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Post Program Involvement in Community Service and Volunteerism: An Examination of Youth Exchange and Study Program Alumni

Ashleigh Caws

SIT Graduate Institute, ashleigh.caws@gmail.com

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Post Program Involvement in Community Service and Volunteerism, an examination of Youth
Exchange and Study Program Alumni

Ashleigh Caws

PIM074

A Capstone Paper Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a master of
International Education at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

May 16, 2016

Advisor: Sora Friedman Ph.D.

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Ashleigh Caws

May 16, 2016

Dedication

This capstone is dedicated to the Grant Local Coordinators of Academic Year in America, whose dedication to their students never ceases to amaze me.

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Abstract

This research project is a case study that examines the post program involvement of former Youth Exchange and Study (YES) students that were placed in the United States for an academic year through the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) Foundation high school program, Academic Year in America (AYA). This study explores the perspectives and narratives of former YES students with a specific focus on their involvement in community service and volunteerism since they returned to their home country. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to gather data, which included a comprehensive survey, interviews with former students and AYA staff, as well as a review of relevant research and industry perspectives. The findings exposed a strong and diverse presence of community service and volunteerism activity with the group of participating alumni. Involvement included larger scale efforts through the YES Alumni networks to small yet impactful initiatives run by the former students themselves. This case study also revealed larger discussion questions regarding program evaluation, the definition of community service, and exchange student impact. The details of this case study can be used toward the efforts to improve program evaluation methodology, as well discuss the sustainability of the YES program in the future.

Key Words: J-1 Secondary Exchange Visitors, Youth Exchange and Study, Youth Development, Community Service, Service Learning, International Students

Introduction

In a round table discussion with Muslim students at the Tophane Cultural Center in Istanbul Turkey in 2009, President Barack Obama led a discussion about the importance of building bridges instead of walls between our world's nations through our young people (Office of the Press Secretary, 2009). That discussion, touching on the benefits of international collaboration, peace, and mutual understanding, is just one of thousands of conversations that happen in higher education classrooms, U.S. Department of State conference halls, and even the living rooms of average American households. At the heart of these discussions is the importance of international education and cultural exchange. Obama stated during the meeting, "Simple exchanges can break down walls between us, for when people come together and speak to one another and share a common experience, then their common humanity is revealed (Obama, 2009)." International education has emerged as an important vehicle for cultural connections and educational opportunities (Alliance, 2015) and cannot be rivaled by the traditional limiting learning methods. Exchange programs specifically create opportunities for personal growth and self-empowerment that a text book or film simply cannot provide. Through experiential education and exchange, future leaders emerge who intuitively value international partnerships, mutual understanding, and empathy towards other cultures (2015).

International Education in the secondary education sector has bridged American and overseas communities by mutually participating in the practice of opening their hearts and homes to high school foreign exchange students. By inviting an international student into an American home, school, and community, those students can personally and positively challenge the perceptions of our world. Most importantly, high school foreign exchange programs inspire

cultural understanding at an early age for both parties, as well as enable students and host families to participate and contribute to a changing worldview (AIFS Foundation, 2013).

International high school students enter the United States on J-1 visas annually, averaging just over 23,000 per year (U.S. Department of State, 2015). The purpose of the J-1 secondary education visa is to promote citizen exchange, which is primarily administered by private sponsors that are designated by the U.S. Department of State. In addition, there are some J-1 programs with specific citizen diplomacy objectives that are funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) directly. An example of a program like this is the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program, the focus of this paper. This youth program in particular awards scholarships to high school students from predominantly Muslim countries with strong academic and leadership potential. If selected, the students are placed in an American community for a full academic year, are hosted by an American host family and school, and encouraged to continue to develop their leadership potential in this environment (Youth Exchange and Study Program, 2015). By design, the YES program aims to foster a global community of mutual values, respect and interests cultivated through these exchange experiences. Since its formation in October 2002, the YES program has made connections across more than 40 countries with Muslim populations. The countries that are currently participating are Albania, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Egypt, Gaza, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Israel, Jordan, Kenya, Kosovo, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Macedonia, Malaysia, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Suriname, Tanzania, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, West Bank, and Yemen. The involvement of all of these countries brings diversity to the exchange experience for Americans, but also an opportunity for all the

participating countries to benefit from sending a group of their brightest students to absorb all they can of American democracy, culture and daily life (Youth Exchange and Study Program, 2015).

As this program was founded in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, it holds extreme relevance to the United States' future international policy and public diplomacy efforts (Youth Exchange and Study Program, 2015). The student experience throughout and post the YES program is a key component to these efforts, and is carried out through the following program objectives:

- To provide the opportunity for young people in selected countries to learn more about American society, people, institutions, values and culture;
- To enhance American understanding of foreign students' countries and cultures;
- To provide the opportunity for young people in selected countries to learn more about civic rights and values and to view their own countries from a distance;
- To develop leadership skills while in the United States that they can use when they return home;
- To support program participants in putting the knowledge and skills acquired during the exchange program to good use in their home countries;
- To foster personal ties and institutional links obtained during their experiences.

(U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2009)

These program objectives set by the ECA help facilitate a successful student exchange experience during their time in America, but also set a foundation for future growth once they return home. One of the primary ways the YES program attempts to ensure these objectives are

met throughout and beyond the program year is through volunteer service hours in the students' host communities (AIFS Foundation 2014). Community service and volunteerism are identified as indicators of positive impact, and involvement in such activities helps to ensure that program objectives are met. All students are required to complete a minimum of 50 hours of volunteerism, participate in monthly Enhancement Activities, and contribute to larger efforts such as Global Youth Service Day and International Education Week. The ECA awards a highly coveted Volunteer Service Certificate to students who complete 100 hours or more of volunteer service during their time in the United States. A large percentage of the total students per year meet or exceed 100 service hours. Some examples of this extraordinary participation in community service while on the YES program have been working in orphanages for children, helping victims of natural disasters, tutoring children in their host communities, helping the poor and homeless, volunteering at the local libraries and community gardens, fundraising for local charities and much more (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2009). The YES program shares the impact stories of current students, allowing them to be recognized and motivate each other. Some notable efforts that have been initiated by former YES students are also posted, and examples have been the development of teen leadership workshops, international education grants used to develop youth development programs, participation in training workshops, and peaceful actions in countries of conflict (Youth Exchange and Study Program, 2015). These examples are just a small snapshot of how YES students are continuing their growth after program conclusion.

The AIFS Foundation is one of several approved 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations that administers the YES program for about six percent of the total 900 annual scholarship winners, and has had an ongoing cycle of bright motivated and inspirational participants for the last 14

years (AIFS Foundation 2014). The AIFS Foundation's high school exchange program, Academic Year in America (AYA), yields an average of 800 total participants a year; 10 percent of those participants are ECA scholarship winners for the YES and Future Leader Exchange (FLEX) programs. Given the scope of this paper, the AIFS Foundation's AYA program will be used as a case study to learn about YES student participants and their involvement in their communities through volunteerism when they return home after the program. The focus will be specifically on the AYA high school alumni group of the last five years (2009-2014 program years). As the Associate Director of Compliance and Operations at AYA, I ensure that the placement and supervision of all active and incoming students is compliant with U.S. Department of State's regulations for secondary school students. I work closely with the vetting of host families, create and adapt policies to safeguard our participants, as well as maintain the daily operations of the exchange program. I have the pleasure of interacting with all program participants (host families, Local Coordinators, high school administrators, and students) as they navigate the experience of a lifetime. My interactions and exposure to the YES students has impacted me very personally; heightening my own self-awareness and mutual understanding of other cultures. These adolescents are extraordinary individuals, who at a young age, are demonstrating remarkably mature leadership skills and acting as true cultural ambassadors. In working and spending time with YES students through program activities, orientations and student visits, it is extremely clear that they possess a distinctive positive energy, the type of energy that will one day change our world. For many years I have marveled at the accomplishments of these students once they return home after the program, and intend to examine the link between impact and community in this study. The intention of focusing on this group of AIFS Foundation YES program alumni and their involvement in community service

and volunteerism will help to validate my belief that the YES program is generating positive impact through its alumni after program completion.

Research Question

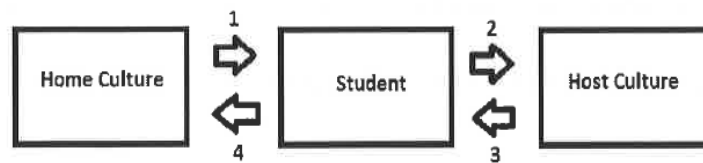
How have AIFS Foundation Youth Exchange and Study Program alumni from 2009-2014 been involved in community service and volunteerism since their program completion?

Literature Review

The focus of community service and volunteerism while on an exchange program or study abroad program is a concept as old as study abroad itself. For decades, individuals have been seeking experiences abroad rooted in helping others through organizations like American Field Service (AFS), Habitat for Humanity, Peace Corps, and dozens of others. This study begins to unfold the various layers associated with this sort of exchange program, unpacking the key components of service based learning and youth development that make these experiences seemingly impactful and successful. Generating and assessing impact through international exchange is a quest of many scholars and industry professionals. Studies over the decades have confirmed that long term impact is a measurement that is difficult to quantify over a lifetime, and poses many additional questions of variables like student experiences, personal attributes, cognitive development, cultural competence, etc. The task of drawing conclusions about international exchange programs regardless of these variables has been the subject of much debate and research since their emergence in the last century. Despite the difficulty of assessing the abstract nature of these exchanges, all international education programs sew a common thread of intending to impact the participants' tolerance and understanding of other cultures and citizens of the world.

Exchange Visitor Impact

Eide's cross cultural survey attempts to establish that the impact of the international student can be illustrated through the theoretical model of cultural carrying (Eide, 1970). Eide describes the student as a link between the home and host culture, transmitting information of cultural competence and understanding through themselves and into their home and host environments (Eide, 1970).



(Eide, 1970)

Their knowledge and intercultural experiences gained during their time on an exchange program are passed from their host culture to their home culture and vice versa. This exchange in essence begins to break down the barriers between culturally different people and removes prejudices in the process (Abbas, 2015). As an example, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. Government sought to improve its image and build positive impressions of the United States through public diplomacy efforts targeted at youth abroad (Youth for Understanding USA, 2014). Through its research, it was consistently demonstrated that those who visit the United States and interact with American people are more likely to develop a positive impression, and therefore have a more favorable opinion of the United States (Youth for Understanding USA, 2014). Public diplomacy is now an important tool, utilizing the impact, transfer of knowledge and intercultural experiences of exchange students. In the case of J-1 exchange visitors, the role of the sponsoring exchange organization is also an important part of this transfer of impact. Sponsor organizations for J-1 participants ensure that the student is

monitored and supported, but also encouraged to carry out the objectives of the United States' public diplomacy efforts (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2016).

Formally American Field Service, AFS-USA is another grand example of a leader in intercultural learning and exchange with worldwide presence of impactful students. For more than 65 years, AFS has facilitated student exchange and international education opportunities that promote the importance of being exposed to new environments and ways of life (Hansel, 2008). Through long term impact studies, AFS has attempted to question if it can predict intercultural sensitivity and lifelong learning indicators in its high school participants. Its assessments did indicate that its participants are more likely to be among the “educated intercultural travelers” group that possessed interest in lifelong learning through international exploration (Hansel, 2008). Additionally, AFS participants who had a good experience during their exchange year did develop intercultural sensitivities that impacted their life. AFS as well as other notable programs like Youth for Understanding (YFU), Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), and many more are highly regarded as collaborative fundamental pillars in secondary education exchange that promote the success of adolescents seeking cultural experiences. Those who are awarded the grant each year share the task of ensuring all YES students receive a quality exchange experience in America. The following organizations have upheld a high standard of quality for YES placement, and continue to pledge to impact youth development around the world: Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES), AFS-USA, AIFS Foundation/Academic Year in America, American Councils, American Scandinavian Student Exchange (ASSE), AYUSA International, CCI Greenheart, (CIEE), Foreign Links Around the Globe (FLAG) , Iowa Resource for International Service (IRIS), Program of

Academic Exchange (PAX), Student Travel Schools Foundation (STS), World Learning, World Link, and YFU (Youth Exchange and Study Program, 2015).

Youth Development

As United States political leaders have echoed for decades, in order for democracy to continue to thrive, the youth of our world must be prepared and willing to build a more hopeful future (Alessi, 2006). By fostering opportunities for youth to contribute to society through service based community engagement, the youth of today will develop the necessary tools to uphold, shape, and participate in our future world. In his argument to establish youth service programs as “effective in shifting transitional democracies toward healthy democratic functioning abroad,” (Alessi, 2006 p. 1), Alessi found that if provided structured opportunities of community service, youth around the world will apply passion and energy to contribute to societal movements and missions. Alessi points out that any lack of youth involvement in the world it is not a lack of interest or motivation but a lack of structured opportunities for them to participate. There are increasing concerns in developing countries as youth are faced with a lack of resources in education and employment, creating trends of disempowerment (Alessi, 2006). These concerns highlight the point that if given a positive outlet, i.e. community service, disempowered or destructive behavior can be redirected into a positive direction.

Adolescence is a key period in the development of the human brain, as it is the vital period in which the development of habits and competencies that will affect their thoughts, choices and perspectives in their adulthood. While this is a time of vulnerability to risk seeking behavior and a fluctuation of hormones and emotions, this is also a time of known strength passion and growth (Morton, 2010). Youth development experts agree that adolescence is a time of emerging independence, autonomy and focus of individual interests and skills, making

community engaged adolescents more likely to have a productive adulthood (Quinn, 1999). Quinn notes in her studies of youth development programs for early teens that, “Programs that are designed to foster youth development build on the strengths of young people, recognizing their need for both ongoing support and challenging opportunities,” (Quinn, 1999). Researchers have since followed Quinn’s lead and began to focus on the significance of service engaged teenagers and their impact on the world.

Adolescents’ participation in service learning has been a topic of growing significance to educators, researchers, and policy makers in the United States in recent years. (Schmidt 2014). Research studies have shown that service learning activities are developmentally beneficial to youth by impacting their motivation and cognition and have also been correlated with positive academic, behavioral, psychological and social outcomes. Behavioral, psychological and social outcomes include but are not limited to self-efficacy, civic attitudes, moral reasoning, and a kindness/social responsibility to help others. Another important reported result of service learning is an increased appreciation of diversity, increased political awareness, self-assurance, and a willingness to volunteer and vote in the future (Schmidt, 2014). Schmidt’s findings are in line with other service learning impact studies that have identified service learning as a strong predictor for all positive student outcomes such as academic engagement, community involvement and a stronger perception of civic knowledge (Billig, 2006). Researchers have now begun to examine youth development and community service connections more closely, attempting to determine long term impact, predicting participation in the future, and comparing self-initiated volunteerism with required community service through a school or institution (Schmidt, 2014).

Program Evaluation

During an evaluation of the YES program in 2009, the ECA was able to identify some compelling evidence that its program participants had grown as individuals, and that their views and understanding of the United States had greatly evolved (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2009). Across all cohort samples, nearly all participants were involved in community service during their time on the program, and still had a strong desire to undertake a similar involvement in their own communities at home upon program conclusion. An average of eight in ten participants indicated they remained committed to becoming more involved and working in their home communities and actually were active in volunteering and changing the perceptions of the United States after one year. Many alumni also indicated that they still, even a few years after program conclusion, are engaged in community service activities, and have remained in touch with fellow participants and/or contacts that they met through service learning workshops, lectures and social events coordinated through their exchange organizations (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2009). While this report is the first and only since 2009 to draw such conclusions about the official impact of the YES program, it was quite clear that even from only five years of detailed survey data that community service events, the YES Alumni Network, and the exposure to service learning in the United States has aided the participants in building on lessons learned during their exchange experience and will continue to motivate them forward into the future.

Public diplomacy and foreign exchange impact are aspects of the government that are not strangers to the international education industry. While the two go hand in hand, public diplomacy efforts demand a level of evidence and evaluation to validate the allocation of resources to exchange programs. Proving that public diplomacy programs actually work and

deserve funding is a difficult thing to validate within the realms of normal measurement because they involve intangibles (Rider, 2015) There is an uncomfortable truth that in more than 70 years of public diplomacy activities and efforts, that there still is not a practical or certain method to validate most of its programs (Rider, 2015). The ECA was highlighted in the 2013 Advisory Commission's report as only allocating a quarter of a percent of its budget for evaluation, not to mention the ongoing focus of outputs versus outcomes. The Institute of International Education has produced several articles commenting on the difficulties of program evaluation within the realm of citizen diplomacy and cultural exchange, and has contributed to an ongoing effort to changing the landscape of program evaluation. At this time, focused case studies and the comparison of outcomes of previous evaluations are the current strategy to providing meaningful evaluation feedback and correlations (Bhandar, 2011).

The evaluation of the YES program specifically described earlier was conducted by InterMedia, a third party, initiated by the ECA. This evaluation assessed the impact of the program, specifically the exchange experience, on the students' satisfaction, learning, behavior changes, and personal ties to the United States over time (InterMedia, 2009) The evaluation took place over five years, and was finalized in August 2009. The final report concluded that the program outcomes supported the program objectives. The majority of the YES students exhibited considerable and lasting changes after their experience (InterMedia, 2009). There has not been a formal evaluation process since 2009, but the YES program and the ECA have showcased the program's productivity through their alumni network initiatives, as well as significant documentation of student impact through online news and stories. Student impact stories, future plans, and presentations that demonstrate the program "in action" are posted to illustrate how the objectives are met (Youth Exchange and Study Program, 2015).

The United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy has made recommendations to the ECA regarding the collection of data for its programs, which covered the inclusion of more contextual data and less self-reported reflection (United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, 2014). These recommendations were made after careful analysis of past evaluations, materials, and annual data collected by the ECA for the YES and Fulbright programs in 2014 (United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, 2014).

Overall, formal research and evaluation are able to highlight the importance of youth development, international youth exchange, and the significance of community service and volunteerism in adolescents. The YES program facilitates these aspects of a successful youth development program, while also contributing to the greater effort of public diplomacy by generating its own ripple effect of impact. This impact, while difficult to evaluate and measure, is still a major component to the foundation of the YES program, and can be seen in its alumni's stories, initiatives, and experiences revolving around community service and volunteerism.

Methodology

As there has not been a formal evaluation of the YES program since 2009, this study begins to explore the post program involvement in community service of YES alumni in the context of the AIFS Foundation. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology was used to attempt to effectively determine participation and perceived impact of the alumni. Data collection methods included an online survey as well as a follow up interview for consenting participants. Survey data and interviews were conducted over a 30 day period.

Participants were identified by program year; only 2009-2014 AIFS Foundation, Academic Year in America program years were invited. A quantitative survey was distributed via email to 300 qualified (18 years or older) program alumni inviting them to participate in the

study (see Appendix A), and 31 consented to participate (see Appendix E). The initial email invitation yielded 15 respondents. Local Coordinators who are currently associated with the AYA and connected with their YES alumni volunteered to assist the researcher by following up with students they thought may be willing to participate and share their experiences. The remaining 16 respondents were recruited by Local Coordinators. The survey included information about their personal and cultural demographics, the extent of their community involvement and achievements during its time in the United States, their community involvement since they have returned home, and a personal rating of personal attitudes, activities, comprehension and intentions for the future. Survey questions were also developed based on the ECA YES program objectives. The survey was distributed via email, and created through QuestBack, secure data collection software (see Appendix B).

The entire sample was invited to participate in a follow up interview with the researcher. Eight interviews were conducted with alumni that consented to a follow up interview to take place after survey completion. Interviews were conducted via telephone or online chat (Skype, WhatsApp or Vibor) and transcribed for analysis. The interview questions were an extension of the survey questions, asking participants to provide more details about their involvement in community service and volunteerism after the program, and how they feel the YES program assisted the continued involvement in such activities (see Appendix C). In addition to participant interviews, two AIFS Program Administrators for AYA were interviewed to examine AIFS Foundation's role in YES program administration (see Appendix D) as well as a thorough review of program literature.

Data Analysis

AIFS Foundation

The mission of the AIFS Foundation is “to provide educational and cultural exchange opportunities to foster greater understanding among the people of the world” (AIFS Foundation, 2016). As of 2015, the AIFS Foundation’s high school program AYA has enabled more than 35,000 foreign students to come to the United States from more than 45 countries around the world. Academic Year in America annually distributes a satisfaction evaluation to all host families and students. Of all surveyed host families that participated in the 2014-2015 program year, 90 percent of all host families would recommend hosting to another family. Of that same group, 88 percent of host families rated their overall experience as good or excellent. For the 2014-2015 program year, 98 percent of the surveyed students rated their overall experience as good or excellent (AIFS Foundation, 2016).

We have had so much fun hosting exchange students in our home. Each student comes with unique qualities and so much to teach us of their culture. I am confident that my young children will grow up to be better people because of these experiences. (p.5)

Superintendent of Schools in the Hornell City School District (AIFS Foundation, 2012) was extremely satisfied with YES program students and their impact on his school:

The benefits of hosting an AYA student are enormous. Our students are exposed to a new culture shared by our AYA students. Our experience was one that created lifelong friendships that forever changed our host families as well as our staff. (p. 2)

Exchange visitor impact exists beyond the host families, and has a ripple effect to schools and local communities as well.

AIFS Foundation YES Administrators

Two AIFS Foundation Academic Year in America YES program administrators were asked to discuss the YES program. Data was collected in the form of an interview from the AYA Grants Regional Director, who places the YES and Future Leader Exchange (FLEX) students with host families and provides student support throughout the year, as well as an email response from the AYA Grants & Orientation Manager, who is the primary administrator and orientation manager for the YES and FLEX programs. Discussion questions were answered (see questions in Appendix D) by both administrators, who have been working with YES students for two and four years, although both have worked for the AIFS Foundation for more than six years. Their perspective was limited to the YES alumni students while they were active on the program, not after program completion.

The administrators described the YES students as very appreciative of the opportunity to receive the competitive YES program scholarship. They also both agreed that YES students are also highly responsive to AYA student outreach efforts, and are continuously the largest majority of students who respond to surveys and internal outreach. The YES students are extremely connected to the “bigger picture”, making them an enjoyable and productive group of students to work with.

Coming to the United States as an exchange student takes some courage, and YES students come with that same feeling of anticipation and excitement that other students do, but it has a different feeling to me. YES students understand that they are here to do more than just meet their host family and go to school, they are here to create some sort of impact, whether it be personal or communal, they understand the 'bigger picture'.

(AIFS Foundation, personal interview, March 11, 2016)

Administrators also estimated that over 50 percent of the YES students exceeded 50 hours of community service while on the AYA program and that many students express that the service element of the program is the highlight of their year. When administrators were asked if they think that the ECA prioritized community service, the answer was yes, “it is a purposeful program objective so that students can prepare themselves to establish community service initiatives when they return home.” Administrators also described their role in the students’ involvement, indicating that they do coach the students through meeting the community service with the help of the Local Coordinator, but do think that a large portion of students would still participate even if community service was not mandatory. Some students initiated their involvement themselves, but many were more successful with a strong and consistent Local Coordinator encouragement.

Program administrators are not responsible for impact upon program completion, but they do receive feedback and stories about alumni. Based on that feedback, the impression the AIFS Foundation has is that the majority of the students do engage in community service activities when they return home. A standout YES student impact story from the YES Alumni Network that was shared with the administrators was a female from Gaza, who is involved with diabetes awareness and fighting for women’s rights in her home country. Her story and quotes on gender roles and the rights of women have been used to encourage other YES students on the program.

The AIFS Foundation is very proud of the accomplishments of all its YES students, both active students and alumni. The encouragement and support given to students during their time on the program is known to positively impact the student while in the United States, but also to inspire them to implement amazing projects and ideas when they return home and reach a larger network of people beyond their host family and host community.

Participant Data

The following demographic data was captured in the online survey. The average participant was female, 20 years old, identified as a student, and currently resides in her country of birth. Of the 31 survey respondents, 20 participants were female and 11 were male. The median age of the male respondents was 20 years old, and the median age of female respondents was 19 years old. Seventeen countries of birth were represented in the data sample, including: Lebanon, Pakistan, Ghana, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Philippines, Malaysia, Israel, Morocco, Thailand, Suriname, Mozambique, Indonesia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Oman, Turkey, and Kenya. Of the 31 survey respondents, 25 currently reside in their country of birth. Six survey respondents currently reside in a country different than they were born and five of the six are living in another place because they are enrolled at a university. Overall, 30 of the 31 self-identified as students, and 24 of the students identified as a university-level student. Six identified as high school students. Only one survey respondent identified as employed. Of the entire sample, 23 had completed the YES program within the last three years.

Satisfaction Data

The online survey began by establishing participant satisfaction with their exchange experience, and their experience with the YES program itself. See Table 1 for all participant satisfaction data. All participants indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their exchange experience. Thirty participants indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their YES program experience, and one had a neutral response. Additionally, participants were asked to indicate their familiarity with American culture before the YES program. Eighteen of respondents were neutral and unfamiliar with American culture, but 13 of participants did indicate that they were familiar or very familiar with American culture already as seen in Table 2.

<u>Question</u>	<u>Very Unsatisfied</u>	<u>Satisfied</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Satisfied</u>	<u>Very Satisfied</u>
How would you rate your satisfaction with your exchange experience? This pertains to your experience with your host family, host school, local coordinator, and host community?	0	0	0	10	21
How would you rate your satisfaction with the YES program? This pertains to the overall experience, pre-departure/re-entry orientations, and program operations etc.?	0	0	1	7	23

In addition to American familiarity, the survey asked participants if they had any negative perceptions about Americans after the program. All participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “my perception of Americans after my YES experience was negative,” despite their familiarity with America before arrival.

Table 2					
Participant American Familiarity Data					
<u>Question</u>	<u>Very Unfamiliar</u>	<u>Unfamiliar</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Familiar</u>	<u>Very Familiar</u>
How would you rate your understanding of American culture <u>before</u> you came on the YES Program?	0	6	12	8	5

YES Program Objectives and Community Service

The bulk of the survey questions instructed respondents to indicate whether or not they agreed with statements about their experience on the YES program, their feelings about community service, and their future. These questions were designed to echo YES program objectives, as well as gage the value of community service to the participants. These responses can be found below in Table 3. While some respondents maintained a neutral response to some of the presented statements, none of the respondents disagreed with any of the statements relating to YES program objectives or values. Interestingly, six respondents indicated that they felt neutral about the statement regarding connecting their value in community service to their participation on the YES program. This response is an indication that are potentially other influences in their value of community service. Additionally, 19 respondents indicated that they were already involved in community service before they arrived. Interest and value in community service is prevalent in this data, but it is difficult to measure if the respondents relate this feeling to the YES program exclusively or if the YES program simply facilitated an interest that was preexisting.

YES Program Objectives & Community Service					
<u>Question</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>
My time on the YES program provided me the opportunity to learn about American society, people, institutions, values and culture:	0	0	0	3	27
I helped my American host family develop a better understanding of my home country, culture, and worldview.	0	0	1	6	24
My perception of Americans after my YES experience was positive.	0	0	3	11	17
The YES program assisted me in learning more about civic rights and values.	0	0	3	13	15
The YES program assisted in observing and viewing my home country from a distance.	0	0	3	9	19
The YES program strengthened my leadership skills	0	0	0	7	24
I acquired skills during my exchange experience that I am able to utilize to good use in my home country:	0	0	0	13	18
The YES Program gave me an increased sense of empowerment:	0	0	0	12	19
My year in the United States strengthened my belief in the importance of equal rights for people with disabilities:	0	0	2	10	19
My year in the United States strengthened my belief in the importance of equal rights for men and women:	0	0	5	6	20
My year in the United States strengthened my belief in the importance of youth development:	0	0	0	4	27
Community service and volunteerism is a valuable and impactful way to contribute to society:	0	0	0	2	29
The YES Program is the reason why I find community service and volunteerism important:	0	0	6	12	13
Before the YES Program, I was already compelled to contribute to society through community service and volunteerism:	1	6	5	10	9

All participants agreed or strongly agreed that their time on the YES program provided them the opportunity to learn about American society, that their year in the United States strengthened their belief in the importance of youth development, that they gained an increased sense of empowerment, that they acquired skills that were helpful when they returned to their home

country, that they strengthened their leadership abilities, and finally all agreed that community service and volunteerism is a valuable and impactful way to contribute to society.

Post Program Involvement

The YES Alumni Network is a known generator of community service and activism for post program participants of the YES program. Twenty-five of the survey respondents did join the YES Alumni Network when they returned home.

Table 4		
YES Alumni Network Involvement		
<u>Question</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Did you join the YES Alumni Network when you returned home?	25	6

Involvement in the YES Alumni Network did show a connection with the age and student identity of the respondents. Four of the six respondents that did not join the YES Alumni Network are still currently in high school, which may affect their involvement. This group of high school students also indicated that they have not initiated their own community service project since they have returned home, which may be connected to the high school setting. A total of 14 respondents responded “No” to the question, “I have started or created my own community service or volunteer initiative because I was inspired while on the YES program,” but the majority, a total of 17 respondents said “Yes.” When asked what they created, respondents described their initiatives in the survey. Three respondents started their own camp or workshop initiatives for children:

- “I am the founder of a Peace Camp and facilitate Interfaith Dialogues in the Philippines”

- “My friends and I have created an English Language Camp in our community to motivate students from the East Coast of Malaysia to speak more English.”
- “I run workshops for students who don’t have access to education.”

These camps provided education and cultural discussion for children. Two respondents started youth focused education initiatives in their communities:

- “I started a project that aims to empower youth with soft skills, introducing them to the concept of active citizens and guide them throughout the process of implementing initiatives in their local communities.”
- “I saw an opportunity to share my experience in America with the local school in my home town. I wanted to share that the world is changing. Now, I help organize opportunities for the children to be involved in cultural exchange.”

Helping people in need was the strongest theme in all of the initiatives, this particular initiative reaches out to the people of Kenya without drinking water:

- “Rain water harvesting project for the less fortunate in rural Kenya. The people in this area have no access to clean drinking water. With the help of the United States government, I have purchased water tanks that will be able to harvest water during the rains and sustain them afterwards.”

Two respondents started helping those affected by the current political climate in the middle east,

- “My friends and I started a group that spend a lot of time with Syrian refugees in my community. I interpret for them, and give them access to the things that they do not have because of the war.”
- “My team and I are working on a project about Syrian refugee children. We have not started to do the project yet, but have had several meetings.”

Two respondents had a focus of raising awareness for certain causes,

- “I created a local youth voluntary initiative that aims to help others, raising awareness of cultural, environmental, and educational aspects of our daily life. Also, we hold fundraisers for orphanages, nursing houses and underprivileged with low incomes families.”
- “I have created a social media campaign to raise awareness for the feeding program, mangrove tree planting and many more.”

Three initiatives sought to physically help people in need through an organized institution,

- “I created a project for children in an orphanage where I live. Together with my fellow alumni friends I gather clothes from people in our local community, and give them to these children who need them,”
- “I created an initiative at Dar-ul-sukun, which is a home for mentally and physically challenged people in our community in Pakistan, we seek to improve their quality of life by helping and visiting them.”
- “I started a recycling program at my university. It may sound small, but it has been a big success.”

Lastly, four respondents were highly involved in fundraising for initiatives in their communities:

- “I created a little project in my home city for those struggling financially to learn how to make jewelry. I wrote a proposal and received funding from the US Embassy. Now these people are having a better life with a different source of income.
- “I initiated with a group of friends and alumni some projects relating to fund raising for poor people who cannot afford medication. We raised funds and were able to execute

projects regarding social awareness of different prevailing diseases and human rights to medication.”

- “Buku Kami. We combined the power of business in creating economic change in the lives of human trafficking survivors in Indonesia and Thailand. We also advocate and fundraise for the use of sustainable products to preserve the planet.”
- “I received funding to raise awareness about hygiene and to distribute hygiene kits at a Dara shelter for homeless kids and also where they learn Quran.”

The initiatives identified by respondents all involve elements of their community. Whether they created a project to affect their direct community or gathered individuals within their community to impact a larger initiative, community outreach was prevalent throughout the data. The largest theme was helping others in need and education.

As illustrated above through excerpts, 17 of the total respondents have started or created their own community service or volunteer initiative because they were inspired while on the YES program. While 14 of the remaining participants did not create their own initiative, 10 are still very active in community service. The total involvement in community service was 87 percent. Table 4 illustrates the specific categories of community service the participants are currently involved in. The categories with the most participation in community service included Education with 75 percent, Environmental with 54 percent participation, Fundraising with 51 percent participation, and Assisting Children in their home communities with 42 percent participation. These findings also align with the community service initiatives explored above.

Categories of Community Service	Fundraising	Assisting the Elderly	Assisting Children	Education	Disabled Individuals	Disaster Relief	Poor/homeless populations	Environmental	Other	Not involved in community service
Participant 1	1	1	1	1					1	
Participant 2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
Participant 3	1			1				1	1	
Participant 4			1	1			1	1		
Participant 5										1
Participant 6				1				1	1	
Participant 7	1			1		1			1	
Participant 8		1	1	1					1	
Participant 9	1		1							
Participant 10				1				1		
Participant 11										1
Participant 12				1						
Participant 13	1		1	1			1	1	1	
Participant 14										1
Participant 15									1	
Participant 16	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
Participant 17	1			1			1	1		
Participant 18	1									
Participant 19		1	1	1		1				
Participant 20	1		1	1			1	1	1	
Participant 21	1	1	1	1	1			1		
Participant 22			1	1				1		
Participant 23			1	1			1	1		
Participant 24			1	1				1	1	
Participant 25	1			1	1					
Participant 26										1
Participant 27				1						
Participant 28	1			1				1		
Participant 29	1			1	1	1		1	1	
Participant 30							1	1		
Participant 31	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Total %	51.5%	21.2%	42.4%	75.8%	24.2%	21.2%	27.3%	54.5%	33.3%	12.1%

The data also shows 23 of the active 27 participants were active in more than one category of community service. The average participant was involved in four categories of community service; three participants were active in all categories of community service. Eleven respondents indicated that they were active in the “Other” category, which shows that there is a need for further research on community service categories.

The final question asked in the survey was, “What would you describe as your greatest achievement as since the conclusion of your exchange experience?” Responses to this question were as follows:

Table 6	
Categories of Achievement	
<u>Category</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Community Service & Impact	7
Leadership & Applicable Skills	7
Cultural Sensitivity	8
Academics	6
Youth Empowerment	3

Seven respondents described their greatest achievement in the context of community service and impact. Seven respondents described their gain of leadership and other applicable skills as their greatest achievement. The highest category was cultural sensitivity, as eight respondents described their ability to gain perspective appreciate and knowledge about other cultures. Six respondents attributed their greatest experiences to academics, and lowest category youth empowerment had a total of three responses. All of the responses echoed the YES program objectives.

Participant Interviews

Of the 31 participants, eight agreed to participate in an interview expanding on the topics covered in the survey. Interviews were conducted over the phone, and live chat (Skype, Whatsapp and Viber). All interviews ranged from 20 to 40 minutes. Interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

When asked to describe their satisfaction with their exchange experience, all interviewees expressed feelings of happiness and satisfaction with their exchange experience. Four out of the eight interviewees were satisfied because of their personal growth, as stated below by one of the interviewees:

I am very satisfied with the program because it helped bring out certain qualities in me I didn't know I had. It has also broadened my mind about my own culture because I needed to learn about certain things about my culture I didn't know in order to teach others. It also helped change certain perception I had about the American culture.

Interviewees were then asked to describe the extent of their involvement in community service and volunteerism while on the YES program in detail. Many were able to recall some of the activities they were involved in while on the program. All interviewees were involved in service of some kind, and six out of the eight described religious based community service and four of the eight described activities functioning around their high school. Three received the award for completing over 100 hours of community service, as noted by one of the interviewees below:

I volunteered over 100 hours during my exchange year. It was mostly at the local church community center. I also mopped the basketball court at school and helped out at events. I did a potluck for elementary kids once which was fun, and also did local theater in my neighborhood with my host dad.

When asked if they attribute their involvement to anything in particular, all interviewees discussed the value of a strong Local Coordinator. According to all interviewees, all Local Coordinators encouraged them to participate in group community service events, organized their schedules, and most importantly motivated them to be successful on the program. Each of the interviewees had a different perspective when asked to identify the one most important thing

they learned about the United States. Responses ranged from the introduction to a supportive family unit to the value of high school exchange. One interviewee noted that he found Americans to be uninterested in the background of others. He said, “One thing that comes to mind now is how little Americans give regard to your background, be it ethnic or religious. You are respected for who you are and are treated according to your actions.”

All interviewees were able to discuss the YES program objectives, although not verbatim. They all claimed to be acutely aware of the objectives before they arrived to the United States because of the competitive nature of the application process. In order to be accepted, they were expected to demonstrate their understanding of those objectives. When asked to describe their understanding of American culture before arrival, interviewees expressed a narrow view of the United States culture. Six of the eight said that their experience was mostly through television, which did not influence them negatively, but did not capture the whole picture of American life. Diversity was a surprise to one of the interviewees, “I now understand that America is very diverse and people of multiple ethnicities and backgrounds are living together.” All agreed that their perspectives were positively influenced during their stay.

All interviewees were connected to the YES Alumni Network in one form or another. six of the eight were actively involved in the network, while two were initially involved when they returned home and have since had trouble staying connected. One participant described herself as highly involved:

Yes, initially I was just a casual volunteer, but now I am on the committee and a large part of the alumni group in Malaysia. I am the secretary, I report all the alumni activities to AFS and also organize projects for other alumni.

Leadership was a prevalent topic amongst all the interviews, as they all identified themselves as leaders. One interviewee described her leadership as administrative, which was different than some of the others who described strengths like leading a group of people or persuading others in their favor. Administrative leadership was described as leading the organization of alumni events or teaching peers how to create a community service project. A more traditional forms of leadership is as follows:

I believe I am able to lead a team and manage the different skill set of the members involved and divide tasks accordingly, in addition to solving conflicts that may arise between the various parties involved in a given community project. I also highly value working in a collaborative and respectful environment where everyone's ideas and inputs are welcome, and I try to instill that philosophy in any projects my team and I undertake.

I learned this about myself on the YES program.

Leadership skills were also present in the community service narratives. All interviews contained extensive discussion around the topic of community service and the importance of it for the worlds future. Interviewees spoke highly of the YES program, and felt that community service has remained a priority since they have returned home because of their time in America. As six of the eight interviewees that were interviewed were also part of the group that created their own initiative in the survey, the community service projects described during the interviews were the same that were already mentioned in the survey, but they did elaborate on their involvement. Participation in community service was a minimum of once a week for all interviewees, except in one case where the interviewee did not consider themselves active. A community service project that was not captured initially was university based foundation that raises funds for a school:

I am part of a foundation (Nectar of Hope for Children's Foundation) on my campus that helps children education and we hold a lot of charity work and I always take part in them.

Just over the weekend we had a car wash to raise funds to renovate a school.

One of the respondents described their involvement in community service as minimal at this time, but will be working on their camp initiative this summer; they do volunteer when the YES Alumni Network reaches out to them or if they feel compelled to a small cause on their university campus. Another identified themselves as not involved, but still feels connected to various causes and wished to devote more time in the future. All interviewees expressed an interest and obligation to impact their community in the future.

Interview responses echoed the survey results, but did bring forward more detail regarding community service experiences and time spent on such activities. Overall, very few needed to be pressed to speak about their accomplishments while on the YES program. The term, “community service” did need to be clarified in all of the interviews. Many participants considered community service to be a formally structured organization of helping others. One participant shared that they were not actively involved in community service, but they wished they had more time for it. However, later in the interview, the participant revealed that they actually were actively involved in their community in other ways, but did not consider it to be formal “community service.” All participants felt that the YES program prepared them adequately to be an ambassador for cultural exchange, and have accepted their role as such:

I do feel that the YES program enabled me to become an ambassador for cultural exchange. I feel that it is my responsibility to share the experience with as many people as I can so they too can take part in such an exquisite opportunity. I have done so through many presentations at my high school and at the American Language Center in my

hometown, in addition to informing my surroundings and acquaintances through social media.

In most cases, the survey did not capture the full community service involvement of the participants. They all were able to describe more involvement in further detail during the interview. Most of the additional community service efforts were tied to their university campus, which was not captured in the survey data either. Time devoted to community service was touched on in this research, and was conveyed as a minimum of once a week for all active participants. Frequency and consistency of participation of community service will require further research as it was not specified on the survey.

Limitations to the study

While this study did produce encouraging narratives about impact, there are several limitations to this case study. As mentioned in the data collection, this study only includes 10 percent of the AIFS Foundation alumni that were invited to participate. The alumni that did participate are most likely the students that still feel connected to the program, and therefore felt compelled to respond. This study does not capture those students who are not interested in AIFS Foundation outreach.

Another limitation, as noted in the earlier evaluation critique of the ECA, was the self-reporting method of data collection. Due to the limited access to participants and resources of this particular study, data collection without the participants self-reporting their own involvement in community service was not possible. In the future, a larger study with more resources should use techniques of observation and introduce a method to validate the self-reporting data collection. This data should also be analyzed long term. The YES program is only 15 years old,

meaning the oldest possible participant could only be in their mid-thirties, which is hardly a long term study of their life time.

Lastly, 97 percent of the respondents identified themselves as students, and many of the community service activities they were involved in were seemingly an extension of their university environment. An educational setting would certainly impact a student's involvement in activities because a university is an environment that usually promotes youth leadership and fosters a 'community'. To avoid that bias in the future, participants should be invited in the range of ten years instead of five. This would create a group of participants in their late teens and early twenties, as well as a group of presumably graduated alumni in their mid to late twenties.

Conclusions

Discussion

It is very clear through the combination of qualitative and quantitative data, that there is evidence of positive community service and volunteerism generating from the AIFS Foundation's YES student alumni. Participants are involved in a plethora of different initiatives, all of which are creating a ripple effect from themselves to their local community. Survey and interview data validate the notion that there is a connection between the YES program and community service and volunteerism. However, the question that emerges is whether one is the result of the other. Do students who have a predisposed interest in community service apply to participate on the YES program or does the YES program itself create community service inclined individuals? Based on the data collected in this study, the YES program did influence the participants' choices to continue community service after program completion, however, the interviews revealed that there may be more to measuring impact than examining formal community service.

While discussing community service during the interviews it became clear that there was a discrepancy with the term “community service”. Two types of community service were captured in this study, a type that can be formally measured and a type that is more abstract. The more measurable community service initiatives were formally structured or had ties to larger initiatives that could be tracked through the YES Alumni Network. The students involved in these more formal initiatives could articulate the amount of time they have spent on the initiative, could calculate the funds they have raised, or could document their involvement in some other way. Other participants who appear to be less active, are actually active in their communities but in a less measurable way. Several of the participants that were interviewed discussed aspects of their daily life that should be considered as impactful, but is not traditionally community service. Some examples that came up were speaking to others about their experiences in other countries, tutoring language students on campus, campaigning for a social media for cause, showcasing cultural self-awareness and sensitivity by assisting other foreign exchange students, supporting an initiative that a friend was involved in, and networking with connections made in America that are linked to promoting student exchange in the United States. The most specific example of this sort of behavior was a student that spends hours every week with Syrian refugees in Germany, but was adamant that he was not actively involved in community service because he did not want to label his behavior as so. This was an aspect of his daily life, and the time spent with the local refugees was an extension of his free time.

Another interesting element that emerged was the impact of a strong Local Coordinator on the students. When this research study was designed, the Local Coordinator was not an element of impact that was part of the scope of research. Local Coordinators were inevitably brought up in every interview by the participants, and were described as highly supportive and an

essential part of their experience. Even more interesting, the Local Coordinator's role often did not end after program completion; all interviewees were still in contact with their Local Coordinator via email or Facebook. This was also illustrated during participant recruitment when the Local Coordinators assisted in recruiting 16 participants. The ongoing connection to their Local Coordinator after program completion may be a contributing factor to why they continue to value to community service.

Practical Application

Through data collected in this case study, it appears that the AIFS Foundation has a strong group of Local Coordinators that are involved in the lives of YES students beyond program completion. The AIFS Foundation should continue to strengthen and facilitate Local Coordinator presence in local communities, and ensure that all students are supervised by quality, well trained, and motivated individuals. The ECA should additionally ensure that all J-1 sponsors use the AIFS Foundation as a model for quality Local Coordinators. All sponsors should ensure that all local representatives are adequately educated on the importance of their role after program completion.

Evaluation methods need to improve in the J-1 sector, specifically for the YES program. While this study shows that there is evidence that the program generates some sort of positive impact connected to community service, this data alone cannot ensure the sustainability of the program in the future. To evaluate public diplomacy impact over time, YES student alumni will need to be monitored over the course of their lifetime. Self-reported individualized data should not be the primary method of data collection, and the ECA should arrange site visits to all YES Alumni Network headquarters in all participating countries. As noted in the case study, the

community service projects that have been described are best suited to be observed by the evaluator in order to fully understand and capture the impact.

Conclusion

Based on the examination of qualitative and quantitative research data, the AIFS Foundation YES alumni are highly involved in community service and volunteerism. This case study was able to capture personal stories, narratives, and perceptual evidence to support the notion that the YES program is affecting its student participants in a positive way. Through their own initiatives fundraising, assisting those in need within their community, and volunteering efforts through the YES Alumni Network, these participants have shown that they continue to value and promote impactful actions in their home communities. Throughout the study there was a notable relationship between community service involvement and the fulfillment of the YES program objectives while on the program in the United States. Ultimately, the YES alumni involvement in their communities and their praise and satisfaction of the AIFS Foundation exchange experience does provide evidence that their experience was impactful and successful.

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Appendix A Participant Recruitment Template

Hi _____, (Participant)

My name is Ashleigh Caws, and I am a graduate student at the School of International Training Graduate Institute in Brattleboro Vermont. I work for the AIFS Foundation exchange program, Academic Year in America, and am pursuing my Master's degree in International Education as well. International exchange programs are very important to me, and for my final project, I will be researching the YES Program and the impact that it has on the world today.

Research Study: Post Program Involvement in Community Service and Volunteerism, an examination of Youth Exchange and Study Program Alumni

For many of you, the true beginning of the YES program was not while you were arriving to your host families for the first time, but rather, the first day that you returned to your home country after a life changing experience in America. The work and reflection that takes place after the conclusion of this program is what the focus of my project will be about. I would like to invite you to participate in a voluntary survey that asks about of your community involvement and achievements during your time in the United States, what you have accomplished since your return to your home country, and how you would rate any changes in your personal attitudes, knowledge, behaviors, and skills. If you would like to continue to contribute to this study, you are welcome to participate in a one on one interview with me to explore your personal impact even further.

The criteria I am looking for specifically is any YES student that participated through AYA from 2009-2014. You cannot be an active student on our program this year and must be at least 18 years old. Participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. Overall, your participation should not exceed more than an hour or more of your time.

If you would like to participate and contribute to the efforts to provide helpful evidence and evaluative material to successfully assess exchange programs in the future, please begin by clicking the below link to access the survey!

By clicking this link and completing this survey, I understand that my responses will be used in a research study to examine the experiences of YES Program alumni.

>>>survey link here<<<<<

Thank you,
Ashleigh

Appendix B Survey Questions

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Where were you born?

Where do you live now?

What nationality do you identify with?

What religion do you identify with?

Are you a Student? No then --What is your current occupation?

Yes then:

Where do you go to school?

What is your major?

When will you graduate?

How long ago did you complete the YES Program?

What state did you live in while on the YES Program?

What was the name of your sponsoring program? ** to confirm only AIFS Foundation are in the sample**

How would you rate your satisfaction with your exchange experience? *This pertains to your experience with your host family, host school, local coordinator, and host community.*

- 1- Very satisfied
- 2- Somewhat satisfied
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Somewhat dissatisfied
- 5- Very dissatisfied

How would you rate your satisfaction with the YES program? *This pertains to the overall experience, pre-departure/re-entry orientations, program operations etc.*

- 1- Very satisfied
- 2- Somewhat satisfied
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Somewhat dissatisfied
- 5- Very dissatisfied

How would you rate your understanding of American culture before you came on the YES Program?

- 1- Very unfamiliar
- 2- Unfamiliar
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Familiar
- 5- Very familiar

Did you join the YES Alumni network when you returned home?

- Yes
- No

My time on the YES program provided me the opportunity to learn about American society, people, institutions, values and culture:

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

I helped my American host family develop a better understanding of my home country, culture, and worldview.

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

My perception of Americans after my YES experience was positive.

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

My perception of Americans after my YES experience was negative.

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

The YES program assisted me in learning more about civic rights and values.

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

The YES program assisted me in observing and viewing my home country from a distance.

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

The YES program strengthened my leadership skills

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

I acquired skills during my exchange experience that I am able to utilize to good use in my home country:

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

The YES Program gave me an increased sense of empowerment:

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

My year in the United States strengthened my belief in the importance of equal rights for people with disabilities:

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree

- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

My year in the United States strengthened my belief in the importance of equal rights for men and women:

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

My year in the United States strengthened my belief in the importance of youth development:

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

Community service and volunteerism is a valuable and impactful way to contribute to society:

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

The YES Program is the reason why I find community service and volunteerism important:

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

Before the YES Program, I was already compelled to contribute to society through community service and volunteerism:

- 1- Strongly Agree
- 2- Agree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Disagree
- 5- Strongly Disagree

Since returning home after the YES Program, I spend this many hours per week devoted to community service and volunteerism:

- 0-1
- 1-3
- 3-5
- 5-8
- 8-10
- 10+

What types of community service are you involved in currently? Check all that apply

- Fundraising
- Assisting the Elderly
- Assisting Children
- Education
- Disabled Individuals
- Disaster Relief
- Poor/homeless populations
- Environmental
- Other
- I am not involved in any community service

I have started or created my own community service or volunteer initiative because I was inspired while on the YES program. *E.g. Youth development program, fundraising opportunity etc.*

- Yes
- No

If Yes, What did you create?

What would you describe as your greatest achievement as since the conclusion of your exchange experience?

Please share in this space any community service or volunteerism you are currently involved in.

Would you be willing to participate in an interview to elaborate on some of these topics?

- Yes
- No

Appendix C
YES Participant Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your satisfaction with your exchange experience?
2. Please describe the extent of your involvement in community service and volunteerism while on the YES Program.
3. Do you attribute your involvement to anything in particular? *E.g. a motivating Local Coordinator, active student cluster, activities correlated with my interests etc.*
4. What was the one most important thing you learned about the US while living there?
5. Are you able to recall the YES Program objectives at this time?
6. Were you aware of the YES Program objectives when you applied to the program?
7. How would you describe your understanding of American culture before you came on the YES program? And now after?
8. Are you involved with the YES Alumni Program? If Yes, describe your involvement.
9. What leadership skills do you feel you have?
10. How have you utilized those leadership skills since your return home?
11. What community service or volunteerism involvement have you had since you returned home? *This could be in your home town, on a college campus, or even an online community.*
12. How often are you involved in community service? *This could be in your home town, on a college campus, or even an online community.*
13. What would you describe as your greatest achievement as since the conclusion of your exchange experience?
14. What did the YES Program teach you about community service and volunteerism?

15. How would you describe your impact in your home country and community?
16. How do you plan to impact your community in the future?
17. Do you feel that the YES program prepared you adequately to be an ambassador for cultural exchange? Do you feel compelled to fulfill that responsibility?

Appendix D
AIFS Staff Discussion Questions

1. How long have you worked at the AIFS Foundation?
2. How long have you worked with YES Students?
3. Based on your experience, what sets YES students apart from other students that may be on the AYA program?
4. How many students usually exceed their 50 required hours of community service?
5. Do you feel that community service and volunteerism while on the YES program is prioritized by the ECA for a particular reason?
6. As an AIFS Foundation YES Program Administrator, what is your role in ensuring that all students are completing their mandatory community service hours?
7. If community service was not mandatory, do you think students would still choose to participate in service learning?
8. From your experience, how many students return home and continue to seek out community service and volunteer opportunities?
9. Are you still in contact with any alumni that are active in their home communities?
10. Have there been any stand out stories or experiences of alumni within the last 5 years that you would like to share?

Appendix E

Consent Form for Participation

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study **School of International Training Graduate Institute**

Post Program Involvement in Community Service and Volunteerism, an examination of Youth Exchange and Study Program Alumni

SIT Graduate Institute: Capstone Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Ashleigh Caws, an SIT graduate student who is pursuing her Master's degree in International Education. The purpose of this research is to examine the involvement in community service and volunteerism since the conclusion of your YES Program experience through the AIFS Foundation.

Your voluntary participation will involve answering series of survey questions including but not limited to the demographic that you belong to, the extent of your community involvement and achievements during your time in the United States, what you have accomplished since your return to your home country, and how you would rate any changes in your personal attitudes, knowledge, behaviors, and skills.

Additionally, you may volunteer to participate in a video conferencing or phone interview that will elaborate on the survey questions. You may be asked to expand in detail about your post program achievements, and involvement in your home communities. All data collection will be done in English.

Risks and Benefits

There are no anticipated risks associated with the participation in this study, nor are there any costs for participation. The information you provide may help contribute to a better understanding on the impact of the YES program alumni.

Protection of confidentiality

Your privacy will be taken very seriously; participant's names will not be included in the final report. Any interviews that are recorded will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Ashleigh Caws at 908-797-6023 or ashleigh.caws@gmail.com. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the SIT Graduate Institute Review Board at irb@sit.edu.

Consent

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date: _____