academics on the Hill, we also exposed the children to the athletic and creative opportunities of college: we toured them around the athletic facilities as well as the Price Theater and Lamar Dodd Art Building. To ensure we were engaging the kids, and not merely lecturing, we asked athletes, thespians, and artists to interact with the kids and give demonstrations

Our ultimate goal was to show the students that college afforded them many opportunities for the future, offered diverse areas of study, and was filled with fun activities. After each tour stop, we gave the kids the opportunity to ask questions, and they were all eager to raise their hands and ask about how the college could help them reach their goals. The fact that the students were impressed and interested made this short-term yet impactful portion of the project an immense success.

### **Not Always Bruises**

Abby Bowen's experience at Harmony House, a domestic violence shelter, informed us of an under-addressed problem in our community: dating violence. Dating violence is common, especially among high school and college age groups: "Girls and young women between the ages of 16 and 24 experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence — almost triple the national average" (*2011 College Dating Violence and Abuse Poll*). This physical violence is often preceded by unhealthy dating behavior, which, even if non-physical, can be considered dating violence in its own right. With the "Not Always Bruises" on-campus awareness campaign, we endeavored to educate our peers on what can and cannot be considered unhealthy dating behavior and the inherent consequences of such behavior. Our hope was that the event would help our peers to better recognize the signs of a harmful relationship. We also took the event as an opportunity to make LaGrange College students aware of possible support systems for themselves or victims they may know, LaGrange students or otherwise. In this way, the event spoke to the larger community outside of the LaGrange campus.

Before hosting the event, we launched a promotional campaign lasting several days. Each Scholar wore makeup simulating physical abuse, and posed forlornly in images that circulated around LaGrange College circles on social media. We used the eponymous hashtag “#NotAlwaysBruises.” Some examples:



At the event, Abby Bowen spoke, assisted by Scholars planted in the audience and Michele Bedingfield, the director of Harmony House. Abby discussed subtle and overt manipulation, possessiveness, violation of privacy, and isolation tactics. Some examples included an abuser coercing his or her partner to engage in dangerous behavior by way of shaming or monitoring a partner’s text messages without permission. An abuser may also pressure victims into having sex or keep them away from their friends.

After Abby’s presentation, Mrs. Bedingfield explained in simple terms how abusers use these tactics in everyday business, having a conversation with attendees, rather than giving a lecture. To further make the program accessible and relatable, we displayed Yik Yak posts from the LaGrange College campus where a student questions her boyfriend’s possessiveness and receives some poor advice from other students.

Our final message was for our peers to address, rather than ignore, the signs of an abusive relationship before physical violence begins. We hoped to reach more male students, as we did not want to suggest that we were casting them as abusers and never victims. Though not many men attended, the event was a success regardless for its good turnout, engaging approach, and receptive audience. Further, Not Always Bruises is important for the statistics we found and survey results we gathered, which are incorporated into this report's research component.

### **Dating Violence among LaGrange College Students**

The research portion of this report centers on the research conducted for the Not Always Bruises seminar. We presented a questionnaire at the beginning of the presentation, which used a yes/no scale to rate the frequency at which certain relationship behaviors were present within the student population of LaGrange College. According to the data gathered from the survey, exactly half of respondents have been involved in unhealthy relationships. Twenty-eight percent of the respondents had been involved in relationships that involved the warning signs we discussed, while twenty-two percent of the respondents reported no unhealthy dating experience. Though our sample was extremely small (we must account for the possibility that the survey participants, as the event's attendees, were more likely to be victims), it is still noteworthy that any students on the LaGrange campus have experienced dating violence at all and confirms the need for our activism during S.E.A.M..

Out of the unhealthy behaviors listed on the questionnaire, "The person I'm with texts me or calls me all the time," was the most commonly cited, at thirty-three percent. "The person I'm with accuses me of flirting or cheating," was the next unhealthy behavior most often cited, at twenty-two percent. And the last two most commonly cited symptoms of dating violence in seventeen percent of the surveys were, "The person I'm with gets extremely jealous or possessive" and "The person I'm with makes me feel nervous or like I'm walking on eggshells." Each of these symptoms can reflect an unhealthy relationship, and the more of them that are present, the more likely it is that the relationship is abusive. Our survey results may not be statistically significant or citable, but they do represent actual LaGrange College students and are, therefore, still relevant.

### **Solutions and Recommendations**

Though we are confident that we made substantial impact at all of our service locations, before we conclude, we wish to summarize our report with a reflection of the strengths and weaknesses of our project, and how charities, groups,

and volunteers in Troup County can better equip themselves for helping the community's youth. With the processes and outcomes of our project in mind, we recommend strong community partnership, creative thinking, teamwork, and respect as absolutely necessary when reaching out to the troubled youth of Troup County.

From our experience, we found that working with after-school programs necessitated strong relationships with directors, teachers, and coordinators. We thank West Georgia Star director of operations Chad Cooper and West Georgia Star leaders Inetha Hatten and Lonnie Thornton for accommodating us, but regret our distance from them and our difficulties with communication. As such, we recommend forging close director-volunteer relationships when entering after-school programs, as to accurately understand the programs' needs and serve accordingly. Indeed, we noticed that there was a pattern of our plans conflicting with an organization's preconceived notions about our involvement. Though we are proud that our project was so diverse, we also concede that focus was sometimes lost, and that when it comes to entering an organization, directors and volunteers should identify objectives for the program's students, and align their plans closely.

Though many of our plans had to be dropped or modified due to limited resources and poor communication, we do not discourage unbridled creativity. We strongly recommend field trips, in particular. Encouraging children to explore avenues beyond the walls of their classrooms allows them to see a variety of opportunities. From our experience, this is the necessary first step in guaranteeing students a bright future. The Hollis Hand campus visit, for example, inspired the fifth graders to pursue secondary education, while the swim lessons provided the West Georgia Star students an opportunity to learn a new form or recreation and a life-saving skill. In addition to broadening children's horizons, we also recommend that mentors, when mentoring on-site at a school or after-school program, should participate with the children, inviting them to take part in activities, rather than merely giving assignments. Relationships and trust-building are vital when it comes to making a difference in a child's life, as our time in Project S.E.A.M. has shown us.

Ultimately, because of our teamwork, our various projects managed to not merely teach, but engage and inspire the children, teens, and young adults we worked with. This was because we strived to provide lessons and advice that our audiences would care to listen to and genuinely appreciate. Starting a conversation, rather than giving a lecture, is the ultimate solution to the problem of making a meaningful impact in the lives of young people. We recommend strongly that children and teens always be treated with respect—never

denigrated, never shamed, never underestimated. Our one-on-one interactions and hands-on lessons at the after-school programs, combined with our attempts to make events already hosted by the community more relatable to teens and college students, reflect our commitment to this philosophy.

In the end, we can say that our modifications did not hinder us, that we persevered despite our difficulties, and, as this report reveals, made an impact on our community's children, teens, and young adults in diverse and nuanced ways. Through our teamwork and the creativity that did make it into the final project, we have given these young people many outlets and experiences they never had and have equipped them with new life skills. For even just that, we have, as was our mission, left something behind. We gladly share our experience in the hopes that we can be an example to all who make similar efforts in the organizations which cater to the needs of Troup County's youth.

### **Conclusion—Robert Greenleaf's Test**

As Project S.E.A.M.'s hurdles and successes have demonstrated, service is about creating a lasting legacy that will inspire others to do similar work. Robert Greenleaf, studied by each Servant Scholar cohort, espouses this view of service, and we believe that Project S.E.A.M. has more than met the criteria of this philosopher of servant leadership. The results of all of our long-term projects attest to our passing Greenleaf's assessment: those who we served became "healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, [and] more likely themselves to become servants" (15).

S.E.A.M.'s year-long initiatives best showcase the difference we made. The guests at Our Daily Bread, who now actively help us keep up the kitchen, are an example of an impact which transcends cohorts. At West Georgia Star and the Boys & Girls Club, we have seen the kids excel in their personal, artistic, and academic pursuits. This is surely because of our commitment to relationship building: through gaining their trust and acceptance, we were able to reach them on a deeper level.

At the Boys & Girls Club, for instance, the students have gained new enthusiasm for art and self-expression, and some students even seek to be art teachers in the future. Also, the kids at West Georgia Star have already begun to integrate their newly learned skills from "10 Lessons" into everyday life. When they meet an adult or official person, for example, they excitedly tell us that they were able to properly greet them with a firm handshake and good eye contact. Many of them continue to set goals for school and during the week to help better themselves, and many children who participated in swim lessons now are interested in returning to the water and mastering swimming.

The effects of our work extend farther than we can see, as the kids will potentially share all they have learned with family and friends outside of West Georgia Star, Boys & Girls Club, and even our short-term events such as the Hollis Hand field trip. The various awareness campaigns and events, likewise, will not only resonate with our peers, but reach the minds and hearts of everyone who spreads our message. The hope of the Servant Scholars is that our successors in the program will continue to improve the lives of all who we are called to serve. We may physically be leaving behind our lesson plans, but, more importantly, we leave an example for the youth of LaGrange and future Scholars alike.

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