

DISSERTATION

SERVICE LEARNING AS CIVIC PEDAGOGY:  
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORING THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Submitted by

Keith E. Robinder

School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2012

Doctoral Committee:

Advisor: Timothy Davies

Bruce Hall

Linda Kuk

Frankie Santos Laanan

Copyright by Keith E. Robinder 2012

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

### SERVICE LEARNING AS CIVIC PEDAGOGY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY EXPLORING THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) proposed that a primary role of higher education should be to renew and strengthen students' commitment to active civic life. More recently Campus Compact, a consortium of college and university presidents committed to community service, challenged higher education to "re-examine its public purposes and its commitments to the democratic ideal... to become engaged, through actions and teaching, with its communities" (National Campus Compact, 2007, p. 2). Many authors have called for higher education to renew the democratic mission of higher education (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont & Stephens, 2003; Franco, 2005; Hodge, Lewis, Kramer & Hughes, 2001). Community colleges were founded to bring the ideals associated with democratic purposes of higher education to a more inclusive, locally defined community (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Service learning has been identified as an effective teaching strategy to achieve the goal of civic engagement for community college students (Prentice & Robinson, 2007; Prentice, 2011). The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the stories of how community college students experience academic service learning. Seven students who completed academic service learning assignments at a comprehensive community college shared their personal

stories, service learning experiences, and reflections on their experiences. The content and context of the students' narratives were analyzed to explore the connections between participating in service learning and developing a commitment to active citizenship and leadership for the common good. Holistic content analysis of the narrative data created rich and compelling stories. The students' stories demonstrated that service learning is a transformational educational practice that engages students fully in the educational process and validates their lived experiences. Service learning involves students in meaningful, empowering experiences that build their capacity to lead productive and purposeful lives. By providing educational opportunities that empower and transform students, community colleges build cultural capital, increase human potential in local communities and promote the civic habits of an inclusive, democratic society that Dewey envisioned. My findings and analyses reveal that service learning is an effective civic pedagogy, particularly when instructors utilize rigorous reflection assignments that challenge students to consider their roles beyond the classroom as citizens and leaders. The student's stories also illuminate the impact of the open access mission on both students and communities, and exemplify the power that community colleges have to transform the lives of students.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Cynthia Solis de la Cruz, Adam Nickerson, Brenda Giordano, Jeff Dalton,  
Kennedy Martens, Mark Baxter, and Linda Mason

Judy Sloan, Service Learning Coordinator; along with the  
other faculty, staff and senior leadership at Service Learning Community College.

Tim Davies, Bruce Hall, Linda Kuk, and Frankie Santos Laanan.

The 2004 CSU Community College Leadership Cohort, especially WYO+1:  
Deejaay Beals, Tammy Frankland, Bob Kleinschmidt, and Matt Bennett

Cliff Harbour

The LCCC Student Life and Community Engagement Staff: Amanda Hubbard,  
Cara Fearneyhough, Watende Johnson, Amy Perea, Sarah Fleenor, and Pascale Griffe

The Horizons Team: Jeri Griego, Gail Jessen, Gail Robinson and Mary Prentice

Willadeen Chamberlain

Dione Somerville

The ISU Dean of Students Office, especially:  
Kipp Van Dyke, Michelle Boettcher, Mary Jo Gonzales and the rest of “the Hallway”

The ISU Community College Leadership Learning Community

Marilyn Robinder

And most of all:

Wendy, Abby, and Carter Robinder

*I couldn't have made it without your love and support,  
and all the smiles and laughter that made up for the times I missed along the way.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| ABSTRACT.....  | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....  | iv |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS.....   | v  |
| CHAPTER ONE – OVERVIEW .....                                   | 1  |
| Background.....  | 2  |
| Service Learning as Civic Pedagogy .....                       | 4  |
| How Service Learning Effects Students .....                    | 5  |
| Academic Benefits of Service Learning.....                     | 6  |
| Personal Benefits of Service Learning .....                    | 7  |
| Purpose of the Study.....                                      | 8  |
| Rationale for the Study .....                                  | 9  |
| Methodology.....   | 9  |
| Research Questions.....  | 10 |
| Organization of the Study .....                                | 11 |
| Conclusion.....  | 12 |
| CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW.....                           | 13 |
| The Democratic Purpose of Higher Education.....                | 14 |
| The Civic Mission of the Comprehensive Community College ..... | 15 |
| Service Learning as Civic Pedagogy .....                       | 18 |
| Civic Responsibilities.....                                    | 21 |
| Theoretical Backgrounds of Service Learning .....              | 26 |
| Learning Theories.....   | 26 |
| Experiential Learning Theories.....                            | 28 |
| Adult Learning Theories.....                                   | 29 |
| Student Development Theories .....                             | 32 |
| Cognitive Development Theories.....                            | 33 |
| Other Student Development Theories.....                        | 36 |
| Leadership Responsibilities.....                               | 40 |
| Synthesis and Conclusion .....                                 | 43 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY .....                              | 46  |
| Theoretical and Ideological Foundations.....                   | 47  |
| Narrative Inquiry .....  | 48  |
| Research Design .....  | 52  |
| Participant Selection.....                                     | 53  |
| Table One - Students' Biographic and Academic Information..... | 55  |
| Conducting the Narrative Interviews.....                       | 55  |
| Data Collection.....   | 60  |
| Data Analysis.....   | 61  |
| Reciprocity.....   | 63  |
| Ethics .....   | 64  |
| Trustworthiness and Authenticity.....                          | 65  |
| Conclusion .....   | 67  |
| CHAPTER FOUR – THE STUDENTS' STORIES.....                      | 69  |
| Cynthia Solis de la Cruz .....                                 | 71  |
| Cynthia's Story.....   | 72  |
| Cynthia's Service Learning Experiences.....                    | 77  |
| Reflection .....   | 82  |
| Adam Nickerson .....   | 85  |
| Adam's Story.....  | 87  |
| Adam's Service Learning Experiences .....                      | 95  |
| Reflection .....   | 98  |
| Brenda Giordano.....   | 102 |
| Brenda's Story .....   | 104 |
| Brenda's Service Learning Experiences.....                     | 112 |
| Reflection .....   | 117 |
| Jeff Dalton .....  | 121 |
| Jeff's Story.....  | 122 |
| Jeff's Service Learning Experiences .....                      | 129 |
| Reflection .....   | 132 |
| Kennedy Martens.....   | 135 |
| Kennedy's Story .....  | 136 |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Kennedy’s Service Learning Experiences .....      | 141        |
| Reflection .....                                  | 149        |
| Mark Baxter .....                                 | 152        |
| Mark’s Story .....                                | 154        |
| Mark’s Service Learning Experiences.....          | 161        |
| Reflection .....                                  | 166        |
| Linda Mason .....                                 | 170        |
| Linda’s Story .....                               | 171        |
| Linda’s Service Learning Experiences .....        | 178        |
| Reflection .....                                  | 184        |
| Conclusion .....                                  | 190        |
| <b>CHAPTER FIVE – ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS .....</b> | <b>192</b> |
| Research Context .....                            | 193        |
| Researcher’s Perspective .....                    | 194        |
| Awareness.....                                    | 195        |
| Action .....                                      | 196        |
| Activism and Advocacy .....                       | 198        |
| Service Learning as Civic Pedagogy .....          | 200        |
| Student Narratives .....                          | 201        |
| Table Two – Summary of the Students’ Stories..... | 201        |
| Personal Stories .....                            | 205        |
| Service Learning Experiences .....                | 210        |
| Reflections .....                                 | 215        |
| Summary.....                                      | 218        |
| Revisiting the Students’ Perspectives .....       | 221        |
| Conclusion .....                                  | 222        |
| <b>CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION.....</b>              | <b>224</b> |
| Authenticity of the Research .....                | 225        |
| Implications for Service Learning Practice .....  | 226        |
| Areas for Further Research .....                  | 234        |
| Unintended Results .....                          | 235        |
| Transformation .....                              | 237        |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| REFERENCES .....  | 241 |
| APPENDIX A - Service Learning Community College: Organizational Context ..... | 251 |
| Table Three - SLCC 2009-2010 Enrollment Demographics .....                    | 252 |
| History and Evolution of the Service Learning Program at SLCC .....           | 255 |
| APPENDIX B: Participant Selection Documents.....                              | 260 |
| E-mail to SLCC Faculty soliciting student nominations .....                   | 260 |
| E-mail to SLCC students inviting them to participate.....                     | 262 |
| Participant Profile Questionnaire.....  | 263 |
| Participant Consent Form .....  | 264 |
| APPENDIX C - Interview Guide.....   | 266 |

## CHAPTER ONE – OVERVIEW

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) proposed that a primary role of higher education should be to renew and strengthen students' commitment to active civic life. More recently Campus Compact, a consortium of college and university presidents committed to community service, challenged higher education to “re-examine its public purposes and its commitments to the democratic ideal... to become engaged, through actions and teaching, with its communities” (National Campus Compact, 2007, p. 2). To achieve the civic mission of higher education, community colleges must infuse the curriculum with lessons that create concern for the rights and welfare of both individuals and the community at large (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont & Stephens, 2003). Service learning has been recognized as a civic pedagogy that links course content with service to the community (Garcia & Robinson, 2005). Service learning is a teaching methodology which provides an avenue to develop students as both citizens and scholars who have the knowledge, skills, and commitment to serve an increasingly complex society (Prentice & Robinson, 2007).

Service learning is a form of experiential education that engages learners more fully in the learning process (Prentice & Garcia, 2000) and educates students as leaders for the common good (Butler, 2000). It is an increasingly utilized teaching methodology with a growing following among community college faculty (Garcia & Robinson, 2005). Service learning is based on a reciprocal relationship where community service and academic learning are mutually enhanced and strengthened (Prentice & Garcia, 2000). The American Association of Community Colleges defines service learning as “the combination of community service with classroom instruction, focusing on critical, reflective thinking as well as personal and civic responsibility”

(Garcia & Robinson, 2005, p. 1). Generally, service learning refers to the use of service in the community as a required activity to facilitate student learning of course content. The service activity in combination with critical reflection helps students to link theory presented in class with the practical application of knowledge in the context of the community. “Service learning is an educationally and socially powerful intervention that holds great potential for enhancing learning and development of college students” (McEwen, 1996, p. 86). Service learning develops moral and ethical citizens prepared to lead a truly equitable society (Franco, 2005). Service learning links teaching and learning to the civic role of the comprehensive community college.

### **Background**

My interest in service learning, civic participation, and leadership is a direct result of my own experiences as a service learning participant, student affairs professional, and doctoral student in community college leadership. My first community service memory was a “Trees for Trash” service project sponsored by my 4-H club when I was 10 years old. My 4-H club spent a Saturday afternoon cleaning up trash around a local park. The trash bags collected were then given to a community environmental group who planted a tree for each bag of trash collected. My club leader, Mrs. Cardinal, explained repeatedly that we were not only picking up the trash to improve our neighborhood, the trees that would be planted based on our trash collection provided an additional benefit. The lesson was clear: as ‘junior leaders’ we had an obligation to serve the needs of our community, and we also were improving the environment while having fun as a group. I don’t recall actively dreading the experience, but I certainly wasn’t enthusiastic calling the club members as a part of the ‘telephone committee’ to remind them of the event. My memory is that nobody really wanted to serve the community by walking around picking up pond trash, but as 4-H members we understood that we had an obligation to serve. I remember it

was a beautiful day, and we did have fun. The event turned into an annual undertaking for the next several years. With each passing year, the obligation to serve became a tradition, even something we looked forward to doing each spring. Even now, I have a sense of ownership when I drive by Yesness Pond. And to this day I still pick up trash as I walk in the woods with my family – teaching my young children the importance of improving the world around us.

During my doctoral coursework, leadership to achieve the mission of the comprehensive community college was a common theme. I was employed as the Director of Student Life and Community Engagement at Laramie County Community College (LCCC) as I completed my coursework. In my professional role I served as the LCCC project director for the American Association of Community Colleges (AACCC) *Broadening Horizons through Service Learning* grant (*Horizons*). The purpose of this grant was to infuse service learning as a teaching pedagogy across the entire curriculum. LCCC added a student leadership component to the grant initiative, linking student involvement and leadership with efforts to enhance community engagement through service learning.

As the project director of the *Horizons* grant at LCCC, I observed students encountering service learning for the first time. For example, I interviewed a student leader for my qualitative research methods class about his service learning experiences. “Zeke” was enrolled in Jeri Griego’s management class. Jeri was the faculty co-director of the LCCC *Horizons* grant. She used service learning to teach students the management model: planning, budgeting, implementing, and evaluating a project. Zeke described how he, along with his fellow group members, groaned when the service learning project was initially assigned. To complete the assignment Zeke worked with a group to sponsor a pizza fund raiser for the local Boys and Girls Club: “Meal for a Deal.” The students solicited donations of pizza and soda from local

businesses and worked with children from the Boys and Girls Club of Cheyenne to make dessert treats that were also included in the meal deal. The event was held over the lunch hour at LCCC and students, faculty, and staff received pizza, soda, and a dessert for a financial donation to the organization. As a result of this initial experience, Zeke eventually went on to join and serve as an executive officer in Rotaract, a college service organization.

My observations of students encountering service learning, combined with my professional training and educational experiences, contributed to my research interests and commitment to public service. Zeke's experiences encountering service learning for the first time mirrored my own: initial hesitancy transformed into leadership and service for the common good. As a doctoral student studying community college leadership while concurrently developing a service learning program, I began to question if the common theme of service learning as a gateway to active civic leadership in both Zeke's and my stories was consistent with the experiences of other community college students. Service learning as a civic pedagogy, particularly in the context of the community college mission, creates a robust research context to investigate this question.

### **Service Learning as Civic Pedagogy**

The AACC definition of service learning provides an excellent foundation for understanding service learning as civic pedagogy. The initial focus is on course content and the academic learning objectives of the course. The integration of course materials with unmet community needs directly connects classroom instruction with the complexities of the modern world. Service learning also helps students to experientially learn civic leadership skills: critical thinking, time management, decision making, problem solving, and interpersonal communication (Franco, 2005). Through critical reflection service learners make meaning of the experience and

connect their learning to their life stories. Reflection is the central organizing theme that provides opportunity for students to link their service experiences with content knowledge (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; Honnet & Paulsen, 1989; Howard, 2001; Prentice & Garcia, 2000).

Battistoni (1997) promoted three essential components of a democratic civic education: intellectual understanding (content knowledge and general education skills such as critical thinking or communication); civic skills and attitudes, (such as ethics or a focus on improving communities for the common good); and combining these first two components into action beyond the classroom. “Increased civic responsibility, personal growth and a greater understanding of social problems, as examples, all represent the possible benefits of involving students in education that goes beyond the classroom walls” (Schmidt, Marks & Derrico, 2004, p. 207). Achieving the civic mission occurs when faculty understand and accept the democratic function of higher education and intentionally work to engage students in active, participatory citizenship as they teach course content (Prentice, 2011).

### **How Service Learning Effects Students**

Service learning is an effective teaching strategy that helps students to better understand course content, themselves, and their role in society. McEwen (1996) suggested that positive outcomes are the primary reasons service learning is recognized as an effective teaching methodology. “The use of service learning in community colleges has increased as research continues to link participation in service learning with a growing list of student benefits” (Prentice & Robinson, 2007, p. 1). Several studies have verified that individual students who participate in service learning benefit both academically and personally. In this section, the predominantly quantitative research on how service learning participation affects students’ learning and personal development will be summarized.

## **Academic Benefits of Service Learning**

Service learning provides many academic benefits to student participants. Service learners demonstrate more engagement in the classroom (Kozeracki, 2000). Service learners demonstrate better writing skills (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000), as well as better critical thinking and decision making skills (Franco, 2005). Service learning improves course content knowledge and skill acquisition (Kozeracki, 2000; Robinson, 2000). These academic benefits manifest in better performance on mid-term and final exams for service learners (Fredericksen, 2000; Strage, 2000) and result in higher grade point averages (Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000). Additionally, linking course content to the students' experiences also creates immediacy and relevance, thus increasing students' motivation to learn (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). These academic benefits of service learning are indicative of the concept of active learning advocated by Dewey (England & Marcinkowski, 2007).

A national study measured the impact of service participation on eleven dependent academic and engagement measures. Service participation resulted in significant positive effects on all eleven measures (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Lee, 2000). In a cross-sectional one year study of service learning participation in undergraduates comparing those who participated in service learning with those who did not, results showed that participating in service learning had positive effects on academic outcomes, civic engagement outcomes, and the development of life skills (Astin & Sax, 1998). Service learners demonstrate better conceptualization and application of course content (Simone & Cleary, 2005). Service learning increases students' understanding the relevance of course materials in daily life and increases participant awareness of and commitment to community involvement (Prentice & Robinson, 2007, Prentice, 2011). Finally students' thinking and reasoning become more cognitively complex after participating in service

learning (Wang & Rogers, 2006). An evaluation of service learning initiatives indicate that students who participate in service learning are more engaged in classroom learning activities, better understand course material, achieve higher grades, and are more satisfied with the academic experience (Kozeracki, 2000). The academic benefits of service learning contribute to the educational and civic mission of the comprehensive community college.

### **Personal Benefits of Service Learning**

Service learning also has positive effects on personal development (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Prentice and Robinson (2007) investigated the impact of service learning on civic participation at community colleges. Service learning increased students understanding the relevance of course materials in daily life and increased participant awareness of and commitment to community involvement (Prentice & Robinson, 2007). Service learners developed a better understanding of themselves, and their role in society (Halford, 2007). Service learners reported gains in both self-awareness and leadership skills (Ashe, Clayton & Atkinson, 2005). Finally, service learners developed a more positive attitude toward community involvement and social responsibility (Exley, 1996).

Students who participate in service learning demonstrated gains in understanding themselves, others, and civic responsibility (McKenna & Rizzo, 1999). In a mixed methods study, the qualitative findings indicated that service learning facilitates four outcomes: increased sense of self, increased awareness of the world, increased awareness of one's values, and increased engagement in the classroom (Astin, et al., 2000). Students who participate in service learning demonstrated increased levels of civic engagement and the development of life skills (Astin & Sax, 1998). Service learning participants develop the habits of civic responsibility described by Dewey (Sandman & Plater, 2009).

As I reviewed the literature, several gaps emerged. Many leaders have called for higher education to renew the democratic mission of higher education (Campus Compact; 2007; Colby, et al., 2003; Franco, 2005; Hodge, Lewis, Kramer & Hughes, 2001). Service learning is recognized as an effective teaching strategy that facilitates students' civic engagement (Prentice & Robinson, 2007; Prentice, 2011). Most research on service learning has focused on establishing a variety of academic benefits and positive personal outcomes; however, there is very little research on the lived experiences of service learning participants as active citizens. Additionally, there is very little research that thoroughly investigates the relationship between students' service learning experiences and their civic attitudes and leadership skills (Eyler, 2002). There is much less research on service learning at community colleges compared with service learning at four year colleges and universities (Kozeracki, 2000). Finally, there is very little qualitative investigation into the lived experiences of community college service learning participants; none using the lens of service learning as a civic pedagogy.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of my dissertation was to investigate the stories of how community college students experience service learning activities. I explored the content and context of their stories in relationship to their civic attitudes and leadership skills. The relationships between participating in service learning and developing a commitment to active citizenship and leadership for the common good was researched utilizing narrative inquiry. The stories of students' civic experiences as service learning participants are not described in the existing literature.

## **Rationale for the Study**

My study provides additional information about the civic experiences of service learning participants, thus illuminating the quantitative data previously published that describe positive outcomes for students personally and academically. Better insight into how serving unmet community needs contributes to the development of civic values and leadership for the common good can provide valuable information to community college leaders. Instructors who utilize service learning will benefit from a rich understanding of the student experience, thus increasing the effectiveness of service learning as a teaching methodology. Administrators will benefit from understanding the impact civic pedagogies such as service learning have when evaluating and funding campus programs. This richer understanding will provide faculty and staff with more information on how best to utilize service learning to achieve the civic mission of the comprehensive community college. Understanding service learning as a civic pedagogy is a significant area of inquiry for community college leaders.

## **Methodology**

A qualitative methodology was proposed for my study because it provides a holistic understanding of the lived experiences of service learning participants (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative researchers can select from a variety of qualitative approaches. I selected narrative inquiry because this methodology is consistent with both my research questions and the principles of good practice for service learning (Honnet & Paulson, 1989; Howard, 2001). Just as service learning includes a reflective component where participants are asked to integrate their service experience with course content, narrative inquiry focuses on the stories of participants. Service learning participants have unique stories to share about their experiences. Narrative inquiry allows individuals to tell their story without fracturing the data (Schram, 2006). In

narrative inquiry, the emphasis is centered on the participants' stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry reveals how service learners construct the stories of their experiences serving others in the context of a complex world.

The study was conducted at Service Learning Community College (SLCC), a comprehensive community college located in the United States. (A description of the institutional mission, demographics, and cultural context of SLCC is included in Appendix A, along with a narrative summary of the history and evolution of the institution's service learning program.) Students who participated in academic service learning as part of their collegiate experience were nominated to participate. A sample size of approximately five - eight participants was proposed for the research, and seven students were selected. Data was gathered using a series of narrative interviews in the Spring semester of 2011. As the primary researcher conducting this study, I completed the interviews myself. Civic engagement, broadly defined as active community involvement and leadership for the common good, provided a framework to focus my data analysis. The primary purpose of data analysis was to let the narrative relationships embedded in the participants' stories reveal themselves.

### **Research Questions**

My research questions emerged from my previous experiences as a student affairs professional working to develop a service learning program, the service learning process of self-reflection, and the qualitative research traditions. I investigated the following questions.

- 1. How do community college students who have participated in service learning reflect on their service and tell the stories of these experiences?*
- 2. How do students make meaning of their contributions serving the unmet needs of their communities?*

3. *How do students build upon their service learning experiences to engage in civic leadership for the common good?*
4. *How do students connect their service learning participation, civic responsibility, and leadership skills?*

### **Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is organized in six chapters, a bibliography, and three appendices. Chapter one introduces the research, describes my interest and background related to the topic, and establishes a context for the proposed research questions. Chapter two summarizes the related literature in two sections. The first section in chapter two begins with an overview of the democratic purpose of higher education then narrows to focus on the civic mission of the comprehensive community college. Next, the literature describing service learning as an innovative teaching pedagogy that achieves this civic mission will be presented. The first section of chapter two concludes with a description of key civic engagement outcomes for service learning participants. The second section of chapter two is a focused review of relevant learning and student development theoretical constructs. In the absence of specific research describing the lived experiences of service learning participants, this section provides a framework for the qualitative data to build upon. Finally, the second section of chapter two concludes with an overview of the leadership responsibilities that emerge from the integration of the literature on service learning and civic responsibility. Chapter three describes my qualitative research design utilizing narrative inquiry to explore students' service learning experiences. Information describing the selection of the students who participated in the study is provided. The interview protocol for collecting narrative data from these students is explained along with procedures utilized to insure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data collection and holistic-content

data analysis. Chapter four is comprised of the seven global impressions I created for the students who participated. The students' stories are organized using a framework that emerged from the data analysis. Each global impression includes thick descriptions of the students' *Personal Stories, Service Learning Experiences, and Reflections*. My analyses of the students' stories and the findings of my research questions are presented in chapter five. The lessons learned in my exploration of service learning as a civic pedagogy are presented in an organizational format that parallels the students' stories. I conclude my dissertation in chapter six by describing the implications of my findings for service learning practitioners and community college leaders.

### **Conclusion**

In chapter one I have identified the background, context, and methodology I used for my dissertation. I introduced service learning as a civic pedagogy that is increasingly utilized by community college faculty to achieve higher education's democratic purpose. I selected narrative inquiry to explore the relationship between service learning participation and civic engagement for community college students. Understanding the experiences of service learners will increase the effectiveness of service learning as a civic pedagogy in order to achieving the democratic purpose Dewey proposed for higher education. The concepts introduced in chapter one are developed further in chapter two through a selected review of the community college, service learning, and student development literature.

## CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

The mission of the comprehensive community college includes transfer, vocational, and developmental educational opportunities combined with a commitment to open access, student learning, community involvement, and innovation (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). As locally supported, flexible institutions of higher education, community colleges are uniquely able to address community needs as they educate students. Service learning links service to the community with educational outcomes (Garcia & Robinson, 2005). Utilizing service learning as a teaching methodology provides many benefits for students, faculty, and the community (Kozeracki, 2000). One of these benefits is enhanced civic engagement (Franco, 2005; Garcia & Robinson, 2005; Prentice, 2011). The purposes of this review of the literature are to establish service learning as an effective pedagogy that links teaching and learning to the civic mission of the comprehensive community college and to establish a framework for understanding students' lived experiences as service learning participants.

In this chapter, the academic and research literature is reviewed to establish a framework for my dissertation. The purpose of this focused review of the literature is to narrow the scope of the service learning research in two primary areas. First, I review the literature that describes the democratic purpose of higher education generally and the civic mission of the comprehensive community college specifically. The literature describing the effectiveness of service learning as a civic pedagogy is also reviewed in the first section. The result of this narrow focus is a description of the civic responsibilities service learners gain from these experiences. The second section of chapter two reviews the theoretical constructs that inform service learning pedagogy. The learning theories that shape service learning as an effective teaching methodology are

identified, as well as the student development theories that shape students' service learning experiences. Finally, the leadership responsibilities that emerge when students serve the unmet needs of their community to benefit the common good are summarized. The selected literature includes the articles and published research germane to service learning as a civic pedagogy, and to my narrative inquiry investigating the experiences of community college service learning participants.

### **The Democratic Purpose of Higher Education**

In this section, I present the historical evolution of the democratic purpose of higher education generally, and the comprehensive community college specifically. This context establishes the importance of educating citizens and leaders prepared for the complexities of today's society. The literature reveals that today's institutions of higher education are recommitting to the civic, democratic purpose of higher education through innovative practices such as service learning.

Public education in the United States was created to educate citizens prepared to engage in the work of democracy (Dewey, 1916). The purpose of American higher education is to graduate a well informed and critically thinking population prepared and able to serve as democratic citizens. The concept of a general education evolved "as a means of safeguarding civic education from curriculum overspecialization" (Sax, 2000, p. 3). The mission of higher education continues to include students' civic responsibilities, not just their intellectual capacity (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, Rosner & Stephens, 2000). Although educational attainment is a strong predictor of civic engagement, active democratic participation is in decline (Putnam, 2000). Service learning seeks to address this dichotomy by engaging students more fully in the

democratic process in their communities. Serving the needs of the local community develops the knowledge and skills required to sustain our democracy.

Democratic citizens must have the capacity to critically debate complex issues in an informed and productive manner (Westheimer & Kahne, 2003b). “This country cannot afford to educate a generation that acquires knowledge without ever understanding how that knowledge can benefit society or benefit democratic decision making” (Campus Compact, 2007, p. 2). Educating graduates who can identify “aspects of society that need improving, fostering a supportive community of peers, and developing the skills needed to work effectively for change” is central to achieving the democratic purpose of higher education (Westheimer & Kahne, 2003b, p. 12). Coughlan (1975) identified a link between Dewey’s democratic purpose of higher education and the mission of the community college. “Democracy must begin at home and its home is the neighborly community” (Dewey, 1927, p. 213). Community colleges are uniquely situated to educate members of their local communities as citizens and scholars.

### **The Civic Mission of the Comprehensive Community College**

Community colleges were founded to bring the ideals associated with the democratic purposes of higher education to a more inclusive, locally defined community (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). By including vocational and technical programs in addition to the more traditional liberal arts and sciences, and by opening access to all students regardless of academic preparation, community colleges enlarge the scope of higher education’s democratic purpose. The open access mission of the comprehensive community colleges strives to prepare and educate more local citizens to participate in the work of democracy (Franco, 2005). Community colleges have historically been described as “America’s democracy colleges” because of the comprehensive, open access mission (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

Franco (2005) connected the comprehensive community college mission of open access and equal opportunity to civic participation. “Community college leaders need to recommit to three essential missions: developing strong transfer programs that provide students with equal educational opportunities; preparing students for twenty-first century careers; and preparing students for the work of democracy” (p. 119). Brint and Karabel (1989) identified the development of a democratic citizenry through open access to educational opportunity as one of the founding purposes of community colleges. Franco (2005) emphasized the importance of engaging the needs of the local community to fulfill higher education’s democratic mission. “Preparing students for the work of democracy requires the commitment of two-year colleges to become engaged in addressing and solving the problems that beset the communities that support them” (p. 121).

“Community colleges are in a perfect position to address the need for civic engagement through their mission to play an active role in the communities they serve” (Hodge, et al., 2001, p. 677). Cohen and Brawer (2008) suggested that community colleges were established to solve social problems. The American ideal that all individuals should have “the opportunity to rise to their greatest potential” contributed to the original mission of the comprehensive community college (p.10). Today’s comprehensive community colleges proudly identify as democratic institutions through their open access missions and the ability to quickly respond to changing community needs. Rhoads and Valadez (1996) indicated that community colleges “prepare students for work and as citizens and community members who have obligations to public life as well” (p. 191). Community colleges are uniquely able to achieve the civic, democratic purpose of higher education because of the comprehensive, open access, and community centered mission.

To achieve this civic mission, community colleges have embraced service learning as an emergent and effective teaching strategy (Robinson 2000). “Service Learning is the leading pedagogy that community colleges can employ to achieve these missions and truly become civically engaged campuses in the communities they serve” (Franco, 2005, p. 119). The emergence of civic engagement as a trend in higher education is further exemplified by the new elective Community Engagement Carnegie Classification (Sandman & Plater, 2009; Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). This builds on Dewey’s experiential learning philosophy of applying knowledge and learning by doing in the context of our communities (Holland & Robinsons, 2008). By engaging in the community as civic institutions, community colleges build capacity by preparing graduates who can understand and resolve the complexities of our modern world (Franco, 2005).

Community colleges have historically been recognized as America’s democracy colleges, emphasizing the democratic and civic mission of higher education (Brint & Karabel, 1989). The mission of the comprehensive community college includes developmental, vocational, technical, and traditional transfer educational programs (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). More recently, the vocational and technical educational mission has shifted to focus workforce training and economic development (Levin, 2000). While all of these are integral to the mission of the comprehensive community college, my research emphasis narrowly focused on the civic mission to engage active citizens in the work of democracy.

Based on the civic mission of the comprehensive community college, service learning has emerged an effective teaching strategy (Prentice & Robinson, 2007). In the next section, the literature that establishes service learning as a civic pedagogy is presented. Service learning has been recognized as an effective pedagogy that teaches content knowledge, general education

skills, and civic responsibilities and prepares students to serve an increasingly complicated society as active citizens.

### **Service Learning as Civic Pedagogy**

Service learning is the pedagogical approach with the most empirical research supporting the development of civic responsibility (Colby, et al., 2003). Furthermore, service learning has been identified as the best way to promote these educational ideals, as academic coursework is primarily what brings students to college (Gottlieb & Robinson, 2006). Service learning fosters students to become responsible citizens by integrating civically engaged pedagogy with course content; prioritizing education that promotes content expertise balanced with the cultural and social dimensions of human existence (Butler, 2000). Service learning has been acknowledged as a “particularly effective method of civic education” (Battistoni, 1997, p. 155).

Research has established the emergence of college student volunteerism and service learning as an effective and engaging pedagogy. Integrating service learning in the classroom is an effective strategy of engaging students in the learning process (Astin, et al., 2000). Service and volunteerism are important values for today’s college students (Dote, Cramer, Dietz & Grimm, 2006). These researchers determined that in 2005, 30% of college students participated in volunteer service, and the number of college students who volunteer increased by 20% from 2002 to 2005. The growth in college student volunteers is double the growth of other adult populations. College students are twice as likely to volunteer compared to non-college attending peers. Additionally, Butin (2007) reported that 80% of faculty members believe their institution has a responsibility to work with their local community and that students should be involved in service participation. Garcia and Robinson (2005) determined that engaged students are more likely to attend class, to be prepared, and to participate in learning activities resulting in

increased satisfaction and knowledge attainment. Beyond the community college campus, service learning also benefits partner agencies and the community at large (Kozeracki, 2000).

There is not yet a generally accepted understanding of what defines effective service learning among community college faculty. Some academicians narrowly view service learning as a teaching strategy that can only be effective in the social science disciplines (Prentice & Robinson, 2007). Critics charge that service learning takes too much time and resources, or it forwards a liberal social justice agenda that is counter to a pure academic learning environment (Speck, 2001). Other faculty view service learning as a “soft” teaching strategy that compromises academic rigor (Prentice & Robinson, 2007). Recent research indicates that service learning is an effective teaching method that links theory to practice (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). For faculty, service learning achieves the “goal of being good academicians who search for and develop ever-better tools to teach, conduct research, and disseminate knowledge” (Butin, 2007, p. 37). This commitment rises above specific disciplines and individual standards for teaching and scholarship.

Battistoni (1997) advocated that service learning improves student learning by viewing course content through a critical thinking lens that transcends individual disciplines. “The students’ ability to analyze critically is enhanced by confronting ideas and theories with the actual realities in the world surrounding them” (p. 152). Such an engaged civic pedagogy is based on teaching practices that empower and engage students as full participants. Franco (2005) indicated that service learning is the leading pedagogy to achieve higher education’s civic mission and develop citizens prepared to serve the local community. He emphasized the importance of engaging in the needs of the local community to fulfill this mission: students must understand their community’s un-met needs and take action with community partners to fulfill

these needs through engaged service. Community colleges must prepare students for lives of “critical inquiry, active participation and leadership as socially responsible members of their communities” through the integration of service learning across the curriculum (p. 135).

To fulfill the renewed focus in higher education to foster civic engagement, service learning has been utilized with the purpose of enriching students’ academic learning and increasing students’ awareness of their civic responsibility (Prentice, 2011, p. 844). The recent emergence of service learning as a civic pedagogy has resulted in a more broadly defined understanding of students’ civic engagement. Prentice (2011) identified a link between more traditional models of civic engagement that focused on political knowledge and behaviors and more emergent models that also recognized community involvement as an important factor in defining civic engagement. This more broadly defined understanding of civic engagement recognizes new forms of civic action or political activism such as “making purchases or investment decisions to support social or political causes, giving money to think tanks, using affinity credit cards, communicating via blogs, and wearing clothing with political messages” (CIRCLE, 2006, p.2). For the purpose of my study I utilized this broader definition of civic engagement that connects community involvement with social and political activism.

To achieve the community-based civic mission, community colleges must instill students’ with civic responsibility as they teach academic content. Teaching civic responsibility through service learning is directly related to general education outcomes such as communication and interpersonal skills, mutual respect, leadership, and conflict resolution (Colby, et al., 2003). Community colleges must also teach democratic values such as “concern for both the rights and welfare of individuals and the community, recognition that each individual is a part of the larger societal fabric” (Colby, et al., 2003, p. 43). Rhoads (1997) connected the socially constructed

experiences of service learners with Dewey's democratic purpose of education. "For Dewey, who saw the link between the process of learning and democratic citizenship, educative experiences are those which immerse students in worthwhile activities in the community and that provoke curiosity and commitment to continuous inquiry" (Eyler, 2002, p. 520). Service learning develops moral and ethical citizens prepared to lead a truly equitable society (Franco, 2005). "The academic enterprise would be seriously compromised if these ideals ceased to guide scholarship, teaching, and learning" (Colby, et al., 2003, p. 43). Service learning is not only a valuable teaching strategy for teaching course content across the curriculum, it also teaches general education civic responsibilities.

In the first two sub-sections of this review of the literature, I focused on the democratic mission of the comprehensive community college, and service learning as an effective civic pedagogy. The foundation of this perspective is based on the educational philosophy of John Dewey. More recently, the establishment of Campus Compact and the elective Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement emphasizes the emergent trend in achieving the civic, democratic mission of academia. Service learning integrates the teaching and learning of specific content knowledge with the general educational ideals of producing good citizens. The context of my dissertation research was built on this framework. In the next section, I review the literature on civic responsibility and overview the civic outcomes that result from service participation.

### **Civic Responsibilities**

Dewey (1916, 1922) proposed that educated citizens demonstrate habits of engaged participation in the work of democracy. Educational attainment is balanced by the public responsibilities of using content expertise to improve communities, both locally and globally (Colby, et al., 2000). When civic responsibility is specifically identified as a course learning

outcome service learning can be purposely integrated into the course as a citizenship development tool in addition to its use as a vehicle for course content learning (Prentice, 2011, p. 845). Boyte and Kari (2000) identified three frames for viewing civic responsibility: the civic frame, the communitarian frame, and the commonwealth frame. The civic frame emerges from the view of democracy as a representative form of government. Citizens have rights and civic responsibility is demonstrated by voting, paying taxes, obeying the law, and occasional civic tasks such as jury duty. “The civics view defines democracy as primarily a system of representative political institutions and political and civil rights” (p. 40). In the civic frame, higher education serves to create experts and prepare citizens for careers. However, Sax (2000) suggested that “‘civic education’ is more than simply teaching students ‘civics’” (p. 16).

Boyte and Kari (2000) next described the communitarian frame. The communitarian frame of civic responsibility emerges from the spirit of a shared community and the understanding of democracy as a civil society. Citizens share common values and are responsible for one another and the larger community. Individual rights are balanced with shared responsibilities. In the communitarian frame, higher education promotes the cultivation of community by teaching shared values and common expectations. Boyte and Kari acknowledged that the idealism of the communitarian framework minimizes the diversity of experiences and opinions in today’s complex society.

To address the shortcomings of the first two models of civic responsibility, Boyte and Kari (2000) presented the commonwealth frame. This framework views democracy as the public work of the people, by the people for the common good. Citizens are problem solvers and co-creators of democracy. “Public works of significance – in offices and schools, factories and farms, government agencies or in higher education – has been the way diverse people have

forged connections with each other and address the nation's problems" (p. 44). In the commonwealth frame, higher education develops the public imagination and builds capacity for public good through civic action and the application of knowledge. The commonwealth framework identifies the creation of civic responsibility as the public work of higher education.

Many researchers have defined a continuum of civic responsibility that ranges from charity to social justice (Delve, Mintz & Stewart, 1990; Kahne & Westheimer, 1999; Rhoads, 1997; Wang & Jackson, 2005). Service experiences in a volunteerism paradigm are "infused with the volunteer ethos, a philanthropic or charitable viewpoint that ignores the structural reasons to help others" (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002, p. 230). In isolation, this perspective can perpetuate social injustice and maintain a fragmented social order (Battistoni, 1997). Westheimer and Kahne (2003a) label students with a commitment to volunteerism as "personally responsible citizens" (p. 4). In contrast, service learning builds individual and community capacity by encouraging participants to take action and engage in their roles as community members and leaders. Westheimer and Kahne (2003a) identified this communitarian perspective of service for the common good and labeled those taking action as "participatory citizens" (p. 4). Participatory citizens assume a mutuality in serving others that moves academic service learning beyond charitable acts of volunteerism (Rhoads, 1997). However, preparing graduates for "public lives as citizens, members of communities, and professionals in society has historically been a responsibility of higher education" (AAC&U, 2010, ¶ 3). An educated citizenry is more than technically talented professionals contributing economically in the workforce; education should result in active and engaged citizens prepared to solve the unmet needs of their communities (Rhoads, 2000). Westheimer and Kahne (2003a) described individuals with this perspective as "justice oriented citizens" (p. 4). Justice oriented citizens work to "critically assess social,

political, and economic structures and consider collective strategies for change that challenge injustice and, when possible, address root causes of problems” (p. 5). This perspective emerges when service learners mutually engage in the shared goals of academic learning and meeting the unmet needs of community partners.

The differing service learning experiences in this model represent distinct paradigms that are not in opposition (Morton, 1995; Leeds, 1999; Mitchell, 2008). Mitchell (2008) differentiated the charity and social justice service learning paradigms as traditional service learning and critical service learning. The critical approach to service learning focuses on social responsibility, consistent with the Boyte and Kari’s (2000) commonwealth framework of civic responsibility and Westheimer and Kahne (2003a) justice-oriented citizens. Critical service learning is a pedagogical means to identify community concerns and solve societal inequity. Service learners examine the unmet needs of the community using a critical, problem solving lens. Critical service learning expands the emphasis beyond teaching and learning to include the redistribution of power and social change (Mitchell, 2008).

Critics charge that the emphasis in critical service learning goes beyond the educational mission into the realm of social indoctrination (Speck, 2001). However, a primary goal of higher education is not simply the creation of knowledge for its own sake, but knowledge to improve the general welfare of society (Boyte & Hollander, 1999). “The key is to sensitize students to the fact that many of the issues they will explore are ill-structured and that part of their task is to pay attention, figure out what the critical questions are, and refine their understanding of complex community issues (Eyler, 2002, p. 525). Critical service learning develops civic responsibility by “encouraging students to become more active and proactive participants in the learning process” (Sax, 2000, p. 17).

Eyler and Giles (1999) described five dimensions of civic responsibility: values, knowledge, skills, efficacy, and commitment. Values build the foundation for active citizenship. Eyler and Giles defined values as a sense of social responsibility for what needs to be done. Knowledge, the second responsibility, is defined as the integration of awareness of social need with academic content expertise. Civic knowledge results in intelligent decisions about resolving unmet social problems. Eyler and Giles defined civic skills as the talents and capabilities to take action to address community needs. Efficacy is the self-confidence and belief in one's civic contributions. Finally, commitment is defined as the willingness to take action and the resolve to create social change.

Wang and Jackson (2005) expanded the framework established by Eyler and Giles. They suggested that responsibility be added as an independent sixth dimension. While Eyler and Giles included social responsibility as a dimension of values, Wang and Jackson noted that a personal responsibility or self-agency in addressing social problems is necessary in addition to values. Wang and Jackson's research validated the existence of all six dimensions of civic responsibility. These dimensions of civic responsibility, along with the commonwealth framework proposed by Boyte and Kari (2000), provide a structure to begin understanding the lived experiences of community college service learning participants.

This first section of the service learning literature has narrowed the ideal of Dewey's democratic purpose of higher education and defined the civic mission of the comprehensive community college. The role of service learning as a civic pedagogy to achieve this mission has also been described. Finally, several civic responsibility outcomes of service learning have been identified. For the purpose of my narrative inquiry, I utilized the commonwealth frame of citizenship as public work (Boyte & Kari, 2000); and the six dimensions of civic responsibility:

responsibility, values, knowledge, skills, efficacy and commitment (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Wang & Jackson, 2005) to establish a context for exploring the experiences of service learning participants. In the next section, the theoretical constructs that inform student learning and personal development of participants in service learning are presented.

### **Theoretical Backgrounds of Service Learning**

In this section, the theoretical frameworks that influence the experiences of students participating in service learning are reviewed. The theoretical frameworks are organized in three themes. First, learning theories that inform service learning as a civic pedagogy are presented. Next, student developmental theories will provide an understanding of the individual growth and development experienced by service learners. These student development theories were selected based on the commonwealth framework and the six dimensions of civic responsibility identified in the previous section. Finally, a targeted review of current leadership paradigms provides an understanding of the interrelated connections between self and others which emerge when students serve others for the common good. A review of these theoretical constructs establishes a framework to understand the civic experiences of service learning participants.

#### **Learning Theories**

Service learning engages participants by empowering them and making them more responsible and involved in their own learning. More traditional educational approaches do not provide the skills and knowledge for active citizenship and separate students from participation in public life. Speck (2001) declared that “higher education must be radically transformed to meet its obligation to produce citizens who can promote justice in a democratic society” (p. 5). This civic approach is based on the Dewey’s promotion of education as a tool for creating a democratic society. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2000) identified a transactional,

banking model of education. Freire's model is based on the presumption of faculty as knowledge experts and students as empty accounts waiting to be filled with deposits. However, when using service learning, faculty move beyond teaching in the controlled environment of the classroom where they are experts, to the messy, chaotic reality where they are not the only source of knowledge (Butin, 2007).

Several researchers have identified general education outcomes that are integral to higher education's civic and democratic purpose. Astin (2000) identified the acquisition of knowledge, communication skills (written and verbal), and critical thinking skills as the general education priorities of academic faculty. He also suggested self-understanding, listening, leadership, empathy, honesty, generosity, and the ability to work collaboratively are the necessary skills to foster civic responsibility. Boyte and Hollander (1999) identified critical thinking, informational literacy, the capacity to work with multiple viewpoints, listening, curiosity and a commitment to collaborative problem solving as essential to civic responsibility. These general education skills enhance and strengthen content knowledge in the development of educated citizens prepared to work for a common, democratic good.

As faculty become more engaged in the teaching and learning process, they need to examine their role as knowledge experts and become "facilitators of learning" (Flynn, 2005). Faculty need to "readjust their thinking about what constitutes effective education. They need to reconsider the belief that filling students with content knowledge is the sole or the most important function of academic education" (Speck, 2001, p. 10). This change in perspective profoundly alters the roles of both students and faculty in the learning process. Experiential learning and adult learning theories provide frameworks for better understanding the experiences of service learning participants.

### **Experiential Learning Theories.**

Service learning is considered to be a form of experiential education, defined by the work of David Kolb (1981, 1984). Kolb's work builds on the Dewey's philosophy of learning by doing, particularly the importance of experience in the learning process (McKewen, 1996). Kolb (1984) defined learning as a process where "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). Kolb theorized that learning is a four stage cycle. Concrete experiences are the basis for observation and reflection from many perspectives. From this reflective process, learners integrate their observations into theories in practice which then inform new experiences. Students can enter into Kolb's learning cycle at any stage, but must complete the entire four stage cycle to effectively learn. Kolb's theory also states that to gain knowledge from any experience learners must be actively involved in and able to reflect on the experience. Additionally, Kolb states that learners must possess the background knowledge to conceptualize and analyze the experience, as well as the critical thinking and problem solving capacity to integrate new knowledge gained through the process.

Service learning experiences provide multiple opportunities for students to move through Kolb's learning cycle (McKewen, 1996; Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Kolb's theory makes explicit the importance of critical reflection in connecting service learning experiences with both content knowledge and personal development. Service learning also effectively includes multiple learning styles by intentionally cycling through Kolb's entire learning model (Holland & Robinson, 2008). As students progress through Kolb's model of experiential learning, they develop increased capacity to manage complexity in several areas (Evans, et al., 1998). Concrete experiences increase the ability to manage affective complexity. Reflective observation enhances perceptual complexity. Abstract conceptualization creates complexity of

thought and active experimentation leads to behavioral complexity. By intentionally cycling through Kolb's entire experiential learning model, service learning participants develop these skills across the entire range of learning styles. Service learning is an effective teaching methodology because it engages the learner at both a cognitive level and an emotional level, which provides robust learning more likely to be retained by the learner (McKewen, 1996).

Service learners make meaning of their own experiences through the process of reflective observation: experience alone does not equate learning (Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning is contrasted with transactional or didactic learning theories (Evans, et al., 1998). In service learning students discover new knowledge directly, rather than reading or hearing about the experiences and insights of experts. When students engage in experiential service learning, they are developing the civic habits and skills necessary to lead today's chaotic and complex world. Service learning as civic pedagogy should facilitate "an ability to analyze problems and engage in actions. These capabilities have intellectual components such as knowledge, skills, and cognitive development" (Eyler, 2002, p. 520). Kolb's experiential learning theory connects student learning, the development of practical skills, and increased cognitive capacities with students' lived experiences.

### **Adult Learning Theories.**

Service learning provides opportunities for students to be more engaged in the process of learning, because it situates learning in the lived experiences of students (McKewen, 1996). This transformative learning invites students to make their own meaning through action and reflection (Baumgartner, 2001). This learning process is indicative of Knowles' concept of andragogy and self-directed learning (Merriam, 2001). Service learning engages adult learners as citizens and community members while learning content knowledge (Holland & Robinson, 2008). Service

learning also provides opportunities for all participants to integrate their lived experiences into the class curriculum, including those with border knowledge that might otherwise be excluded from transactional educational models (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996).

This engaged learning perspective emphasizes the emergent role of faculty in helping students learn course content while discovering multiple ways of knowing and different sources of knowledge (Butler, 2000; Halford, 2007). Halford (2007) determined that the different experiences, values, and perspectives faculty members bring to the learning process informs their teaching styles. Halford suggested that students and faculty may not be prepared to grapple with the messiness emergent pedagogies require, instead preferring to remain in the simpler world of Freire's banking model of knowledge exchange. However, the ability to manage complexity of the modern world is an important general education skill and civic responsibility. Service learning as a civic pedagogy develops these skills and responsibilities for student participants.

Dewey (1939) proposed that learning is a socially constructed, community based process. Rhoads (1997) connected the socially constructed experiences of service learners with Dewey's democratic purpose of education. Service learning is a collaborative learning process designed to capitalize on the learning potential of dialogue (Vella, 1994), peer relationships (Alfred, 2002), personal histories, and common experiences (AAHE, 2002). Furthermore, linking each individual's learning and life experience with the social and culture perspectives of others is central to the social construction of knowledge (Alfred, 2002). Service learning situates students' experiences at the center of their own learning. Such constructivist learning engages students in the creation of meaning and empowers them to create change through the learning process (Jarvis, et al., 2003).

Critical reflection provides students opportunities to understand their own experiences and share their understanding of the world (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). Empowering students in the learning process also increases personal commitment to social justice and the common good (Mitchell, 2008; Moely, et.al., 2008). The integration of the service experience with content knowledge creates increased efficacy and skills (Chickering, 2008). Service learning involves students in the experiential learning process, fostering individual responsibility and civic values. Through this civic pedagogy, service learners develop the capacities and skills to manage a complex world (Wang & Rogers, 2006). Within this framework, learning is co-constructed. This requires students to act as engaged participants in the teaching and learning process and develops the habits of responsible citizenship Dewey described.

Experiential and adult learning theories begin to illuminate the commonwealth framework for understanding the development of civic responsibilities. Recognizing how service learners develop civic values, knowledge, skills, efficacy, and commitment is integral to connecting these theories to their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The tension between formalistic theories and the narrative lives of participants exists throughout the process of narrative research. “The tension often appears as a tension between literature reviewed as a structuring framework and literature reviewed as a kind of conversation between theory and life or, at least, between theory and the stories of life contained in the inquiry” (p. 41). Narrative inquirers must balance the benefits of having theoretical frameworks to understand experience with the tension of allowing understanding to emerge directly from lived experience. With this tension in mind, selected student development theories are presented that illuminate the lived experiences of service learning participants.

## **Student Development Theories**

Academic learning and student development are shared purposes of higher education (NASPA, 2004). Student development theory is a broadly defined field of study exploring the changes in college students outside the classroom (Evans, et al., 1998). Sanford (1967) defined student development as the progression of ability to integrate and act on increasingly complex experiences. Sanford determined that students learn and develop when they experience the optimum balance of challenge and support. The field of student development theory has expanded to include a range of psychosocial, cognitive-structural, typology and identity development models (Evans, et al., 1998). McKewen (1996) identified a variety of student development theories related to the service learning experience, such as cognitive and psychosocial development, involvement, and student engagement theories.

The theoretical frameworks that influence students' learning and development provide an important and valuable foundation for understanding service learning experiences (McKewen, 1996). Rhoads (1997) articulated that service learning participants experience developmental growth because of the intersection between the sense of self and the unmet needs of society. These theoretical constructs influence students' ability to conceptualize and understand course content, reflect on their service experience, and make connections between formal instruction, experiential service activities, and their own lives.

Several service learning researchers have identified cognitive development theory as an integral framework for understanding the service learning experience (Delve, et al, 1990; McKewen, 1996; Wang & Rogers, 2006). Chickering (2008) suggested that student engagement and involvement within their communities are also important. Involvement and integration as a full member of the campus community helps students make meaning of their experiences.

Further, Chickering believed students' service learning experiences are socially constructed: students develop "through relationships with others" (p. 89). Other student development constructs that describe the engagement and involvement of service learners include involvement theory (Astin, 1984), the continuum of community (Schlossberg, 1989), and psychosocial human development models (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Further, the integration of the academic and social dimensions into a seamless educational experience facilitates student success (Tinto, 1997). A focused review of these student development theories provides a deeper and contextual understanding the civic experiences of service learners.

### **Cognitive Development Theories.**

The capacities to manage the complexities of life and the relationships between self and others are at the heart of cognitive development theories (Evans, et al, 1998; McKewen, 1996; Chickering, 2008). Chickering (2008) proposed that individuals with higher-order cognitive function accept complexity, and recognize multiple contextual solutions. He also proposed that interpersonal skills and competencies are the foundation to relational ways of knowing and understanding the world. Chickering indicated four factors are necessary for civic responsibility to emerge: knowledge of key social issues, multiple intelligences, a sense of integrity, and motivation to invest in concerns beyond one's self. He further suggested that strengthening cognitive and affective complexity is an important foundation for the emergence of these civic responsibility factors.

William Perry formulated a theory of cognitive development describing students' patterns of thinking and understanding the world (Evans, et al., 1998). Perry (1968; 1981) identified cognitive development as a continuum of five cognitive positions and four existential dimensions. The least complex cognitive positions in Perry's theory are labeled *Dualism* because

knowledge is conceptualized as absolute. “Dualism represents a mode of meaning making that tends to view the world dichotomously” (Evans, et al., 1998, p. 131). “Students at the dualistic stages fail to recognize that social problems are ill structured and assume a ‘right’ answer is evident. They are likely to be disinclined to reflective thought because they assume their role is to receive the ‘right answer’” (Eyler, 2002, p. 522). Students move from *Dualism* to *Multiplicity* as they develop the ability to conceptualize multiple viewpoints. Individuals then move through stages of *Multiplicity* where diverse viewpoints are considered equally valid. These positions in Perry’s developmental scheme are described as cognitive structural positions. They are marked by foundational differences in the cognitive processing of information. As individuals continue the developmental process, changes are based on commitment and choices in a contextual world. As individuals develop the cognitive complexity to identify multiple perspectives relative to context, they move from *Multiplicity* to *Relativism*. In Relativism, knowledge is “viewed more qualitatively; it is contextually defined, based on evidence and supporting arguments” (Evans, et al., 1998, p. 132). Cognitive development is important in developing the civic responsibilities identified by the research teams of Eyler and Giles (1999), and Wang and Jackson (2005). “The social issues that we face as citizens in our communities are classic ill-structured problems, they are not easy to identify and define, and there are not clear answers about how to resolve them” (Eyler, 2002, p. 521). Service learning provides students with opportunities to progress developmentally through Perry’s model (Wang & Rogers, 2006).

The commonwealth framework defines civic responsibility through public works for the common good. Democratic citizens must have the knowledge and skills to act on their values to improve their local communities. Service learners develop the capacity and skills to identify solutions to complex problems; solutions that are well suited to the context (Wang & Rogers,

2006). Service learners also develop self efficacy and commitment through their active involvement in Kolb's experiential learning model. Chickering (2008) stated that citizens need "knowledge pertinent to key social issues, intellectual competence, interpersonal competence, emotional intelligence, integrity; and a level of motivation that invests time, energy and emotion in concerns larger than our own immediate self-interest" (p. 91). These critical thinking skills, consideration of other perspectives, and relational ways of knowing are indicative of Perry's advanced levels of cognitive development (Delve, et al., 1996; McKewen, 1996).

To achieve the socially connected learning Dewey envisioned, Chickering (2008) asserted that students and faculty need contextual, constructed ways of knowing. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberg and Tarule (1986; 1996) formulated a contextual relational model of cognitive development. These researchers investigated the cognitive development of women, in contrast with Perry's research with male students. Belenky and her colleagues identified five developmental perspectives along a continuum: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge. These developmental perspectives represent a progression of participation and engagement in the learning process. "Constructed knowledge, as a perspective, involves the integration of subjective and objective knowledge" (Evans, et al., 1998, p. 149). This constructivist way of knowing is consistent with the responsibilities associated with active, democratic citizenship (Chickering, 2008).

Baxter Magolda (1992) identified three principles of cognitive development directly related to the adult learning theories associated with service learning: validating the student as a learner; situating learning in the lived experiences; and defining learning as jointly constructed. This open-ended process of discovery allows students the opportunity to synthesize their own experiences with alternative perspectives (McKewen, 1996). "Critical reflection leads to

cognitive development” (Eyler, 2002, p. 528). Critical reflection integrating life experiences with course content enriches student learning and personal development (Vella, 1994). Critical self-reflection and dialogue in class about the varying service experiences also expands and enriches learning (Alfred, 2002). This inter-disciplinary approach and collaborative learning process requires a commitment by both instructors and students “to succeed and to help others succeed” (Rhoads & Valadez, 1996, p. 206). The transformational pedagogical approach required in service learning is inherent to the developmental outcomes service learners experience (Astin, et al, 2000).

Cognitive developmental theories identify the cognitive thinking skills, ways of knowing, and relational processes associated with civic responsibility. Several researchers have determined that participating in service learning results in higher levels of developmental growth in these areas (Astin, et al., 2000; Prentice & Robinson, 2007; Sax, 2000; Wang & Rogers, 2006). Research has demonstrated that service learning is effective in part because it facilitates multiple outcomes: an increased awareness of the world, an increased awareness of one’s personal values, and an increased engagement in the classroom experience (Astin, et. al., 2000). Understanding the cognitive developmental changes experienced by service learning participants provides an additional perspective in understanding the stories of their lived experiences.

### **Other Student Development Theories.**

Several other student development theories have been identified that influence the civic development of service learning participants. These include involvement theory (Astin, 1984), the continuum of community (Schlossberg, 1989), and psychosocial human development models (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). These theories “provide valuable perspectives for understanding students as they enter service learning experiences, how students experience

the process of their involvement in service learning, and what their learning and developmental outcomes might be” (McKewen, 1996, p. 54). These theoretical domains reveal how service learners engage in the civic process and develop the habits of citizenship Dewey described.

“[T]he development of civic responsibility during the college years is enhance by students’ degree of involvement during college” (Sax, 2000, p. 16). Astin (1984) defined involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 297). For civic responsibilities to develop, students need to actively engage in the service learning experience (Evans, et al., 1998). Consistent with Kolb’s theory, Astin (1984) indicated that the learning and development outcomes of learning activities such as service learning are “directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program” (p. 298). The positive civic outcomes associated with involvement can be any of the cognitive development gains, content knowledge learning, or general education outcomes previously described. Astin and his colleagues’ (2000) qualitative research on the effects of service learning indicated that the positive developmental gains of service learners are attributed to the socially constructed meaning making of a complex experience. This finding is consistent with the Dewey’s social understanding of education and the development of civic habits. These habits are also indicative of the civic responsibility outcomes of efficacy and commitment described by Eyler and Giles (1999).

An institutional perspective on Astin’s involvement theory was developed in the book *Involving Colleges* (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991). Kuh, et al. identified the importance of involving students both inside the classroom as well as through extracurricular activities. Service learning is a pedagogical approach that creates this seamless learning environment and engages students in the learning process (Holland & Robinson, 2008). Further,

Kuh (1995) established the importance seamless learning activities on positive student development outcomes. Tinto (1993) also theorized that the integration of academic and social experiences, and the engagement of students in the learning process are directly related to student success and retention. These student development theories are consistent with the experiential and adult learning theories previously reviewed. It is important to recognize that service learners who are more involved and engaged in the educational process are more likely to develop civic habits and skills and articulate these through their lived experiences.

Schlossburg's (1989) *Continuum of Community* identified the importance of belongingness and efficacy when examining the effect of an individual's experience on student development and learning. The dimensions of community identified by Schlossburg range from marginality to mattering. "Marginality can be defined as a sense of not fitting in and can lead to self consciousness, irritability, and depression" (Evans, et al., 1998, p. 27). Feelings of marginality may occur when students engage in new experiences, especially when uncertainty about the learning process exists. Mattering is defined as the belief that one's values and feelings are important, and that one's actions and contributions make a difference (Evans, 1998). Mattering is an important pre-cursor to student development and academic success. Three civic responsibilities identified by Eyler and Giles (1999), values, efficacy, and commitment are embedded in mattering educational experiences. It is also important to recognize that these civic outcomes cannot be achieved if service learning experiences marginalize participants.

Chickering (1969) formulated a theory of psychosocial development among college students. Chickering's vectors of student development expand on Erik Erikson's theory of human development over the life span (McKewen, 1996). Chickering and Reisser (1993) proposed seven vectors as a framework for understanding developmental growth during college.

The seven vectors are: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. Service learning “may facilitate development in one or more vectors, but which vectors are facilitated is likely a function of the interaction of the experience with the issues a student is facing developmentally” (McKewen, 1996, p. 74).

Chickering’s vectors provide a context for understanding how the civic responsibility outcomes of values, interpersonal skills, and commitment integrate with the student development outcomes experienced by service learners.

Service learning creates conditions that facilitate increased student development across many theoretical domains, including many that inform the development of civic responsibility (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001). Student development theory provides a framework to understand the civic responsibilities active citizenship requires. Cognitive development theories reveal how service learners develop the capabilities to manage the complexities of modern life, multiple ways of knowing, and contextual interpersonal relationships. The interrelated connections between self and others that service learning promotes are consistent with Dewey’s social understanding of democracy. Service learning integrates these cognitive and interpersonal dimensions, providing robust learning and development opportunities for participants.

Service learning builds multiple capacities simultaneously: content expertise, cognitive complexity, and engagement in problem solving to fulfill the unmet needs of the community. Throughout the review of the student development theories that inform students’ service learning experiences, the six civic responsibilities identified by the research teams Eyler and Giles (1999), and Wang and Jackson (2005) were explored: personal responsibility, values, knowledge, skills, efficacy, and commitment. Additionally, the importance of being mindful as narrative inquirers

of the tension between these theoretical frameworks and the lived experiences of service learners was presented. In the next section the commonwealth frame of civic responsibility as a public work is considered. Leadership responsibilities emerge when these individual civic responsibilities are put into collective action for the common good.

### **Leadership Responsibilities**

Individuals with a well-developed sense of civic responsibility are fully engaged leaders in their community (Knefelkamp, 2008). These leaders work interdependently to apply knowledge and skills to resolve the challenges in their community with a sense of responsibility and social justice. Margaret Wheatley (1999) stated, “Leadership is always dependent on the context, but the context is established by the relationships we value” (p. 144). Likewise, Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (1998) indicated “leadership happens in an interactive, relational context” (p. 68). These authors integrate this relational leadership practice with civic responsibility. Leaders understand their obligations as members of a community to benefit others. Komives, et al. defined leadership “as a relational process of people together attempting to accomplish change or make a difference to benefit the common good” (p. 21). Leadership, like citizenship, is a shared responsibility.

The public works traditions embedded in the commonwealth framework of civic responsibility emphasize the practical relationship between citizenship and leadership (Boyte & Kari, 2000). Active participation in the work of community develops each citizen’s capacity for leadership by forging connections with diverse neighbors, and addressing the entire community’s unmet needs. Citizens as leaders become “creators of their communities” and stakeholders in the creating the common good (p.44). Citizens can transform their communities through their actions: in volunteer fire departments, parent teacher organizations, public arts commissions, or

other community based civic organizations. The contributions of community leaders create an important balance between individual and public contributions. Boyte and Kari (2000) proposed that developing civic responsibilities is the public contribution of higher education. “If work with public purpose is the heart of a democratic people, then democracy education has to tap the interests, talents and energies for such work, and cultivate lifelong civic habits and skills” (p. 51).

The democratic purpose of higher education prepares students for success in a modern world that is chaotic and complicated (Wheatley, 1999). Civic and leadership responsibilities prepare service learners to take action to improve their communities in the midst of constant change (Boyte, 2008). Just as service learners begin to make sense of chaos by thinking in more cognitively complex ways, leaders also need the ability to look at the world at multiple levels simultaneously (Wheatley, 1999). Emergent leadership theories suggest civic responsibilities, not just content expertise, are increasingly important. This perspective emphasizes public scholarship and service for the common good (Boyte & Kari, 2000; Butler, 2000; Komives, et al., 1998).

Educators have a key role in the development of students as citizens capable of making informed choices and actively participating in community (Hughes, 2002). Wheatley (1999) indicated that knowledge, skills and commitment are distributed across the community. Service learning empowers all to act as leaders for the common good. Service learning also creates partnerships and helps students make meaning of their contributions. Leadership is working with others to address community need through partnerships and civic action (Komives, et al., 1998).

Wheatley (1999) emphasized that the world is interconnected; and asserted that humanity is defined by our relationships. Wheatley also indicated that one way to make a community stronger is to connect it back to itself to create a web of reinforcing relationships. This connection to community is an inherent aspect of service learning process, and consistent with

Dewey's social understanding of democracy and education. This clarity of higher education's democratic purpose and civic mission are powerful amplifiers that facilitate the development of citizens and leaders.

Additionally, civic leaders recognize and nurture the spirit and interconnected relationships within communities (Bolman & Deal, 2001). Jaworski (1996) indicated that the spirit of servant leadership inherent in serving others strengthens both individual citizens and entire communities. Service learning fosters authentic relationships and service to the community, and builds leadership capacity as well as citizenship responsibilities for students. Jaworski noted that working for the common good in our community is the way to create the world we desire.

As citizens and leaders, service learners seek to live authentic lives of meaning and significance (Jaworski, 1996; Bolman & Deal, 2001). Leadership is a purposeful commitment to shared goals (Komives, et al, 1998). Citizens and leaders make meaning of their shared experiences through social action. "People want to matter and to lead lives of meaning. When something is of value, one can make a commitment, find personal purpose, and risk involvement – it matters, it has meaning" (p 98). Service learning, as an example of Dewey's educational philosophy, combines community based pedagogy and real world problem solving. Such pedagogy develops the capacity for "reflective critical inquiry and collaborative practical action" (Benson, Harkavy & Puckett, 2007, p. 29). "But Dewey is more than pedagogy. When students are active participants in education grounded in community-based public problem solving, they learn to become knowledge producers instead of knowledge consumers; the civic corollary to this form of education is that students are not only active participants in learning – they are educated to become active participants in democratic life instead of being spectators to a shallow

form of democracy” (Saltmarsh, 2007, p. 67). Leadership responsibilities emerge from the commonwealth frame of civic responsibility. Such a shared vision for improving local, national and global communities is consistent with Dewey’s democratic purpose of higher education.

The student development theories and learning theories reviewed provide a framework for understanding the civic and leadership responsibilities of service learners. The research literature confirmed service learning is an effective pedagogy that fulfills the civic mission of the comprehensive community college, as well as the larger democratic purpose of higher education. Recognizing how these theoretical perspectives inform the experiences of service learners lays the foundation for exploring their lived experiences using the lens of service learning as civic pedagogy

### **Synthesis and Conclusion**

Service learning can be a “powerful force for encouraging personal development and for strengthening democracy” (Chickering, 2008 p. 94). To achieve this potential, it is critical to commit to service learning and civic responsibility as integral to the democratic mission of higher education (Jaworski, 1996). “Service Learning, at its core, and American higher education in general should prepare students for lives of critical inquiry, active civic participation and leadership as socially responsible members of their diverse communities, locally, nationally and globally” (Franco, 2005, p. 135). Franco stated that community colleges must recommit to the mission of the open access, comprehensive community college that includes strong transfer programs, preparing students for twenty-first century careers, and “preparing students for the work of democracy in the world’s dominant democracy” (Franco, 2005, p. 119). Franco challenged community college to fulfill their historical purpose as America’s democracy colleges.

“Civic responsibility, however, is not something that higher education simply defines for itself and then attempts to meet through appropriate programs and policies. On the contrary, what constitutes our civic responsibility is something that is constantly being defined and redefined jointly by our institutions and the larger society” (Astin, 2000, p. 125). There is significant evidence that higher education is re-committing to engaging students as both citizens and scholars; both in general (Astin, et al., 2000; Boyte & Hollander, 1999; Campus Compact, 2007; Colby, et al., 2003), as well as at community colleges specifically (Franco, 2005; Kozeracki, 2000; Prentice & Robinson, 2007). Preparing students for lives of engaged democratic citizenship is a strategic priority for achieving the civic mission of the comprehensive community college and democratic purpose of higher education Dewey proposed.

While the academic and student development benefits of service learning have been documented (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, et al, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, et al., 2001; Prentice & Robinson, 2007; Wang & Rogers, 2006) the full impact of participating in service learning on developing students’ commitment to active civic life is an emerging area of inquiry. Prentice (2011) investigated the impact of service learning experiences among community college students and found a statistically significant increase in community college service learners’ levels of civic engagement compared to students who did not participate in service learning. However, there continues to be a lack of research exploring the lived experiences of community college service learners (Kozeracki, 2000). A deeper exploration of service learning as civic pedagogy using the commonwealth framework of civic and leadership responsibilities will further illuminate the documented academic and civic benefits of service participation among community college students.

In this chapter I have reviewed the service learning research and literature related to two

broad themes: “The Democratic Purpose of Higher Education” and “Theoretical Backgrounds of Service Learning.” In the first section, I moved from a general perspective on the larger, democratic purpose of education as proposed by the work of John Dewey to the civic mission of the comprehensive community college. The specific citizenship outcomes that emerge from service learning as a civic pedagogy were identified. Next, the learning and student development theories relevant to students’ service learning experiences were presented. Finally, the leadership and civic responsibilities that emerge from the commonwealth framework of civic responsibility were introduced. These theoretical domains provide a context for understanding the lived experiences of service learners.

This review of the literature has established a background and context for my dissertation research. However, the literature documenting academic and personal benefits of service learning did not include the stories of service learners or provide a full understanding of their lived experiences. In Chapter three the research design to gather and analyze the narrative stories of community college service learning participants utilizing the framework of service learning as civic pedagogy is described. This research will provide community college faculty and administrative leaders a deep understanding of how to more effectively serve their communities and fulfill their mission as America’s democracy colleges.

### **CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, the rationale for selecting the qualitative research methodology of narrative inquiry for my dissertation research is described. The methodological process of qualitative research generally, and narrative inquiry specifically, are a good theoretical and ideological fit for my research investigating the habits of active, democratic citizenship revealed in the life stories of service learning participants. Understanding the experiences of service learning participants will enhance the use of service learning as a civic pedagogy. For faculty and administrative leaders, this deeper knowledge and understanding contributes to the achievement of the democratic mission of the comprehensive community college.

First, the specific research design I used for conducting the study is presented. I briefly describe the research site identified for the study, Service Learning Community College (SLCC). (A comprehensive description of the institutional mission, demographics, and cultural context of SLCC is included in Appendix A, along with a narrative summary of the history and evolution of their service learning program.) Detailed information outlining how participants were selected, narrative interviews were conducted, and the interview data were analyzed is included to provide readers sufficient background and context. Next, the rigorous qualitative research design standards I followed to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of my narrative research methodology and holistic-content data analysis. Finally, the ethical considerations for entering the narrative inquiry research space with the students who participated are discussed. This overview provides a transparent view of the research process so that other researchers can determine how my findings translate to other settings and studies.

## **Theoretical and Ideological Foundations**

I selected a qualitative methodology for this study because the research questions I developed are consistent with Shram's (2006) guiding assumptions for qualitative inquiry. My research questions explored the experiences of service learners to discover a deeper, richer understanding of their experiences using the lens of service learning as civic pedagogy. This search for understanding is consistent with a qualitative research stance. Shram indicated that understanding is gained through "direct personal experiences in real world settings" (p. 7). My narrative exploration of the civic experiences of service learning participants was a mutual process of discovery that resulted in a more holistic, contextual understanding of a complex experience. This social construction of knowledge is another fundamental principle of a qualitative research stance (Shram, 2006).

Shank (2006) defined qualitative research as a "systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" (p. 6). I identified qualitative inquiry as an appropriate methodology because my research questions explored how service learners understand and make meaning from their experiences. Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to study a complex experience holistically to establish a richer, contextual understanding (Shank, 2006). "Qualitative research questions tend to focus on process rather than variance, are specific with respect to place, and draw on a relatively small group that is not meant to serve as a sample of a larger population" (Rogers, 2003, p. 5). These tenets of a qualitative stance are not considered limiting factors; instead these are inherent aspects of the search for deeper understanding. Because the qualitative stance begins with a different agenda, the outcomes can be ambiguous and evolve as the inquiry proceeds. "A good narrative analysis prompts the reader to think beyond the surface of the text, and there is a move toward a broader community" (p. 13).

Several traditions exist within the qualitative paradigm, including phenomenology, grounded theory, case study, ethnography, and biography, among others (Creswell, 1998). The methods of inquiry in grounded theory, case study, and ethnography were not consistent with my research questions and were not considered for my study. Phenomenology investigates the lived experiences of individuals to identify the essential structures of a particular phenomenon such as service learning (Moustakas, 1994). I considered phenomenology as an option for my research, however two limiting factors emerged. First, the civic experiences of service learning participants that come through the recursive process of reflection are not bound to the specific service act. The stories of these experiences are frequently linked to the larger narratives of service learning participants' lives. Secondly, the fragmentation of narrative data required to establish a common essence or universal structure associated with the phenomena is not consistent with my research questions. In contrast, narrative inquiry emphasizes a holistic analysis of the civic experiences of service learners in the context of their life stories.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry begins “with experience as expressed in the lived and told stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 40). Individuals think about and tell the stories of their life experiences narratively. Narrative reflections reveal truths about the civic experiences of service learners (Reissman, 2008). Stories also provide a way for people to make sense of their identities and provide coherence and continuity to experience (Lieblich, et al., 1998). Narrative inquiry provides a deeper understanding of the civic experiences of service learning participants without fragmenting the content and context of their stories. The way students reflect upon and construct the stories of their service learning experiences and frame these stories in the context of their life provides a robust opportunity for narrative research.

Narrative inquiry is well suited for researchers seeking a deeper understanding of complex lived experiences (Lieblich, et al., 1998). My research questions focus on the narrative reflections of service learners using the lens of civic responsibility for the common good. Narrative inquiry fits with my research questions and also connects with the principles of good practice for service learning (Honnet & Paulson, 1989; Howard, 2001). Effective service learning includes a narrative reflective component where participants integrate their service experiences with course content. Service learning participants have unique stories to share about these experiences. This narrative inquiry allowed the meaning from these stories to emerge. In this way, narrative inquiry may lead to more traditional, theory-oriented research questions.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described five aspects of narrative thinking: temporality, people, action, certainty, and context. Temporality is conceptualized as personal change over time. The goal of narrative inquiry is to reveal this growth and development by analyzing the stories people tell about their life experiences. People are viewed as agents of this narrative process. Actions are viewed as narrative signs that must be contextually understood prior to attaching meaning or significance. Narrative inquiry brings the context of lived experiences to this process of understanding.

“In narrative inquiry, the distinction between fact and fiction is muddled” (p. 179). Certainty is inherently tentative in narrative thinking, based on the temporality of an unforeseen future. In contrast, context is ever present in narrative thinking. “Context is necessary for making sense of any person, event, or thing” (p. 32). From these aspects of narrative thinking, a continually unfolding, constructivist understanding of making meaning from experience emerges. Narrative thinking can be contrasted with a more positivistic “grand narrative” where truth is absolute (p. 29).

Narrative inquiry is both a means and method for understanding experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This inherently experiential perspective is informed by the philosophical work of John Dewey. For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Dewey's personal and social understanding of experience facilitates a deeper understanding of educational life. This understanding emerges in the narrative stories individuals tell each other through the educational process. "People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context" (p. 2). The parallel philosophical approach connecting narrative thinking and educational experiences like service learning strengthens the fit between my research questions and narrative inquiry as my methodology.

Clandinin and Connelly also credit Dewey for identifying temporality as a key construct of the narrative approach to understanding the transformational nature of experience. Every experience has a temporal beginning, middle and end, and also exists in the evolving life experience of each individual. Additionally, experiences take place in a particular setting or situation that further contextualizes the meaning and significance for the individual. "Context is necessary for making sense of any person, event, or thing" (p. 32). Narrative inquiry occurs at the intersection the participants' personal and social interactions in both time and place. Individuals make meaning of their lived experiences through the stories they share with one another (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly described a "three-dimensional narrative inquiry space" to illustrate this framework of time, place and people (p. 50).

Clandinin and Connelly also described the interpersonal nature of the narrative research process as participants and researcher enter into the three dimensional research space together. As researchers, we become an intrinsic part of the overall process and part of the story. The stories individuals tell researchers provide insight into their experiences; however, these stories

can only approximate the actual lived experience which can never be duplicated in the retelling. “What starts to become apparent as we work within our three-dimensional space is that as narrative inquirers we are not alone in this space. This space enfolds us and those with whom we work. Narrative inquiry is a relationship inquiry as we work in the field, move from field to field text, and from field text to research text” (p. 60). The three dimensional narrative inquiry space reveals a reciprocal and recursive process in which participants, the researcher, and the research audience, co-construct meaning from experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lieblich, et al., 1998).

The constructivist nature of qualitative research generally (Shank, 2006), and narrative inquiry in particular (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), results in the need for authenticity. Lincoln and Guba (2000) presented five lenses to view and evaluate authenticity in qualitative research. The first lens looks at the fair and balanced approach to the topic: authentic research presents multiple points of view. Next, authentic research designs incorporate a genuine, holistic approach that is inclusive of participants’ life experiences. Authentic research also provides opportunity to think critically about the lessons that emerge. Authentic qualitative research also results in an appropriate call to action based on these lessons. Finally, authentic research can serve as a foundation for further research and education. Because narrative inquiry does not differentiate between fact and fiction, authenticity ensures that the audience can make meaning of the findings in an appropriate and contextual way (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The guiding philosophical foundations of narrative inquiry are consistent with my research questions and the design of my study. These philosophical connections emerged from a narrative view of the transformational educational experiences of service learners combined with

the habits of democratic citizenship. Narrative inquiry provides a perspective to understand the complex experiences of service learners that is not currently published.

Narrative inquiry revealed a deeper, richer understanding of the civic experiences of service learners. Meaning emerged from the stories they told in the context of their lived experiences as active, engaged citizens and leaders. Community college leaders can use this deeper understanding to improve service learning program design and implementation. This is important because service learning as a civic pedagogy is recognized as a particularly effective strategy to achieve the democratic mission of the comprehensive community college (Franco, 2005). My research, analysis and findings have illuminated these experiences in ways not currently reported in the literature.

### **Research Design**

This study investigated the experience of service learning participants at a comprehensive community college with an established service learning program. The selected research site, Service Learning Community College (SLCC) is a comprehensive community college in the United States. The college was founded in 1967 and currently offers eighty-four different degree and certificate programs in vocational and technical programs, as well as major and transfer programs in the arts and sciences. Community based continuing education and workforce development programs are also provided as part of the comprehensive curriculum. Enrollment is just over 8,100 students at multiple campuses located in both urban and rural communities across a seven county service area. The service learning program was developed over 10 years ago and has matured and become institutionalized as an integral part of the college's mission and curriculum. The primary goals of the college's service learning program are to meet community needs and advance students' understanding of specific course content and civic learning

objectives. A narrative summary of the history and evolution of the SLCC service learning program is included in Appendix A. This description of the institutional mission, demographics, and cultural context create a framework for understanding SLCC's commitment to serving the local community through a full array of programs and services. This context also provides insight on the experiences of SLCC students as service learners. This description also allows readers to contextualize the finding of my analyses and translate these findings to other institutional settings.

### **Participant Selection**

Qualitative research involves small, purposefully selected samples that are studied in great depth (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A sample of five to eight participants is sufficient to complete a rigorous qualitative inquiry (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Seven students were selected to participate in this research. Convenience sampling was employed as all participants were students at SLCC. Purposeful nominations were utilized to ensure that the selected students had meaningful service learning experiences and therefore had stories to share (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Faculty who use service learning in their courses were asked to nominate students who had described meaningful service learning experiences in their previous academic service learning reflection assignments. The nomination process was facilitated through the SLCC service learning program coordinator. Nominated students were contacted by e-mail and invited to participate. The initial correspondence with the faculty and students described the general themes of objectives of my study, the anticipated time commitment, and the students' roles and responsibilities as potential participants in the process. An effort to intentionally identify a research sample that represented the diversity of student demographics and curricular programs across the institution was made to ensure that a broad range of narrative stories and life

experiences were included in the data collection. This strategy provided maximum variation in the selected sample prior to analyzing the narrative data for common themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

All thirty-two faculty members who include service learning in their course syllabus were contacted to solicit nominations. Forty-two students were nominated by seven instructors representing SLCC's comprehensive curriculum. I worked with the Service Learning Coordinator to select the students from this list to invite based on the priority to have a balanced sample that represented a full range of curricular programs. Eight of the nominated students were invited to attend initial information meetings to learn more about participating in the study. At these initial meetings students were provided information about the study, and completed the participant profile questionnaire and the necessary research consent forms. All seven students who attended the initial meeting chose to participate. One student who was invited did not attend the initial meeting. For additional information on replicating this research the correspondence with the faculty and students, as well as the participant profile questionnaire, and consent form are included in Appendix B. Throughout the nomination and selection process communication with both the faculty and students was facilitated by the SLCC Service Learning Coordinator.

Two female students responded very quickly to the invitation to participate, followed by two more. At this point I prioritized identifying male participants so my research findings were not skewed to a female point of view. Four men were then re-invited and three chose to participate.

The goal of the nomination and selection protocol was not to develop a representative sample because qualitative inquiry is not intended to be generalizable. However, I did intentionally identify students from varying curricular programs. The information included in

Table One summarizes the seven participants' biographic and academic information gathered from the pre-interview student information questionnaires and from the stories the students chose to share during our interviews.

**Table One - Students' Biographic and Academic Information.**

| <b>Name</b>              | <b>Demographic Information</b>               | <b>Academic Information</b>                                      | <b>Academic Service Learning Projects</b>                 |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| Cynthia Solis de la Cruz | Age: 45<br>Gender: Female<br>Race: Hispanic  | Class: Sophomore<br>Major: Addictionology<br>Human Services      | 1. Homeless Shelter Administration<br>2. Grief Counseling |
| Adam Nickerson           | Age: 27<br>Gender: Male<br>Race: Caucasian   | Class: Freshman<br>Major: Human Resources<br>Business Management | 1. Flood Response Certification                           |
| Brenda Giordano          | Age: 44<br>Gender: Female<br>Race: Caucasian | Class: Sophomore<br>Major: Nursing                               | 1. Family Childcare<br>2. Youth Health Fair               |
| Jeff Dalton              | Age: 18<br>Gender: Male<br>Race: Caucasian   | Class: Freshman<br>Major: General Studies                        | 1. Youth Fitness Event<br>2. Cancer Fund Raiser           |
| Kennedy Martens          | Age: 18<br>Gender: Female<br>Race: Caucasian | Class: Freshman<br>Major: Communications                         | 1. Elder Care<br>2. Sexual Assault Awareness Event        |
| Mark Baxter              | Age: 20<br>Gender: Male<br>Race: Caucasian   | Class: Sophomore<br>Major: Construction Trades                   | 1. Habitat for Humanity<br>2. Campus Athletics Project    |
| Linda Mason              | Age: 22<br>Gender: Female<br>Race: Caucasian | Class: Freshman<br>Major: Addictionology<br>Human Services       | 1. Habitat for Humanity<br>2. Grief Counseling            |

The seven students who participated exemplify a wide range experiences indicative of the comprehensive community college: including students from developmental, vocational, technical, and transfer programs; as well as returning adult students, and younger students with concurrent high school enrollment.

### **Conducting the Narrative Interviews**

As the primary researcher for this study, I entered into a research partnership with the selected service learning participants through the process of conducting narrative research interviews. Shared experiences bring people together and the truth of these experiences is

socially constructed in the stories people tell each other (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My interview guide was constructed to evoke participants' stories through the co-constructed narrative interview process. This mutual process explored the complexity of their service learning experiences utilizing the lenses of civic responsibility and leadership for the common good. The full interview guide is included in Appendix C. My interview guide emerged from my research questions and of the literature. I also integrated a ladder narrative interview technique synthesizing concepts indicative of rigorous service learning reflection in developing the interview guide.

An effective narrative interview process is founded on a mutual relationship between the researcher and the participants (Chase, 2003). Narrative interviews are characterized by “two active participants who jointly construct narratives and meaning” (Reissman, 2008, p. 23). My interview guide was structured to establish rapport then build upon this relationship to explore and illuminate the civic themes that emerged. Chase (2003) recommended focusing on participants' lived experiences by considering both the personal and social dimensions of their narrative reflections. The central questions in the interview guide emerged from my research questions investigating service learning as a civic pedagogy.

1. *How do community college students who have participated in service learning reflect on their service learning and tell the stories of these experiences?*
2. *How do students make meaning of their contributions serving the unmet needs of their communities?*
3. *How do students build upon their service learning experiences to engage in civic leadership for the common good?*

4. *How do students connect their service learning participation, civic responsibility, and leadership skills?*

Reissman (2008) suggested that narrative interviews should explore broad themes related to the research topic to allow participants to construct meaning in the stories they choose to tell. “It is preferable to ask questions that open up topics and allow respondents to construct answers they find meaningful” (p. 25). Two key themes in the interview guide, making a difference as community members and leadership for the common good, are directly related to my research questions.

Price (2002) described a ladder question interview technique that begins with less intrusive questions and proceeds deeper into the experience as participants become comfortable. We began with introductions and stories of daily life. Next, the process of reflecting on the service learning activities began with a description of the overall experience to establish context. Questions that explored the experience in multiple dimensions provided a much more detailed story. Finally, deep questions that articulated values and beliefs revealed the significance and meaning making that emerged from students’ experiences. “The goal in narrative interviewing is to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements” (Reissman, 2008, p. 23). To develop an effective interview guide for this study, four guiding principles were synthesized. First, the personal and social nature of narrative inquiry as a research partnership between researcher and participant created a foundation. Second, the themes that anchored my research questions provided overall structure to the questions. Next, rigorous reflection as an inherent pedagogical principle of service learning guided the participants’ narratives to deeper levels. Finally, the civic responsibility themes that emerged from the commonwealth framework defined in the literature focused the conversation throughout the interview.

Reflection is an integral pedagogical component of effective service learning (Hatcher, Bringle & Muthiah, 2004). Intentionally reflecting on service learning experiences also has potential to enhance the civic dimensions of participants' lives. "Reflection activities direct the student's attention to new interpretations of events" (p. 39). In this study, I asked students to specifically reflect on their service learning and life experiences as active citizens and community members. Hatcher, Bringle, and Muthiah noted the narrative aspects inherent in this process. "Through reflection, the community service can be studied and interpreted, much like a text is read and studied for deeper understanding" (p. 39). My interview guide was developed to evoke the narrative stories participants told as they reflected on their service learning experiences.

Ash and Clayton (2004) presented a model of service learning reflection based on Kolb's model of experiential learning. In this model, participants move from an initial description of service learning experiences through analysis of the experiences in connection with learning the course content. Participants reflected upon how the overall service learning experiences connected to their lives. This "rigorous reflection framework" provided a structure for participants to frame and articulate their stories (p. 140). This framework connected the lessons learned through the service learning experience to their roles as citizens and community members, as well as to their life story. This approach is indicative of "Dewey's theory that reflection leads to better understanding and more informed action" (p. 143). This rigorous reflection model is structured similarly to the ladder interview technique Price (2002) identified. Ash and Clayton's rigorous reflection model provided a purposeful and strategic model to explore the richness and complexity of the service learning experience in my interview guide.

The general themes presented in the literature review also helped structure the interview guide. Specifically, the civic responsibility dimensions identified by the research teams Eyler and Giles (1999), and Wang and Jackson (2005), as well as the concept of education as a public work described by Boyte and Kari's (2000) commonwealth framework established rich thematic areas to explore in the interview. These broad thematic areas provided opportunities for participants to share the stories of their lived experiences. The themes in the interview guide also emerged from the context of the comprehensive community college mission to educate citizens prepared to participate in the work of our democracy, as well as service learning as an effective civic pedagogy.

The interview guide was further refined through a pilot interview. The pilot interview was conducted in July, 2010 with an SLCC student who volunteered with the campus service learning program. The pilot interview demonstrated that academic service learning influences life experiences beyond the classroom in significant ways; thus creating a robust opportunity for narrative research. The transcript of the pilot interview was evaluated to ensure that the interview guide questions, sequence, and format elicited holistic stories of service learners' civic experiences.

The broad themes and individual questions in my interview guide (Appendix C) synthesized all of these guiding principles. Each question was intentionally written to elicit the participants' stories. As the primary researcher conducting the interviews I remained open to the varied stories the students choose to share in response to these questions and was not tied to a specific script (Chase, 2003). The interview guide was used to establish the overall context of the research interviews and provided a fertile environment for participants to share their stories.

## **Data Collection**

Narrative research interviews were conducted between December, 2011 and May, 2012. Prior to the initial interview participants completed a participant profile questionnaire and consent form. I also reviewed issues of consent, confidentiality, and reciprocity prior to each interview. Specific interview questions were not shared with the participants in advance, but the overall themes and research topic were included in the introductory correspondence. The interviews were conducted in person on campus at SLCC with assistance and coordination provided by the SLCC Service Learning Coordinator. During the initial interview each participant was also asked to provide a duplicate copy of a service learning reflection assignment they had previously completed for their academic coursework.

Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. I also made detailed field notes of my initial reflections and overall impressions immediately following each interview. The audio recordings were transcribed within two weeks, and then the transcriptions were compared to the audio recording to identify any omissions or transcription errors. Once the accuracy and completeness of the transcript was determined, I synthesized the interview data, my observations of the interview, and the service learning reflection assignment provided by the participant. This created an initial impression of the student's stories (Lieblich, et al., 1998). The initial impression was then analyzed to reveal any gaps in the student's stories, as well as any gaps in the interview guide themes. A follow-up interview was then scheduled approximately three to five weeks after the first meeting. During the second interview, the student was provided an opportunity to read the initial impression and react to the synthesis and analysis of their stories. This provided a fertile opportunity to further explore the student's stories, service learning experiences and reflections. The second interview was also digitally recorded and transcribed.

This additional narrative data was integrated with the first interview as the initial impression was expanded to create the global impressions presented in Chapter Four.

As the final set of second interviews were being scheduled at the end of the data collection process, I struggled with how best to weave together the individual stories into a cohesive re-telling of the students' diverse perspectives. I decided to bring together their individual stories and the emergent themes they contained by concluding my data collection with a focus group interview. Four students were able to participate in this group discussion which was scheduled during the SLCC final examination week for Spring semester, 2011. This conversation explored the broad themes I was beginning to identify across the students' varied experiences. This dialogue confirmed that my initial identification of common themes was consistent across their individual experiences and provided another opportunity for the students to provide input on the analysis of their stories. The focus group interview was also digitally recorded and transcribed. This transcription provided an organizing framework for answering my research questions in Chapter Five.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of the narrative interview data followed the "holistic-content" approach identified by Lieblich, et al. (1998). I listened to and read each transcript multiple times to develop an initial impression. Any incomplete, inconsistent, or contradictory content was identified, as well as any gaps in themes contained in the interview guide. Through this process of data analysis, the transcripts were transformed into an initial impression. This research text was reviewed with each participant in the follow-up interview. This member check provided an opportunity to ensure my data analysis and synthesis of the student's narrative stories was authentic and trustworthy. At the end of the second interview a mutual decision was made with

each participant to determine if additional interviews were required to effectively tell the story. For all seven students, after two individual interviews we determined no additional meetings were necessary to complete the re-telling of their service learning experiences.

Based on the second interview transcript, the initial impression was expanded to create a global impression that illuminated the student's service learning experiences and reflections. This global impression integrated broad themes from both transcripts, including structure, events, and transitions within the stories. Further analysis explored the deeper, rigorous reflection of the student's service learning experiences using a civic lens. The stories that emerged during the rigorous reflection interview process were compared and contrasted with the original academic reflection assignment. The participant's self-evaluation of their lived experiences was also included in the global impression. Finally, the connections between the participants' life stories, service learning experiences and civic responsibilities were analyzed. The original interview transcriptions, the initial impressions, and global impressions were also shared with my methodologist for review. This process of holistic-content data analysis was completed for all seven students.

Further data analysis was also conducted to explore the participants' narratives collectively and compare the holistic content across the seven global impressions to look for patterns in the themes that emerged. While the initial interview transcripts represented the viewpoint of each individual's experiences, multiple perspectives emerged from the intersections of the participants' stories. As I identified how the narrative themes connected and diverged I was mindful of the influence of contextual and interpersonal aspects of the narrative research stance (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The goal for data analysis was to view the participants' narratives holistically as I looked for patterns in the themes that emerged.

## **Reciprocity**

The interview participants did not receive compensation for their participation. This information was shared with them throughout the nomination and selection process. During the interviews, several of the participants disclosed that they personally benefitted from the deeper exploration and reflection of their service learning and civic engagement experiences our interviews provided. Other benefits were not identified. It is very unlikely participants were harmed through their involvement in the narrative interview process.

Prior to the interviews, I disclosed that the rigorous reflection questions in the interview could potentially intrude upon participants' memories and influence their future thoughts and aspirations. I did not anticipate this would be a negative or traumatic experience in any way; however, I remained mindful of each participant's reactions. I intentionally worked to create a positive interview experience by reminding participants that they could choose the content, context and depth of the stories they shared. I established rapport with the participants, showed respect for their lives, and listened attentively in an effort to create an accurate re-telling of their stories and experiences. The students often thanked me for taking the time to listen to their experiences.

Through this process, I was also mindful that as I analyzed the data I was creating my own narrative research text (Ouellette, 2003). I allowed the themes in the participants' stories to guide my analysis and was open to the lessons the stories revealed. I intentionally looked at the narrative data from different perspectives as I moved through the three dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I also checked my interpretations and analysis against the theoretical and conceptual framework that I had established in my research questions (Ouellette, 2003). Finally, I embraced the perspectives and expertise I brought to the collection

and analysis of the data as a qualitative researcher. In this process I created a cohesive retelling of the participants' stories that illuminated the civic themes in their service learning experiences for the participants, me, and other community college leaders.

### **Ethics**

Several ethical considerations were addressed throughout my research. I followed the ethical guidelines established by Colorado State University in seeking approval for and conducting my research. I took the appropriate precautions to ensure each participant gave informed consent and understood the precautions put in place to ensure their privacy and confidentiality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Based on the ethical responsibility to protect my participants' confidentiality pseudonyms for all the participants and the selected research site have been utilized. Each interview was transcribed and checked for error or omissions; thus ensuring accuracy and confidence that the lessons learned emerged from the data. Finally, I took the appropriate precautions to protect the electronic data and records generated throughout the narrative research process.

“In a qualitative study, researchers are commonly involved in long-term and relatively intimate relationships with participants that are both research relationships and social relationships in a particular context” (Rogers, 2003, p. 55). As I entered into the narrative research process I remained aware of my roles as a researcher and partner in the data collection and analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I was both aware and mindful of how my life experiences and biases influence these processes (Reissman, 2008). With these issues appropriately considered I entered into the narrative research process with the participants in a way that allowed their stories to emerge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lieblich, et al., 1998).

It was also important to consider that the ethical issues might “shift and change” as I proceeded through the narrative process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 170). The inherent relational aspect of the narrative inquiry required that ethics be considered beyond the research approval process. As the research proceeded from interviews to field texts and finally to this research text, I maintained a commitment to honor the voices and experiences of the participants in identifying the lessons learned. These efforts created a safe space that resulted in a genuine and authentic inquiry into the students’ life experiences and allowed meaningful lessons to emerge for the students, as well as for service learning practitioners and community college leaders.

### **Trustworthiness and Authenticity**

Trustworthiness and authenticity were prioritized in the rigorous design and transparent implementation of this qualitative study. While quantitative research promotes the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the findings, the qualitative paradigm is based on a different research agenda (Shank, 2006). The qualitative research stance seeks a deeper understanding of experience and acknowledges the “interactive and intersubjective nature of constructing knowledge” (Shram, 2003, p 7). The qualitative research stance does not seek a positivist or absolute truth, instead qualitative researchers design studies that are trustworthy and authentic (Creswell, 1998; Shank, 2006). The research audience is provided with thick descriptions and deep understanding; allowing meaning and significance to emerge.

Trustworthiness is “the degree to which we can depend on and trust” the lessons learned (Shank, 2006, p. 115). Trustworthiness is a combination of dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. Dependability is defined as “the ability to know where the data in a given study come from, how it was collected, and how it was used” (p. 114). Credibility

is established by producing consistent and cohesive data through genuine and honest interactions with the participants. Transferability provides readers with a sufficient description of the research design so as to create the ability to transfer the research to a different setting or population. Finally, confirmability is achieved when “a clear picture of the methodology” and “a clear map for creating a similar study” are provided (p. 116). Taken together, these four concepts communicate trustworthiness in qualitative research. I have integrated these concepts into the design and implementation of my research. In narrative inquiry, transparency in the processes of data collection and analysis as field texts are transformed to a final research text establishes trustworthiness (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lieblich, et al., 1998). The lessons I learned in this research emerged from the lived experiences the students shared in the stories they told.

Standards for effective qualitative research design ensured rigor and quality throughout the implementation of my study (Richards, 2005). A rigorous study is “designed carefully, constructed properly, and analyzed correctly” (Shank, 2006, p. 114). Multiple strategies were utilized in my research design to achieve a rigorous approach resulting in trustworthy and authentic findings. These strategies included spending extended time with participants to gather reliable narrative data, and providing opportunities for participants to verify both the initial analysis of the transcripts as well as the overall themes that emerged as I created my own research narrative. By sharing my initial impressions and thematic analyses with the participants and my methodologist, I provided multiple opportunities to ensure accuracy. Comparing the interview data with the participants’ previous academic reflection assignments was another strategy utilized to develop rigor. Finally, I have included “detailed and thick descriptions” throughout my findings to provide transparency for my audience; thus allowing readers to

develop their own interpretations and understandings (Creswell, 1998, p. 203). These strategies establish a rigorous approach that builds trust in my findings.

“In its most prevalent forms, narrative research does not require replicability of results as a criterion for its evaluation. Thus readers need to rely more on the personal wisdom, skills, and integrity of the researcher” (Lieblich, et al., 1998, p. 10). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described a limitation of narrative inquiry associated with the mindfulness of the researcher. “[N]arrative work requires self-awareness and self-discipline in the on-going examination of text against interpretation, and vice versa” (Lieblich, et al., 1998, p 10). “A language of wakefulness allows [narrative researchers] to proceed forward with a constant, alert awareness of the risks” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 182). Clandinin and Connelly instructed researchers to be aware of and alert to the perspectives of positivist critics, the context of the research, and multiple dimensions of narrative that influence the transitions from field texts to research texts. Based on the intimacy established between myself and participants through the data collection process, I balanced these considerations as the inquiry moved through the interviews and the process of data analysis. Throughout the research I remained wakeful as a researcher to create analyses and findings that are explanatory, authentic, and plausible.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I presented the research design and methodology for my dissertation exploring the civic experiences of service learning participants. Narrative inquiry is the qualitative methodology best suited to investigate my research questions. Narrative inquiry provides a deeper understanding of the complex interactions between the lived experiences of service learners in the context of the democratic mission of the comprehensive community

college. In this study the stories of community college service learners were considered from the perspectives of civic responsibility and leadership for the common good.

Throughout the first three chapters I have connected my research to the philosophies of John Dewey to both anchor and establish context for this inquiry. However, the service learning and civic engagement literature documenting the academic and personal benefits of service learning does not include the stories of service learners or provide a full understanding of their lived experiences. In the next three chapters, the stories of the seven students who participated in my research are presented and analyzed. This research provides a deeper, richer understanding of the experiences of service learners, thus illuminating the predominantly quantitative research previously published, and fills a gap in the literature.

Understanding how serving the unmet needs of their community contributes to students' development of civic values and leadership skills provides valuable information to community college leaders. Academic faculty who utilize service learning benefit from a rich understanding of the student experience, thus increasing the effectiveness of service learning as a teaching methodology. Institutional service learning programs benefit from fully understanding the impact that service learning participation can have across the entire range of civic engagement attitudes and behaviors. Administrators benefit from understanding the impact civic pedagogies such as service learning have when evaluating and funding campus programs. Understanding service learning as a civic pedagogy provides faculty and staff with information on how best to utilize service learning as an effective teaching and learning tool. This understanding fulfills the civic mission of today's comprehensive community college and achieves Dewey's vision for teaching the democratic habits of active citizenship through the integration of experience and education.

## CHAPTER FOUR – THE STUDENTS’ STORIES

As I began collecting stories from the students I was both excited and overwhelmed by the robust narrative data they shared with me. I was struck by their willingness to reflect more deeply on their experiences and their desire to tell their stories. In the re-telling of their stories presented in this chapter, I have attempted to include their words and voices and uphold the narrative principles of my methodology and the holistic-content analysis identified by Lieblich, et al. (1998). For all of the participants I began by summarizing our first interview and creating an initial impression that connected their service experiences to their life stories. Based on the structure of the interview guide (Appendix C) the students shared intimate and personal stories that contributed to both their understanding of self and the importance of serving others. This initial impression was provided to each participant for review at a follow-up interview. This created a structure for the follow up interview to add both depth and context to the content of their stories through further conversation. As I continued to review the transcripts and listen to both interviews, I began to identify metaphors and themes to include in my global impression. I continually revised my impression as I moved recursively through the three dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In developing the global impressions that are presented in this chapter, the narratives represent both the content and analysis of the students’ stories (Ouellette, 2003). The students’ stories about service learning and other significant life experiences provided a guiding framework. I have also included extensive interview excerpts of the students’ stories in their own words to create a context for understanding how they make meaning of these experiences.

The global impressions that emerged from each participant’s stories are presented

individually. To protect confidentiality, I have used pseudonyms selected by the students in the retelling of their stories. I have also used the institutional pseudonym Service Learning Community College (SLCC) and generalized the names of the various community partner agencies where the students provided service. The individual participant's life experience and service learning journeys are unique. By introducing them independently, I am able to honor the distinct voices and highlight the differences and similarities in their experiences.

These global impressions are organized using a consistent format that emerged from the interview data. First, I introduce each student with some descriptive biographical information and a brief summary of my overall impressions. In narrative inquiry, this "context is necessary for making sense of any person, event, or thing" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 32). This is followed by three sections describing the students' *Personal Stories*, *Service Learning Experiences*, and *Reflections*. Each student's story is introduced with a brief biographical overview summarizing the important relationships and events they shared during our interviews. Next, the student describes their academic service learning or other significant volunteer experiences as well as the lessons they learned. Each student's global impression concludes with a synthesis of my reflections and analysis intertwined with each student's own perspective on why these experiences were meaningful.

In the retelling of their stories, I tried to develop a compelling narrative that captures the essence of each student's experiences serving others in their community (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In re-telling each student's stories in this way, I have integrated the themes and lessons that emerged from the student's stories as active citizens and community members. This approach is indicative of Dewey's belief that "reflection leads to better understanding and more informed action" (Ash & Clayton, 2004, p. 143).

## **Cynthia Solis de la Cruz**

*I am who I am.*

Cynthia Solis de la Cruz is a full-time student in her second year at Service Learning Community College. She is a Human Services major with an emphasis in addictive studies. Cynthia is a 45 year old Hispanic female who describes herself as a non-traditional student. She is currently estranged from two adult children as a result of her previous crack cocaine addiction and on-going struggles with her mental health. During our interviews Cynthia openly discussed her addiction, mental health history, and related diagnoses. Cynthia has a family history of alcoholism, and she is in recovery. She aspires to be a licensed professional counselor or court advocate; however, she acknowledges that she is not ready in her own treatment journey to begin helping others full time.

Cynthia ran away from home before completing high school. She spent time living on the streets before getting married and having a son and daughter by age eighteen. Cynthia was later divorced and shared custody of her kids for approximately ten years. During this time she owned a business and experienced an extended period of stability in her life. However, Cynthia later suffered a nervous breakdown that fueled her addiction and resulted in her eventual committal to the state mental hospital. After she was released from the state hospital, Cynthia started working with a court appointed social worker. Because her Social Security Insurance payment did not cover all of her expenses, Cynthia frequented a homeless shelter in her neighborhood for breakfast and dinner. Cynthia completed her GED, moved to [a suburb] where she currently lives with her long-term boyfriend, and started college. She is planning to get married soon and is looking forward to her journeys ahead.

Cynthia has learned how to balance her mental health and her multiple roles in life as a

partner, as a student, and as a recovering addict. She is an honor student at SLCC, is an active member of Phi Theta Kappa, and serves as a peer-mentor in the TRiO program. Cynthia sees herself as a poet and is writing her autobiography to share her story with others. She plans to continue her studies in social work at a local university and hopes to pursue a career as a therapist working with individuals who are dually diagnosed with addiction and mental health issues. Cynthia is a passionate advocate for those living with mental illness and addiction, particularly for women and girls. She is motivated to help other women to get off the streets and succeed without being judged. Throughout our interviews, Cynthia shared her on-going mental health struggles, as well as the therapy strategies that have helped her to be a successful student.

### **Cynthia's Story**

Cynthia grew up with an alcoholic single mother. Her parents divorced when she was two years old. While she a young child, Cynthia's mother knowingly allowed her severe sexual abuse and torture by an adult male acquaintance. This resulted in a split in Cynthia's personality.

*My mother was an alcoholic. My father and mother were broke, divorced when I was two. I am disassociate. I am bipolar. I am borderline personality with post-traumatic stress syndrome. All of this stemming from some abuse that happened at the age of four. I have severe mistrust and defectiveness issues. I didn't realize that I was a disassociate until I was 35 years old and had my first flashback. I always wondered why I blocked out the first fourteen years of my life. Then I realized why. It was like "Ah, no wonder." So I struggled a lot. I've been through two and a half years of trauma therapy and through four years of borderline personality cognitive therapy. I'm a recovering addict. Been through four years of outpatient treatment, and lots of different in-patient treatments. I finally got successful at [the state mental hospital] which is a dual diagnosis treatment center. I think that's why I really want to become an additive chemical dependency counselor working with the dually diagnosed: because I spent so much time either working on my mental issues or working on my chemical dependency issues but never both at the same time. It's like having two broken legs, putting a cast on one and trying to get up and walk while your other leg is still broken. When I went to [the state mental hospital], they put casts on both my legs. I worked on both issues at the same time, and since then, I have been clean and sober for four, coming up on five years now.*

Cynthia dropped out of high school in the ninth grade and began experimenting with drugs and alcohol. Cynthia ran away from home at age 14 and was pregnant with her son at age 15. She was married and had her daughter at age 18. Being a parent created a sense of responsibility for Cynthia that temporarily changed her addictive patterns.

*When I ran away from home I started drinking and I smoked a little bit of weed. If you noticed I got my own tattoo of a pot leaf. I actually put it in myself when I was 14 years old to piss my mother off. It worked really well. I smoked weed for about three weeks, then decided, "No, I don't like that out of control feeling." It felt like what happened when I disassociated 'cause you're about a half second behind everything when you're under the influence of marijuana. So I drank and did some speed, some acid. But when I got pregnant I quit doing everything because then my life was not my own anymore. God had given me the gift of taking care of this other life. And so I gave up my love of using.*

Cynthia's recreational drug use resumed after her children were born. Eventually, her first marriage ended in divorce as she continued to live with undiagnosed borderline personality and dissociated identity disorders. Cynthia shared custody of her children and supported her family working as a housekeeper, later running her own house cleaning business.

This period of family stability was interrupted when Cynthia's son accused another family member of sexual abuse. When she realized she couldn't protect her son, Cynthia had a nervous breakdown. In response her week-end recreational drug use spiraled into a life altering addiction. Cynthia lost custody of her kids and spent the next ten years addicted to crack cocaine.

*I didn't use for 11-12 years while I had my kids. I didn't drink much because I was afraid of alcohol. I had seen what it had done to my mother and that that was very dangerous. Then my son got molested and tried to commit suicide because he was afraid that he was homosexual and that his father would no longer love him or accept him. When he told me what had happened, I sat on the edge of the bed having a nervous breakdown. Up until this point, my son was twelve, mommy could fix anything. But I could not be a man for him. I could not be his father. That's what he needed, and yet my mind could not grasp that. And I was having what I now know was my first nervous breakdown. My mind could not grasp the fact that I could not fix it for him. I was never intended to be a father to my son. I just sat on the edge of the bed, and I didn't know what to do. I was angry; I knew if I moved from the edge of the bed, I was liable to go kill the person my son said had hurt him... Finally after three days, my friend was like, "Look, just take a hit." So then I hit that pipe and that's when I became addicted. I didn't feel: I didn't feel happy, I didn't*

*feel sad, I didn't feel scared. I just felt total nothingness and I could think. I could think what to do. The shutdown of the whole mental meltdown seemed to stop, but unfortunately, that's not the way it worked. Every time I wasn't high, I would melt down again. Everything would cave in on me again. So I would stay high for ten years. I just stayed high. I ended up losing the kids. When I lost the kids, I couldn't stay in the house because around every corner was the shadow of their laughter.*

The loss of her children has a profound effect on Cynthia and her motivation to resist her addictions. During this time her drug use exacerbated her underlying mental health diagnoses. Eventually, she would lose everything. Cynthia survived life on the streets by prostituting herself. She still struggles balancing how this part of her survival is viewed by others.

*I used to speak very openly about the fact that I was a prostitute, and a lot of times I still do in meetings and in group therapy when I feel that it's warranted. Because I think that a lot of women have a hard time looking in the mirror and admitting that they have prostituted themselves. And just to hear me say that out loud in public in a group setting or therapeutic setting will enable another woman to look herself in the mirror and say, "Hey, I've done that too, and realize it's not promiscuity or sleeping around." I don't like to dance around that issue. I really don't. But I've become a little sensitive because of my boyfriend. He is extremely angry because he doesn't want [people to know]. It's just become this struggle within me. "What do I say, what don't I say?" To me, it's not a big deal. It's who I was. It's part of what made me the person I am today. It's what's given me the strength to stand in this world and be who I am.*

Cynthia was initially hesitant to discuss her experiences as a prostitute in detail, alluding to “*the thing's women do to survive.*” However in our second interview Cynthia was able to more honestly tell her story, and in the process reframes her experiences surviving life on the streets as a prostitute into a sign of her strength and resilience. This resilience is a key theme throughout Cynthia's stories.

A significant factor contributing to Cynthia's instability during her career as an addict was her mental health diagnoses. Based on the severe sexual abuse and torture she experienced as a four year old child, Cynthia has disassociated identity disorder. Cynthia has little or no memories of her first 14 years of life; however, she is recovering some of her earlier memories in therapy.

*I believe that the disassociation was for my benefit. Because [God] took me out of that situation and kept those memories [separate] until I was old enough to handle what had happened. I took my anger and put it over here only for when I needed to be protecting myself. I was usually this happy-go-lucky person who was pretty easy going. But if part of me felt threatened... it's kind of scary. It even scared me when I started flashing back. Well one flashback was so... "I was four and the man had me up on the counter and was hurting me. My mom walked in, and she yelled at him. I can remember feeling so relieved. He turns around and says something to her that I can't hear, then she turns around and leaves me in there." That one put me in the hospital. I'm thinking I blocked out fourteen years of memories; if they all come, I'm in trouble. If they were all that bad, I'm in serious trouble. All of a sudden, I'm four and in excruciating pain. And that was the flashback. So I spent two weeks in the hospital extremely paranoid because I felt like a Mack truck hit me from behind. I couldn't stop looking behind me. I always had to be up against something. The psychiatrist comes in and wants to talk to me, and I can't stop looking behind 'cause the door is behind me, and I think memories are coming in the door. He says to me, "Miss de la Cruz, I really need to talk to you, and I need you to look at me." So I'm thinking that it's very important that I speak to the doctor, but I've really got to keep an eye on the door in case the memories come and get me. I knew I was not okay at this point. So I take the stuffed animal that I'm holding, and I pick it up and I say, "Look, I've got to talk to the doctor. I need you to look out for the memories. You let me know if they are coming." And I stuck the dog on my shoulder and I looked the doctor in the eye and say, "What can I do for you doctor?"*

Cynthia was eventually committed to the state mental hospital where she received treatment for her both her addiction and her mental health. Cynthia repeatedly returns to the metaphor of having two broken legs to describe the dual diagnosis treatment. This combination of intensive therapy helped Cynthia to break the cycle of her addiction and mental health status.

*It took me awhile, but I finally found the right counselors, the right programs to get me back together again. Because if you take the shame away, you take the guilt away that is not yours. You have to take on the responsibility for the stuff that is yours; because you've got to do that too. Then get rid of it all. When you deal with it, get rid of it. Let it go. Then you can go on. You're not stuck. If I try to be super Cynthia and do everything, be everything, I end up expelling too much energy without putting anything back in. I've done that before. I've been super mom and super wife, all of these things. Then you end up falling down. Because you can't expel more than you put in and you end up empty. And that's not a good place to be.*

Cynthia is aware that her recovery is a continual and on-going process. As Cynthia learns more about navigating her mental health diagnoses, she reclaims all of her experiences and integrates them into her identity as a survivor.

Cynthia's experiences as a survivor prepare her for serving others as a helper and role model.

*If I could take the shame away from a person who has a mental illness, they could just say, "I'm whole." If I could have a woman stand up and say, "I was in an abusive relationship" or "I have been a prostitute and I'm no longer a prostitute anymore" and not have that shame. If I could just get across that what you've done, you do when you're in survival mode. When you're four years old and you're placed in a position where you have to survive; that's not your choice. You don't have a choice of what happens in your mind at that moment. It just happens. Or what you're born with that you don't have control over. If you can take that shame away, and you can take the denial away, then you can get the work done that needs to be done. It's not easy work. But you can get it done so you can get to a place where you can move on with your life.*

There is a tension in Cynthia's stories of survival between accepting and overcoming her past and her boyfriend's shame or embarrassment about her journey. She struggles to find herself in the midst of her many life experiences and the pattern of keeping secrets in an addicted family. In discovering that she has nothing to be shameful about, Cynthia realizes her own self-worth and the importance of prioritizing her well-being. She also discovers strength that comes from being in relationships with others.

*Because I spent so much time trying to keep everybody's secrets, trying to make sure everybody was okay, taking care of my mom, making sure my sister didn't get upset, making my ex-husband didn't get upset, or nobody else got upset; I was losing [myself] all the time flipping between alters. I was disassociate. I was trying to hide all of that and the fact that I wasn't okay. And now: if I have a mental disability, then I have a mental disability. If I'm in recovery; then I'm in recovery. I am not going to hide behind any more rocks. But I'm a part of a church family now. I'm a part of this community college family now. I love it; I love being a part of a community. I love being a part of my neighborhood. I don't neighbor too much, but I do know folks. I just love it because it really is important. I wasn't sure I could do it, but with every step I know I can do it more and more and more.*

As Cynthia describes surviving her personal history and recovery, she recognizes these experiences are an integral part of her identity. She has taken responsibility for her own journey and understands that accepting herself is the key to creating genuine relationships with others.

Cynthia's resiliency as a survivor gives her the capacity to help others. Her recovery,

mental stability, and sobriety are a collective source of strength and pride as she pursues her associate's degree. She is hopeful to continue on for her bachelor's in social work and a career serving the dually diagnosed. Cynthia is also aware that based on her on-going journey, she may not yet be fully ready for her chosen vocation; however, she is committed to moving forward. Cynthia is passionate about helping others just as she was helped along in her own journey. This perspective provides a context for understanding her service learning experiences.

### **Cynthia's Service Learning Experiences**

Cynthia completed her first academic service learning project in Fall 2009. She volunteered twenty hours at a homeless shelter where she had previously been a client after her release from the state hospital.

*I did my service learning project over at [a homeless shelter]. I don't know if you are familiar with [the shelter.] It started out when Pastor Marshall and his wife started running around in their van 23 years ago with bag lunches, bags of sandwiches for the homeless. He just started running around passing out these little bag lunches. Then they opened a building and started serving breakfast and dinner. Now they are at the point where they have full facilities. They have a men's homeless shelter that has 63 beds. They have a kitchen where they serve two meals a day to probably over 600 people a month. They have a transitional living department that has 23 units. What I got to do was to shadow their transitional living case manager which was really funny. The guy I initially spoke to was the director of transitional living. And he says, "You'll be shadowing Doug, our case manager." So the first day I walk in there, here come this guy, this HUGE guy, pulling off his biker helmet and a leather jacket, sleeved in tattoos, bald with a mustache down to here. It actually hung way down. This guy was so large that they had to put sides on his vest. And [the manager] says, "Oh. There's Doug now." I'm thinking, "Wow. This is the case manager? Okay." I wasn't expecting anything real stringent because I know my pastor is kind of laid back. But I wasn't expecting anything like this guy. So the manager introduces me, and I said, "Hi! I'm going to shadow you for a couple of weeks." He says, "Well, I don't have much of a shadow for you to follow, but I guess if you can keep up." He was a blast. I learned a lot from him; we really had a lot of fun.*

Cynthia wasn't sure what to expect in returning as a volunteer at the shelter. This anxiousness is evident as she describes her meeting with Doug, who isn't quite what she anticipated in a supervisor. The overall experience was very positive and empowering for Cynthia. She spoke

passionately about providing basic food and shelter for those having a difficult time; however, she ultimately focused on the importance of providing dignity and companionship by spending time with the people at the shelter and sharing a simple cup of coffee.

*I used to go down to [the shelter] and get breakfast. I used to go down there and eat because all I had was 540 some dollars a month and \$450 of that went to rent. Before my boyfriend and I met and he started helping me out, I'd go down there and eat. For my project, I got to go in every morning. When I would get there in the morning, the guys who didn't stay in the shelter they were ready for their cup of coffee. I helped with breakfast which was really interesting because the homeless shelter guys have to be out of there by eight o'clock. They would come over to the dining room and I got to help. We would say prayers and hand them their cups. They liked having their cup of coffee. I felt really humbled by the fact that I was able to be the one to hand them a cup of coffee. And I'm grateful that I was given that chance to be the one to talk to somebody when they were having a bad day and not always be the one needing somebody. They really were appreciative to have their cup of coffee in the morning. I was able to be helpful and I liked that. It was... it was pretty cool.*

There was genuine care in her voice as Cynthia described the people at the shelter and her ability to serve them. In particular, Cynthia related to the women in the transitional living unit. She expressed concern for their experiences in the male dominated shelter.

*In transitional living they had women, but they didn't have a woman counselor. As a woman I know that it's difficult to bring up some subjects when you are a woman who's been out on the streets and homeless. There are things that you do; there are situations that you find yourself in that are uncomfortable sometimes for some women to talk about to a man. There was a lady there that was trying to get her kids back. We'd sit and talk at breakfast, and I would say, "You know, I lost my kids too. You'll get them back. You'll be okay." And she'd say, "You're sure?" "Yeah, I'm sure. It's all in God's time. It'll all be alright."*

Cynthia spoke with unconditional regard and acceptance for the people at the shelter. She had been a client and had incredible empathy for those she now served. She valued the opportunity to go back and see her own experience from a new vantage point while still connecting very genuinely to those she served.

Cynthia also described a second service learning experience completed in Fall 2010 with another class at SLCC. Cynthia helped with a holiday event making craft items with grieving

families to help celebrate their memories and cope with death of a loved one. During this project, Cynthia worked two young girls and their mother who had been to the event before.

*I got a family that this was their fourth year. The little girl, the youngest, was only a year and a half when her father died, so she had really no memories of her own that she could really remember. Just stories. Which I could really relate to because I had blocked out of the first fourteen years of my life. And so I have stories that people tell me, but I really don't associate myself with those. And so I could really relate to what she was going through. She didn't want anybody to help her with her project whatsoever. She was going to make her own memories by her own self. And those were going to be hers. It was the first time she was old enough to make some tangible memories that she had actually hold in her hand about her father. And I thought that was really cool. One of the people there was hard of hearing so we had a sign interpreter. And we were singing this silly song and that song. And the little girl looks at me and she's like, "What's that lady doing with her hands?" "Well, she's singing." "What?" And so as she's doing the sign language, because I used to sing a couple of songs in sign language when I was a kid, I'm telling her each word as she's singing. And the refrain, especially, I got the little girl to see that each gesture was a word. That was spectacular. Mom was so upset because the 13 year old didn't want to participate. So I told the mom to let her deal with this whatever way she's going to deal with it.*

Through the project Cynthia was able to connect with both the young girl who wanted to do the project her own way and a teen ager who didn't really want to be there at all. Cynthia demonstrated care for the emotions of the two girls, each of whom who had very different experiences. Cynthia demonstrated her value in relationships as she gave both girls and their mother validation and respect. Cynthia repeatedly talks about wanting to create experiences for girls and young women that empower them and help them to find their pathway to success.

This attitude of help and respect for others is also evident in Cynthia's experiences as both a mentee and a mentor in TRiO. Cynthia shared that as a new student, she felt out of place and isolated at SLCC. However, her TRiO mentor provided a friendly face and place for Cynthia to find a connection on campus.

*I had the most wonderful mentor. Her name was Natalie and she was really a sweet girl. She's like 23, and I looked at this young girl and I was like, "How is she ever going to understand?" But she understood what it was like to be in college; which is what I did not understand. I really felt like an alien here, because I was so out of place. If it hadn't*

*been for Natalie, I don't think I would have stayed here in the TRiO department because I really felt so out of place walking around these halls. I didn't know where to go study. I felt uncomfortable with work. So when I started talking with Natalie, it helped. I had somebody; one face on this campus that if I ran across her, I knew her, you know. Okay, there's one person here I know. We'd run into each other; we had lunch several times. She didn't do anything really spectacular; just say hi to me in the hallways. You know, but that meant so much to me: to have one face that I recognized.*

For Cynthia, making the transition to being a college student was a scary and intimidating process. In the midst of this isolation, Cynthia found a genuine relationship and another example of someone giving her the help she needed to survive. Cynthia brings this same commitment to helping her peers to her own mentoring relationships.

*Being a mentor in TRiO is like a little baby step to being a counselor. And it's difficult. We have six things to go over: time management, stress, test taking strategies... what was the other? There were a couple more I can't remember. Anyway, those are the kind of things that we go over. Then I just kind of ask "What are your classes, what do you need help with?" I'm sort of the go between the advisors and the students. "What do you need some help with? Are you having any problems?" And they tell me, "I'm having this issue, this issue, this issue." And I say, "Okay, well, let's do this and this and this. How does this sound?" And then they don't do it. They're just like my kids. But they're young. They don't understand. I do have one lady whose mother was in the hospital on dialysis. And she started getting depressed. And I explained to her that parents have been real strong and independent. Now her dad is like a little bit lost because Mom's not there to take care of him and she's got to go translate because her mother speaks no English. So she's at the hospital all the time. And neither of her folks speak English, and she's just like, "I feel really strange, and I don't understand what's going on." So I explained to her the concept of the 'Sandwich Generation' where she's now in a position where she's raising her seven and nine year old, caring for her father who has always had his wife do everything for him and a her mother who is now ill. And she's right there in the middle and it's a tough place to be. And she was like, "Ooooh!" That's where it gets rewarding when it clicks for somebody. They say, "Okay. Now I understand." Now she's taking bubble baths and a taking short walks. And those are the things that she does to rejuvenate herself. Those are her self-care just so she can have some little bit of energy put back in so that she doesn't end up empty. Because you can end up empty real easy playing super whoever. I was super Cynthia at one time. I took care of kids, ran the housekeeping business, cleaned the house. You know, I did everything. And guess what happens. You expel all your energy. You will end up empty. When you're empty, you fall down. You can care for nobody if you're down. And so she's taking fifteen minutes to put back into yourself. That's where mentoring is rewarding. Those were few and far between but I guess that's what you look forward to.*

For Cynthia, mentoring is a mutual process. She talks about giving advice to her mentor, as well as the lessons she learns from her mentees. She is proud that she has wisdom to share with others; as this builds her own confidence as a future social worker. Cynthia understands her role as a mentor and role model is one of profound impact on the emotional welfare and academic success of her mentees.

*The other part of being a peer mentor is what I get out of it. When one of my mentees, her kids were running and screaming and bothering her, tearing the house up every time she sat down to study. I said the problem with their screaming and yelling is they're trying to get your attention. Negative attention is better than no attention. Right now nothing is productive because you're not getting your homework done, they're getting in trouble, and it's all on non-productive. I suggested when she sit down to do homework, she set them down because they're both school age. Get their books out right there at the same table with you, and you all sit and do your homework. And while you're doing your homework, you're setting the example that school is important and that's what you expect of them. And you're right there too if they have a question, "Okay, here, I'll answer your question. Here, I'll answer your question. Okay, now you answer my question." You see what mom's doing here. She did try that, and all her kids have gotten their homework done and turned in to the teachers on time, no late homework for two weeks now. No arguing. And her grade in writing has gone up, and her grade in math has gone up. She got a 70 on her bio exam which she was really struggling in before because she couldn't study. Every time she sat down to study, these kids would spaz out. They're vying for her attention, her schoolwork is their competition. If you take that and not make it their competition, then you're not going to have that issue. When she comes back and tells me that they had a nice evening, that they got all their school work done and were able to sit down and watch a movie together that to me is like, "Okay, I got that one right." I don't always get it right, but it's very rewarding when you do.*

Cynthia not only attends to the academic assistance her mentee requires, she also addresses the parenting and self-care concerns that seem to be interfering as well. This is another example of Cynthia's pattern empowering other women by providing dignity and validation. Cynthia's ability to recognize these need in the lives of others, as well as her comfort in serving these needs, emerges from her own life experiences.

Through her various service experiences Cynthia continues to learn about herself. She is discovering her potential to serve and empower others in their journeys, even as she continues

her own. Cynthia recognizes the ethics and responsibility of mentoring and caring for others in this process. This ethic of care is evident in the unconditional regard Cynthia demonstrates to those she serves. Serving her community has helped Cynthia to see her ability to build relationships with others, be a role model, and advocate for others.

## **Reflection**

Cynthia's capacity to understand, connect with, and serve others comes from her life experiences. As her journey continues, she continuously navigates the tension between receiving help from others and a career serving or advocating for others. At various times during our interviews, Cynthia talked about her awareness of being co-dependent and the intrinsic rewards she gets from helping others. Cynthia's confidence comes from self-acceptance of her life story and in her own recovery and sobriety. Cynthia's faith and compassion for others also help her to understand her ability to serve others through the connections and empathy she can bring to assisting others, particularly other women and girls.

*I've been a runaway girl. I've been a young girl who's been in trouble. And what I have to give by giving back is just empathy, I've been there. I know where [others] are coming from. That's hard to say in a lot of situations. A lot of people say it, "Oh, I understand." A lot of people don't understand. A lot of people don't understand what it is like to be a fourteen year old girl out on the streets. A lot of people do not understand what it is like to have to give up of yourself to have a place to sleep and eat. A lot of people don't understand what it is like to have lost a parent at a very young age. Those are the things that I can give back. Everything that I have been through in my life that seems like a horrible thing is not. There's a purpose for it. And the purpose is that I was comforted during those times. God took care of me. So that when I've come across somebody else who is going through the same situation, I can show them comfort and I can say "This can be dealt with, because I've dealt with it. Here's how I dealt with it, and if this doesn't work for you, then we'll find another way."*

Cynthia's commitment to establishing genuine relationships through serving others is contrasted with her self-doubt about her journey and her self-admitted trust and abandonment issues. While Cynthia has an optimistic vision for her future, it is something she is not quite ready to begin.

*I think the most significant thing about going down to [the shelter] is that even though I'm going down there to help other people, I'm always the one who walks away feeling like I've gotten the most out of it. The people are so happy to just be there. You know what I'm saying? I was happy to be there. Every day I went to my service learning, I was so happy when I got there. I was like, "I get to go here and I get to do something today." I also learned at that point in time that I need to take my time in school, because I still have a hard time not getting too enmeshed with people. I have codependency issues being raised in a dysfunctional family. I know that it's going to awhile yet before I can work one on one with somebody. I think that's why I am going to go ahead and transfer to [a local 4 year university] and get my bachelor's degree. Because I could go out and work with my associate's degree, but I don't think I'm ready to do that. I realized that doing my service learning project. I've spoken to [my academic advisor] about when I should do my internship. "You're not ready." I spoke to my therapist. "You're not ready." And I know that I'm not ready, and it's hard to balance that because I really want to be ready. But it's all in God's timing as to when that's going to be.*

Cynthia believes continuing her education will help her learn to navigate the boundaries between serving others and the impact such relationships may have on her own mental well-being.

Despite Cynthia's hesitancy to embark on her career plans to become a social worker or court appointed advocate, there is a theme of survival and resilience in her life stories.

*I will stand on the top of this mountain and scream at the top of my lungs, "This is who I am. Deal with me or don't. I refuse to let you beat me down into earth." I will not go away. It is not always a good thing and it's not always productive for me. But it's a survival mechanism that was very productive for me when I was fourteen and living on the streets, when I was in the projects running with the gangs, and doing drugs, and in the crack houses, and running a crack house. It was very productive then. It is no longer productive; that anger... those things are not productive for me anymore. They are now non-productive. You find a way to be resilient in a way that you can bend without breaking. 'Cause I've been broken before in pieces in my mind and lost memories. That's not a good place to be when you're out of control of your actions. So now, I bend a little bit more. I ask for help a little bit more. It's not an easy thing for me to do, but something that I need to do. I don't think that asking for help is a sign of weakness; I think it's a sign of strength. I think it shows great intelligence to know your limitations. When it's time to say, "I need somebody to help me." My mother always told me that the only person that could help me was her; and the only person that would ever love me was her. And I couldn't trust her or anybody else. Everybody else was going to take advantage of me. It was for her protection so that I would always be there for her when she needed me. It's been a very difficult task for me to learn to ask for help and trust other people. So that resilience is [that] I just refuse to be stamped out. I was like, "No, I'm not going anywhere. I'm just not going. I refuse to."*

While Cynthia's service learning experiences reveal she is not quite ready to proceed into a

career helping others, they reinforce her passion to serve others as well as her commitment to continue her journey through life. Another theme that emerges from her stories is the cyclical connection between the importance of giving back what has been received and the intrinsic rewards serving others provides.

*I've had the opportunity to go through some good therapy, EMD trauma therapy, and this is not cheap. And so to give back now is to me important. When I get a degree, I want to still be giving back in the capacity of what I've been trained to do, pro bono. Because there are people out there who don't have disability, that don't have insurance, that still are in desperate need of help: somebody to talk to, somebody to just be there for them. Like the people who were there for me. Fortunately, I had insurance. A lot of people don't. And God has blessed me with the time to put my life back together. "You can't keep what you can't give away." So I want to give back what was so freely given to me. I just want give back because I had the opportunity that people gave to me. If I don't give back, and I just take and take and take, then you just... What good is it to take it? 'Cause everything's a circle. Everything goes around. The earth goes around; the sun goes around. You know, life goes around you. You grow old. Everything is a continuum. So if you block a continuum by stopping it somehow, then you end up with a flood, with a dam and things don't work right. And so by doing service work, I think you keep that continuum flowing in a way that it's supposed to flow. And we all become part of what we're supposed to be and the whole works together.*

Cynthia has a powerful drive to share her experiences with those in need. By sharing cup of coffee, an honest conversation, or the wisdom of her survival, Cynthia is creating the life she values. She sees that serving others brings her a renewed sense of energy and purpose.

*I keep thinking that that I'm going to be a therapist and maybe I will do some therapy. But I really, really, really think that what I want to do is probably be a court advocate. My mentor that really helped me so much was my court advocate when I was in a court committal. And after I got off court committal, her and I kept in contact almost monthly for up to two years. She says I'm an anomaly: most people don't get off court committal because they successfully complete the requirements. She says for me to get my GED, go to school, be where I'm at, receive the Beacon of Light award, be in Phi Theta Kappa, be a mentee, a mentor, and all those things... with a psych diagnosis like I have. Anything can be overcome. But that's what I really want to do is help the dually diagnosed, and help the general community understand there doesn't need to be this horrible fear for these people with mental illness and substance abuse. And women who have been forced to give of themselves to survive; they're not the predators; they're the victims in these situations. Somewhere down the line I just see myself being an advocate in those areas, getting rid of these stigmatism for the mentally disabled. Even here at Service Learning Community College I've been told that by our mental health counselor that I shouldn't*

*tell people because it could cause them to judge me. And, I mean that's not right. You know, I am who I am.*

There is a sense that Cynthia knows she is on a never ending journey. She is more passionate than ever to do whatever it will take to succeed in her dreams of helping others by sharing the wisdom of her experiences.

Cynthia Solis de la Cruz is a resilient survivor of childhood sexual abuse, an addiction to crack cocaine, a failed marriage and family estrangement, and a challenging cadre of mental health diagnoses. Cynthia understands that she escaped the reinforcing cycle of her addiction and mental health struggles by getting the appropriate help. She uses the metaphor of limping along on two broken legs to explain what life was like before finding an effective dual diagnosis treatment plan. Cynthia's identity as a survivor provides a context for understanding her sense of self-worth and motivation to help others. Cynthia sees everything that has happened in her life as preparation for her future work as a social worker or court advocate. She brings empathy, respect and dignity for those who need help to her relationships. In particular Cynthia wants to provide an empowering and validating example to other women who may still be struggling in their own lives. The genuine care she has for others comes from her journey and recovery. Her recent successes have created confidence, as well as the realization that there is more to yet to come. Cynthia sees that her future success, personally, academically, and professionally, is tied to the mutual processes of caring for herself and helping others.

### **Adam Nickerson**

*Sometimes you have to go out of your way to help out others.  
If you don't, how can you expect anybody else to do that for you?*

Adam Nickerson is a twenty seven year old Caucasian male who is married and has a five year old son. He is military veteran attending Service Learning Community College through his

GI Bill benefits. He served active duty for two years in Iraq as a member of the infantry in the Army National Guard. When he returned home, Adam began pursuing a career in law enforcement and employment with city police. However, shortly before his National Guard unit was scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan, Adam was in motorcycle accident that resulted in the paralysis of his left arm. The accident changed Adam's life by eliminating his chances to pursue public service through the military and his chosen law enforcement career. After a year of recovery and physical rehabilitation, Adam enrolled as a student at SLCC where he is in his first year studying management and human resources.

Adam grew up in a close-knit, rural community. He developed a strong work ethic helping out with the hard physical labor of farming. He attended the same school from Kindergarten through graduation. Adam developed strong relationships with close friends in his relatively small graduating class of 52 students. He participated in a variety of community and school activities and was active in Boy Scouts. He valued the social interactions and the opportunities to have fun with his friends. Adam's friendships were the definitive experiences of his childhood.

After high school Adam went directly to work as customer service representative at a local telephone call center. He and his high school buddies all worked together enjoying the freedom of young adulthood. During this period of his life the opportunities to have fun were more important than professional advancement or financial security. Adam lived paycheck to paycheck moving from one low-paying job to another in pursuit of the next adrenaline rush. Alcohol, cars, girls, and fun with his friends defined Adam's youth.

However, after a couple of years living month to month and struggling to survive, Adam realized he needed to figure out what to do with his life. Life became increasingly complicated as

Adam got married and became a father. Adam and his family experienced hardships that resulted in a move to a nearby city where they lived rent-free with his older sister. Adam spent this time reconsidering his future plans. He had been working as a security officer and started thinking about a career in law enforcement. He joined the National Guard and anticipated public service, through both his military service and future career as a police officer, would provide for his family. Adam's military service was a defining life experience. However, the motorcycle accident and injury changed his life forever and forced Adam to evaluate his goals, skills, and aspirations. Adam continues to be an active, self-described "adrenaline junkie" who likes to ride motorcycles, work on cars, and spend time with his friends and family. He is looking forward to finding a job where he can combine his interests in public service, his active lifestyle, and his desire to supervise others in a fun and relaxed leadership capacity.

### **Adam's Story**

Adam grew up in a rural community with close relationships with his extended family. He enjoyed hanging out with his dad and learning from his example. His parents divorced when he was in his early teens, and Adam remained closer to his dad's family, despite living with his mom for the next several years.

*Both my dad's family and my mom's family are fairly close knit. My dad's side of the family is huge. I think he was one of seven or eight kids. A few of my uncles have lived in other states, but a lot of the family pretty much lived together. I spent a lot of time with my cousins; they were pretty good friends of mine. My mom's side of the family was super small. I only had a couple cousins. Growing up, I didn't really hang out with my mom too much; I was more of a dad's kid. I helped him work on houses, fix cars, hunting. We were big hunters. Dad's always been the type of guy you call up. He'd drop pretty much everything and come help you out. He'll do whatever he can to help you. And hanging out with him so much, helping others kind of got instilled into me. He always managed to make it fun whenever I went along so I never really saw it as work. It was something fun to do.*

Adam learned to help others from his father's example. He enjoyed the camaraderie of working hard and having fun in the process. This is a defining value for Adam that continues to inform his experiences today. Adam connected easily with his dad and learned from his examples of service as well as his controlling and dominating interpersonal style. Adam's stories are characterized by his activities and easy connections with his male friends and family members. His relationships with women are more difficult.

*I have an older sister, a younger brother, and a younger sister. And now I have two younger half-brothers. My older sister is a control freak. That's the nicest way I can put it. I get along great with her now; living with her was not fun. My mom and dad got a divorce when I was just going in to my sophomore year of high school. So I think I was 15, almost 16. Things kind of fell apart then without Dad in the house; Dad was always the disciplinarian. Mom just kind of let everybody do whatever until you torqued her off. My sister was 16 when her and the neighbor boy got caught "doing the nasty." So my mom ended up kicking her out of the house, and she went to live with him, ended up marrying him and then divorcing him. My little brother didn't take the divorce too good, so he started acting out, and I think he was 14 when he went to go live with my dad. And it was shortly after that, just before my senior year of high school when I was kicked out of the house for being disorderly with her new boyfriend. He came into the house and tried to act like it was his house. He came in and criticized my dad left and right, and I didn't take that very well. I got into it with him. He looked at my mom and said. 'It's him or me.' And my mom chose him. So I've been on my own, kind of out of the family spotlight since I was maybe 16. I was working at the time and went to live with my cousin. My aunt really couldn't afford to support me so I paid her rent, helped her out in the ways that I could.*

Being kicked out of his mother's house at age sixteen started a period of instability that continued until Adam was able to prioritize settling down with his own family.

Adam met his wife through one of his menial hourly jobs and after an extended period dating and the birth of their son, they got married. Initially, the negative patterns Adam learned from his father along with the stress of his upcoming military deployment interfered with his efforts to establish a stable family environment.

*I met my wife at work. I was working as a residential living assistant with the mentally handicapped. She was still in high school at the time and she worked as a dietary assistant. We had a little outdoors break area where everybody went, and that's where*

*people smoked. Well she happened to be sitting there whenever it was my break because she had a much longer break than me. So my ex-girlfriend thought that we were messing around and started spreading a rumor. As a joke I said, "Hey let's make the rumor a reality. Let's go out." She said "Yes" so that's how it started. It started as a joke, but it really blossomed. I dated her for five years before we got married just as I was getting ready to deploy to Iraq. We planned on getting married, but we wanted to go to Vegas to do that. Even though we were doing all right, you know Vegas can still be an expensive trip, and we had just had the kid and that so that wasn't really in the cards. So we decided to get married at the court house. Before I left for Iraq I had a lot of stress building up, a lot of things I wasn't sure about that were going to be happening on the home front. I liked to have the say, and I like to have control over situations. When you know that you're not going to have that type of control, it can play funny with your feelings. I acted out. I broke a lot of stuff. I yelled a lot. While I was in Iraq, I'd call home to check up on stuff; and if something didn't go how I thought or it wasn't handled how I thought it should be, I blew up. Drove her to the point where she actually divorced me. She left me while I was overseas. We got divorced after I came home.*

As Adam talks about the early years of his relationship, he reveals the controlling pattern that he learned from his father. His relationship with his wife was tumultuous, and his son remains nameless (a.k.a. 'the kid') throughout his stories. Adam discloses that he and his wife got married to take advantage of his military benefits as he was about to be deployed, not for love or affection. These underlying factors resulted in the end of Adam's marriage while he was serving in Iraq. Adam was able to reflect on his role contributing to the deterioration of his marriage during his time overseas.

*So, you've got a lot of time on your hands overseas. You get to sit back and think about situations, and we'd write back and forth. And I saw that how I was acting wasn't how she saw me and how others were seeing it. So once you get more than two perspectives, you kind of look at how other people are seeing it, and you go back and replay the situations in your mind. And I was able to uncloud my judgment a little bit and see, "Okay. Yeah, I freaked out and flipped out over absolutely nothing." The major control thing has always been money. My dad was in control of the money. He was the breadwinner. My family has never by any means been rich. You know pretty modest to the lower end. We lived out in the country so I wasn't used to all the things you can get in town anyway. We lived all right, and I could tell when my dad would get stressed out about money. I picked up them habits as well. He would get a little upset when money was getting tight, and things would go awry. I guess I kind of picked up on it and followed suit. Only you're never quite like your parents; I kind of took things a little bit further. Got incredibly angry and started breaking things. My wife knew I would never touch her; it was just the intimidation factor. She's no mouse herself. I've always been*

*more attracted to the tomboy type. She's a tough cookie. She had no problem with yelling back and getting right back in my face. But I'm sure even though it looked like it was fairly even, I was definitely the aggressor. And I know it took a toll on her emotionally.*

The awareness that he was replicating his father's negative patterns came to Adam's awareness through reflection on his failed marriage. Direct feedback from his wife contributed to Adam's understanding of his role in creating the factors that negatively impacted the relationship.

*My wife was nice enough before we got the divorce to give me the explanation. She itemized the things that she thought needed improvement quite well. The major one was communication; the idea of communication was there, but the actual communication just wasn't there. And the feeling of equalness. I felt more equal than what she did. So I was able to kind of look at everything, reevaluate it, and decide that if I really wanted the relationship that I needed to make some changes to not compromise with her but collaborate and come to a joint agreement on how things should be handled.*

Adam's failed marriage provided a significant opportunity for self-reflection and growth in his awareness and interpersonal skills. Adam's description that he felt "more equal" than his partner demonstrates the paternalistic influences of his father's controlling and aggressive model.

Although Adam learned how to be a better partner through this process, he returned from his military experience with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and his wife divorced him shortly after he returned from Iraq. However, through the divorce his wife retained his legal power of attorney, and they reconnected when he was hospitalized following his motorcycle accident.

*She wanted to give me another shot after I came home, but didn't know how the war and everything was going to play out with me. And I can completely understand that. It pretty much took the motorcycle accident to kind of wake her up to decide to give me another chance cause the whole time I'd wanted to make it work. I had realized, "Yeah, I was a complete asshole. I'm surprised you didn't leave me before I left." After my motorcycle accident, she was still my power of attorney even after the divorce and everything. So she was up at the hospital making all the tough decisions even though my mom and everybody else had wanted her to sign over the rights to it. She would rather have me be upset at her than one of my family members if a decision was made that I didn't agree with. I came out of my coma, and she was there. And you know we just started talking a little bit more.*

The accident and hospitalization resulted in re-establishing their communication. Adam turned to his former wife for advice with a new relationship he was pursuing.

*Right after our divorce, I had stepped into another relationship incredibly fast. Kind of got myself a little over my head in it. And I actually asked [my ex-wife] for some advice on it, and she said, "You know, you've got to do whatever's going to make you happy. I think you did step into it a little fast. Maybe you need to just step back and reevaluate your situation and let her know that." So that's what I did, moved out of my girlfriend's house, moved back home with some family, and it just started us talking back and forth. And I guess she kind of noticed some changes in me, and decided to give it another chance. And we ended up moving back in with each other and getting remarried. It's the best our relationship has been since we first started dating. I'm incredibly happy with it.*

After significant difficulties, Adam is once again married and settled into family life with his wife and son. He has learned to be an equal partner and to communicate better by reflecting on his own perspectives and recognizing the needs and perspectives of his wife and son. Adam's journey back to a more stable and positive family life was marked by periods of transition and uncertainty. However, through self-awareness and perseverance, Adam has settled in and found some happiness and contentment in his family life.

Adam joined the National Guard because it combined the camaraderie of hanging out with his friends with the honest work of physical labor and public service. Serving in the infantry provided Adam a strong sense of identity and purpose. Adam's public service as a member of the National Guard was a definitive period in his life.

*I loved the infantry. I'm around guys like me. We're vulgar. You don't have to be the smartest guy as long as you can do your job. We loved to have fun. We will joke about anything, and we'll make anything into a game. I'm an adrenaline junkie. I had various weapons systems in my hand, and I got to use them. You know I got to shoot missiles, I got to shoot dragons. Going overseas I was out walking on the streets interacting with the locals there. I got to do all this while hanging out with friends. I got that feeling of power that I was doing something good and something I was proud of that I actually wanted to take recognition for doing. I loved it. I knew what was expected of me at all times. I knew when I woke up in the morning what I was going to be doing that day. I just loved every aspect of the military. I went to Iraq in 2007-2008. When I came back, everything was going pretty well. I started applying at police departments. I was pretty much through all the things with the city police department. Unfortunately, I am an adrenalin junkie: I like*

*riding motorcycles and four wheeling and such. I suffer from PTSD. I was a bit of an adrenaline junkie before going to Iraq, and that's pretty much like the ultimate rush being in danger 24/7. And as you're aware, adrenaline is a drug; it's a very addicting drug. And when you're not in situations any more that pretty much constantly pump out adrenaline, you start doing things to cause an adrenaline rush. When I got back I got a sports car, I got a sport bike. I did lots and lots of stupid stuff. I got word I was going to Afghanistan; was super, super excited: super stoked. I was actually taking it easy one night, hanging out with my friends before we were going to annual training, and ended up getting into an accident which really just flipped the switch. I got on my motorcycle; a car wasn't paying attention, and side swiped me. I ended up hitting a truck, completely changed my life. I was really lucky to even live through my accident, but I can't do the things any more that give me the adrenaline that I need.*

Adam's military experience provided an interesting insight on his beliefs about leadership. He associates power with the ability to make a difference in the context of a military command structure where authority is positional. He is pursuing human resources because he sees this career providing opportunities to be in a position of authority and make a difference serving others.

Because Adam's accident occurred when he was not in active status with the National Guard, his military insurance did not cover his medical expenses. Adam lost the use of left arm in the accident, but his injury wasn't the only disabling factor in his life. He was on his own; without financial support and with his future military and career plans in jeopardy.

*Now I've got hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of medical bills on top of not being able to perform my job anymore. So I can't, you know, I can't keep my job anymore. I can't go in the career field that I love anymore. The military called me in; I couldn't do those jobs anymore, so I lost pretty much everything that pretty much made me who I was. I lost it all in an instant: pretty much completely crippled me. Didn't know what I was going to do. I had no money coming in; I couldn't work. I couldn't get a doctor to sign off for me to go to work even if I wanted to. I have the horror stories of Social Security: tried to get on with them. I never did; probably never will. Couldn't do anything with schooling 'cause I was in such bad shape: I couldn't sit in a chair for any given period of time; I couldn't drive. I really couldn't do anything so I had no opportunity for any financial assistance. Since joining the military I had finally gotten to a point where I wasn't living paycheck to paycheck. So I was fairly comfortable. I was able to start getting the toys that I wanted. To kind of have all that swept out from underneath me again, to where I feel like I am a child again and need handouts. And I've never been one to ask for a handout. It's very difficult to go from a position of power to a position of*

*complete helplessness. And being a proud person and having to swallow your pride and ask for help and then at a lot of turns, not getting any help and feeling “Why am I even asking for help? I’m not getting the help that I want.”*

Once again, Adam’s identity is based on having his “toys” and being in control of his life. He struggles to see himself as a person who needs help. Adam’s motorcycle accident was profoundly life changing. In an instant his identity and career aspirations were forever altered.

*I was in a coma for five days. The accident happened on Thursday; woke up on a Tuesday. I have no recollection of what had happened whatsoever. It’s kind of weird. I really didn’t even know where I was to tell you the truth. And then that first motion of going hands to the face, only my right arm lifted and my left arm wouldn’t even move. Looked down and it was you know all wrapped up. Bit of a shocker; everybody was just kind of staring at me. I had to ask what happened. Was told that I was in a motorcycle accident. The doctor came in, explained all my injuries and was told that I had severe nerve damage to my left arm and would be lucky to ever gain any type of movement out of it again. That was pretty much a killer. I pretty much knew right there, “All right. Well, I’ve messed up to the point where I’m going to get a medical discharge from the military, and I doubt I’m going to be able to pass my physical for the police department now.” So I went into a pretty deep depression. I found out all the medical charges and everything were going to be on me. I was given some prices of how much stuff costs while you’re in the hospital. So I weaned myself off all the pain pills to get out of the hospital ‘cause I didn’t really feel like having couple million dollar bill when I got out. Got out; went to the VA; and then just talked with the worker there that took me through all the steps of going through physical therapy, looking at the nerve damage; the possibilities to try to counteract that to see what would happen. So then I just started going to physical therapy which started as just pretty much a lot of stretching. Then I went and saw some nerve specialists. Had a couple of surgeries done with the nerves and nerve relocation surgeries. It was all a failure. Was told that I would gain no movement whatsoever below my elbow, and I would gain most likely less than ten per cent in my shoulder. Then he brought up the fact that that maybe amputation would probably be in my best case scenario; just because it’s a pretty much a dead piece of tissue. So I contemplated amputation, and in fact decided to amputate. Went in for a final checkup, and the day before that checkup, I moved my wrist. Wasn’t supposed to gain anything below my elbow and just happened to move my wrist. So went in for final check up with my neurologist before I got sent over to the prosthetics department and had to cancel that. He didn’t want to do anything; wanted to give it a couple more years to see if possibly anything else would come back. So he just amped up my rehabilitation. So started doing more rehabilitation; started messing around with nerve stimulators, things of that nature; different types of slings and braces, trying to regain as much as possible. There was a point where I gained substantially from where I was, but I got to a point where it was stagnant, and it was a waste of their time and my time to continue. I had all the skills necessary to continue to do it at home to see if I’ve gained any more. But there is a 98% chance that where I am right now is where I will be ten years from now.*

Adam spent a year recovering from his physical injuries, and responding to the depression that resulted. Adam described a roller coaster of emotions as he learned to cope with the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness he was experiencing.

*So the mental aspect of it: there are tons of highs and lows. Then coupling a lot of that with my PTSD: I do get angry at situations. I've never been one to back down from a fight. Unfortunately, I'm still not one to back down from a fight, and I never think of my arm until it's too late. Fighting's a lot harder when you've only got one arm. So there's a lot of that aspect. You know doing the simple things. Opening ziplock bags is really hard to do with one hand. Cooking: holding a pot still while trying to stir something in the pot. There are times that I do feel sorry for myself. I feel like I'm a helpless two year old, and sometimes I'm not afraid to let people know it. I'll complain about it, and there's other times I know I'll get over it. I'll figure out some way to do it. And I usually do. It's not the most conventional or the easiest way to do it, but I mean I manage. I think it's made me a little bit stronger in that aspect of getting over adversity. I'm still going through a lot of highs and low. A lot of things I took for granted; some of the things are impossible for me to do one handed. Hell, they were even hard for me with two hands. I still go through the highs and lows of that. I'm still independent. I can still do some things; and then I'm completely helpless with others and I have to have somebody help me. So, yeah, I still go through the highs and lows.*

Adam is learning to navigate his daily activities without the use of his left arm. He is emotional as he describes the loss of his independence. Accepting help is especially difficult. Adam is resolute in his commitment to regain his sense of direction and purpose in life.

Adam decided to go to Service Learning Community College to utilize his GI Benefits. He chose human resource management hoping to find a job that will give him some supervisory authority and not confine him to a cubicle. Adam dreads the rote routine of his previous low paying, entry level jobs. He wants a career that will provide for his family. He speaks with energy and passion about his previous military experiences, but is hesitant to return to the monotonous and unsatisfying office jobs of his youth. Adam hopes to find some career security through his educational experiences that will mirror the emerging stability in his family life. Adam is proud to be succeeding in college, and he is doing well academically. However, he is somewhat unsure about his eventual career prospects.

## Adam's Service Learning Experiences

Adam described a variety of community service experiences prior to attending Service Learning Community College. He was very active in service projects for Boy Scouts. His scouting involvement was linked to his relationship with his father. Adam also participated in a variety of school community service experiences. However, these were meaningful based on fun with friends, rather than a civic understanding of serving his community.

*Helping the community was always kind of like a second thing. It was more about hanging out with my dad with the Boy Scouts or with my friends doing the community service. I guess that I understood that I was doing something good at that time, but it was more of an excuse to hang out with my buddies. On community service day one year, we went to the old folks' home. Our close group of friends wanted to go to the same place, kind of hang out and have a good time. So we got down there, and whatever they wanted to have done, we did. But we didn't do it in the conventional factor. I think the funnest thing that we did was their big dining area and the stage had to be washed and waxed. So after we got done washing it, we got the pads, and we put them on the bottom of our feet while we were waxing and played hockey. So it was about having fun. I don't think we ever really took it completely seriously.*

The camaraderie spending time with his dad or having fun with friends was Adam's initial motivation. Just as the impromptu hockey game with his friends was more significant than serving the elderly residents of the facility, Adam shared a story about how sandbagging in advance of rural flooding was a reason to get out of classes instead of protecting the community.

*There was the year we had flooding that went across the highway, and it was coming into town. And the town being a small community, you know, they needed help. So they came up to the high school, and of course, it was going to get us out of class so we're pretty excited to do that. So we went ahead and went down there. We were just kind of joking while we were doing the chain to get the sandbags up and everything. I remember the floods were coming in pretty good. We'd finished doing that portion of it, and we were waiting on more sandbags to come in so we could go back down to the co-op and refill up sandbags to go to another location, and we were bored. The flood waters were getting pretty high, so we wanted to see how high they got. And so we all decided to start walking out into the flood waters, which is something you're not supposed to do. We wanted to see how far out that we could get. We ended up downstream quite a little bit.*

The opportunity to have fun and spend time with friends was the most significant factor in Adam's early service experiences. This approach is indicative of Adam's initial approach to serving others: it is more about the social connections and having fun, not about helping those in need.

Prior to his deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, Adam's National Guard unit provided community assistance responding to regional flooding and winter storms. His unit was also called to assist with the presidential inauguration of Barack Obama. As a member of the National Guard, Adam realized that serving in uniform is an honor and privilege.

*Being in the National Guard, I get called up to do civil things inside the states as well. I went and provided security during the presidential inauguration of Barack Obama. So I was out in D.C. doing that. We get called up for flood duty. We get called up to push snow during snow storms. Then there's just the fact that being in the military. People in the military kind of look differently than civilians. We're looked at as an authority figure, and in most cases a bit of a role model. You've got that going on 24/7 anytime you're wearing the uniform or if anybody knows that you're in a uniform. Especially if they know you on a personal level, you're held to a little bit higher standard than the average citizen. And then getting called up to do the ultimate, to go to war for something that your country believes in is the greatest thing that you can possibly do for a community.*

Through his National Guard experiences Adam developed an appreciation for public service in combination with the camaraderie of strong relationships and commitment to honest work. This evolution in his perspective would continue through his academic service learning.

Adam's service learning project was assigned as a part of his Business Management course. The project consisted of the entire class becoming certified to assist with sandbagging and community flood response.

*I was in the Principles of Management course and we were given the opportunity to learn how to properly sandbag. Now I had already known how to do that, and I'd already been given the training on it, but I decided just to go ahead and kind of keep that to myself. There's nothing worse than 'Mr. Know-It-All' saying, "Well that's not really how it works." So I just decided to go ahead and keep it quiet and tried to look at it as 'Erase all that you know and come at it as a fresh experience.' We had an individual come in that was certified through the Red Cross. She came in and gave a video presentation*

*which I think is good because it kind of exposes you to it a little bit. Then we actually got to do a practical exercise where we went out and performed all the tasks that we had been taught through the video and the discussion. And got to put them into practice and had everybody rotate through so everybody got the general idea of what was going on. And if we were called up, we could actually perform this with little to no guidance, which was really good.*

Adam chose not to tell his classmates or his instructor that he had previous experiences sandbagging; instead, he opted to take the opportunity to observe how his fellow students participated. This reflective approach marks another significant transition in Adam's interpersonal style. He is less authoritative and more aware of other perspectives as he engages more personally and privately in the service project with his one good arm. In reflecting on the project he realizes his perspective about flood prevention has shifted in time. It is no longer just about having fun; instead he realizes how critical serving the community is for those in need.

*It's not fun anymore. It's all about people's personal property. I've kind of grown up a little bit. I have my own property. If it needs to be sandbagged, I really don't have any time for people playing around and having fun. You know you're talking about peoples' possessions, their life. It kind of takes on a different meaning. It's not as fun. It's something that you have to do because you want to do it, not something to do to go and have fun. In class I had already been through it and everything. There wasn't any pressure so we were able to kind of have some fun. I haven't done that kind of work one armed yet, so it was interesting. I kind of enjoy relearning how to do everything with my disabilities. I got to kind of learn some things about how to go ahead and proceed on doing things. So maybe I'll be able to use that in doing something else. I haven't really done any yard work or anything since my accident. Yard work needs to be done. I now know how to use a shovel one handed without it actually killing my wrist or back. So I didn't look at it as learning anything as far as the sandbagging. I looked at it as more of an opportunity to work with the other people, see how they worked, see what their mindsets were; and then to learn how to do it while coping with my disability.*

Because he had sandbagged before, Adam began the class project unsure if he would learn anything meaningful. However, in this experience he began to see and understand the needs of individuals and the community; it isn't just an excuse to get out of class or have fun with his buddies.

Through his service learning project Adam also discovered key lessons about himself and

his abilities to contribute with his disability. Adam learned many lessons from his father: negative relational patterns that interfered with Adam's marriage and positive examples of helping neighbors in need. Adam didn't realize how powerful these lessons were in his life until he was older. Adam has persevered through very challenging times: serving his country in war, divorcing and re-marrying his wife, and recovering from a disabling motorcycle accident. Through these experiences Adam has learned to be less self-centered in his relationships. This ability to see the experiences and perspectives of others has improved his marriage and reinforced his commitment to being an active community member. Adam still struggles with the future. He is relearning how to contribute but remains unsure of his professional pathway.

## **Reflection**

Adam grew up in a rural area with an uncomplicated perspective that emerged from a fairly simple life. Adam's early school and community experiences were about having fun and enjoying time with his friends. Serving in the military helped Adam develop a larger understanding of and an appreciation for public service. Adam's military experience, particularly his time in Iraq, also helped him to view the world from multiple perspectives.

*I loved going overseas, but there's mixed feelings about how it was when I was over there. I have different aspects of looking at it than the average person does from around here. I get both sides first hand. While others, their other side just comes from the TV camera, and those are you know censored. I have to look at it from a few different ways. I have to look at it from a human perspective. I have to look at it from a job perspective. And I have to look at it from a soldier's perspective. Human perspective is, all right, "Killing people." Job perspective is "I'm over there to do a job." And the soldier perspective is, "How am I really helping them? Why am I actually doing this to them? And will that change how I feel about it if they're trying to hurt me or one of my fellow soldiers?" We kind of went in and killed innocent people, bombing for really no apparent reason. Yes, we took Saddam out of power, and a lot of the people there appreciated that, but they're also resentful for now that they have another dictator in their country. You know, before going over there I don't think I really saw it like that.*

Adam struggles to balance the complexity of perspectives he sees as a result of his military service. These experiences contributed to Adam's emerging civic identity and his understanding of the value in serving his community; however, this service is linked to the atrocities of war. The power of thoughtful reflection on all of life's experiences is a theme that emerges from Adam's stories.

*I think I've always had a fairly good grasp on seeing other perspectives and good common sense and stuff. And I've always been able to look at it from a couple of sides, for the most part. I can definitely see why companies do some things, and I can see why people are upset with it. I can see why the idea of a union is a good thing, but I can see where unions are really not what they were designed to be when they first came out. I see why we're in Afghanistan, but I can see from the Afghani's or Iraqi's point of view, why they think we're there. I think I probably have a better grasp on that now than what I did. Now there are some things like my relationship. That was pretty much a one-sided view; but while I was overseas I was able to sit back and go over all the aspects of what I thought that I was doing was incorrect.*

Adam's military experiences not only prepared him for balancing a world of multiple and competing perspectives, it provided an opportunity to develop self-awareness and reconnect with his family. In this way reflection is a powerful force in Adam's lifelong learning that goes beyond the scope of service learning.

As he has matured Adam has realized the value in serving his community extends past his previous understanding of public service. He now realizes that he can serve others in meaningful ways in his own local community.

*I see myself more as localized now; like we have our neighborhood watch program. I'm an extremely active member of that. I have a lot of old older folks in the neighborhood. I walk up and talk to them often, make sure everything's still going all right. I still help out folks when they ask for it. I work on their cars or help if they have any construction projects. As far as the more broad community, we are planning on doing the lake clean up when it comes up this this spring. I'll probably get into a few more of those. I just joined the American Legion and the Legion Riders. We do a lot of Poker Runs that benefit children's charities. I've done them in the past but not with an actual organization, just as a regular rider. I will be contributing, especially with the Legion on tons of fundraisers and things of that nature.*

Serving his community continues to provide a sense of contribution and camaraderie that Adam values. As he reflected on these experiences, Adam came to realize the intrinsic rewards serving others also provides on a personal level.

*I get a sense of pride and accomplishment that I've helped out others. Plus I get to go hang out with guys like me: previous military guys who like to ride motorcycles. I get to meet a lot of interesting people; a few now that are quite good friends. I get a sense of accomplishment and worth. I mean even though I see my situation as being fairly bad, I know there's people out there that are in far worse situations than I can probably ever imagine. And if I can do something to help them out, fantastic.*

The connection to other “guys like me” continues to be a source of strength for Adam just as it was in his youth. Adam is finding himself and his worth through these relationships. He is becoming aware that there are people who need his help, and rediscovering his capacity to serve. Adam plans to continue helping his friends and neighbors by using his skills and abilities whenever he can.

*The various parts of life all come back pretty much to that need for helping others. Growing up it started with my dad. I've always helped folks with their math, 'cause math has always come exceptionally easy to me so I've always helped people out with that. And when I grew up, I joined the military, and I helped folks out with that. I wanted to join law enforcement and help folks out with that. And even though I can't do that anymore, I chose a management HR degree: human resources is there to help the workers. So I guess it all comes back to wanting to help. Maybe deep down I have some need to help others. It's not apparent. I don't really see it unless I think about it. Maybe it's just that natural to me that I don't see that I feel the need to help others and I want to help others. But I mean that's probably what it all boils down to. I guess by helping others out, that helps my own self-worth.*

This connection between serving others and developing a sense identity and self-esteem is another theme in Adam's experiences and journey. His civic attitudes have transitioned from being social and carefree, through grandiose notions of public service, to a community based understanding of his ability to serve others and the personal reward service provides.

*I'm probably going to start doing more community service type work. I do believe it is important to raise my child to see the benefits of it. The more that he gets involved in it now, the easier it's going to be when he's older to continue. No matter what he decides*

*that he wants to do for a living, I don't see the world switching roles here any time soon on how they view people that do community service type work. So that's only going to benefit him. That and it'll probably give me a little bit of satisfaction since I'm not able to serve as a public servant anymore. I mean, it's not going to carry the same meaning or anything, but at least it'll give me a little satisfaction that I'm helping somebody. I try to help out people as much as I can. You know I work on neighbors' vehicles for them, I help them walk their dogs, watch their houses. If they need help working on their house, I do that that type of community work.*

Adam aspires to connect with his friends and neighbors and be a role model for his young son.

He values the ability to help his community in small, meaningful ways, but still struggles that this doesn't live up to his grander notions of "public service."

Despite all that has happened in his life, Adam remains optimistic about his ability to find happiness and fulfillment in what lies ahead.

*Some people say things happen for a reason; some people say that they don't. I was going into a slot going into Afghanistan where I would have been in charge of people. We just had a guy pass away on my deployment last week. So maybe I would have been with him. We had a few other guys get hurt. I don't know how much of all that stuff I believe: that everything happens for a reason. But that's what everybody tells me so that's kind of the understanding that I have. Maybe [the accident] did happen for a reason. Maybe I would have been killed or really hurt while I was in Afghanistan. Maybe I would have gotten somebody else hurt or killed. Or maybe it was just a freak accident, and I got caught in it. Now, I'm going to go into a safer job. I don't know of any HR management individuals that get shot at on a regular basis. I'll make more money so I'll be a little bit more financially stable. My creative side's probably come out a little bit more. I've learned how to accept things. I got back with the wife and I'm fairly happy. I mean I miss a lot of the things that pretty much made me me. I miss them a lot, but I realize that they didn't make me or define me. They just kind of accentuated me, and I can still be myself. And I've learned how to do things a little bit differently through the use of only one arm. I've looked at a lot of other people that aren't in any way near the situations that I've been in and how they fall apart and crumble, and I take no pity on them. I've been through a lot in my life: seen a lot, done a lot, and I'm still kicking. I'm not making any excuses. I don't really complain. It's not going to do me any good anyway. I can make my life as miserable as I want, or I can make it as meaningful as I want.*

Through all the changes in his life, Adam is discovering he no longer has to be defined by his previous interests and goals. He knows he can create a better future; however, there continues to be certain attraction to his care-free and adventurous life. Adam continues to be a hard-working,

active “adrenaline junkie” who values strong friendships, family, and helping others

*I'm just your average Joe. I believe in hard work, good values, not blaming stuff on crap gone wrong, and dealing well with adversity. Just being a good decent all around human being even if it's not convenient. You know sometimes you have to go out of your way to help out others. If you don't, how can you expect anybody else to do that for you?*

Adam values being connected with his community, and helping others whenever he can. He strives each day to overcome the adversity he now faces. He understands the complexity of the world around him and appreciates the role of public and community service in helping to create a better world.

Adam Nickerson is a disabled veteran who is rebuilding his life after surviving a serious motorcycle accident. He grew up active in his rural community, following the example of his father who would “*drop everything to help [others] out.*” Adam has recently found some stability in his family life and is looking for the same in his career. He wants to find success in his new career pathway and provide financially for his family, but he remains unsure about his vocation. The tensions in his life’s journey are part of the complex world Adam has learned to navigate after returning from war and surviving the accident. As he moves forward and continues to seek out a stable and fulfilling life, Adam is raising his son to value the rewards that come from belonging to and serving the needs of their local neighborhood. By reflecting on his many life experiences Adam has learned to make sense of the complexities of his life by focusing on positive relationships, as well as involvement in and contribution to his community.

### **Brenda Giordano**

*You always want to belong.*

Brenda Giordano is a full-time nursing student in her final semester at SLCC. She is a 44 year old Caucasian mother of two children. Brenda will be a third generation nurse, following the professional footsteps of her mother and grandmother. She hopes to go into surgical nursing,

specifically working with transplants. Brenda views this particular field of nursing to be a unique opportunity to improve patients' lives. Brenda embraces the ethic of care and compassion in nursing and sees the profession as a good fit for her desire to help others.

Brenda was raised in a suburban community as the oldest sibling in a large, Italian family. Her happy, idyllic childhood memories contrast with the awareness of her parents' prejudice and marital problems as she grew older. Later, following the death of her father, Brenda prioritized raising her own family and distanced herself from her mother and siblings. Brenda is married and has two pre-teen daughters. Throughout her married life she and her family have relocated several times, and her husband travels extensively in his work. Prior to going back to school to become a nurse, Brenda was a full time stay at home mom. She is currently raising her daughters in a quiet, safe, farming community. Preparing her soon-to-be-teenage daughters to succeed in a rapidly changing world is a significant priority in Brenda's life.

Brenda is a very observant person who enjoys the predictability and practicality of her busy life. However, she questions the toll that being a full time student has taken on her family. As a full-time nursing student and frequent single parent, Brenda's life has been increasingly chaotic and disjointed. Pursuing her nursing degree has prevented Brenda from being extensively involved in her church and her daughters' athletic teams resulting in feelings of isolation from her community. As she prepares to finish nursing school, Brenda senses that important parts of her life are missing and hopes a stronger sense of connection will return after she graduates. She is very much looking forward to life after graduation and having more time to focus on raising her family and re-establishing stronger community connections.

## Brenda's Story

Brenda grew up in suburban Chicago in what she describes as a traditional, Catholic Italian family. She is the oldest of five children with three brothers and a sister. She describes her childhood as happy and characteristic of most families.

*When I think of growing up, I think about kindergarten. My mom was a stay at home mom, and the grade school that we had attended we walked home for lunch every day. So I always remember walking home for lunch. And we had a half an hour, and when you're a kid it seemed like it's ten miles when it was probably three blocks. It took us forever to walk home; we never had time to eat 'cause we had to turn around and hurry and get back to school. In my mind it was a typical suburban upbringing. We had friends, a street that had so many kids so many different ages that all of us played together. We had bikes. We chased the ice cream man in the evening; that kind of stuff. It was perfect. We had playhouses. We had pools. We had everything. When I think of growing up, it was always very positive. I can remember in the winter the smell when you walked in the door of the chocolate chip cookies that my mom had made. My dad was always working. He was always busy, but he was home on week-ends and just involved in our lives. We were too young at that point to be in sports. We did a lot of bike riding. He was very involved with Boy Scouts, but my brothers were too young, so he did a lot of Boy Scouts. He would do a lot of work with the park district in the winter building ice rinks and stuff. We were always skating. My mom would take us skating. My dad would be there surfacing the ice. I think I had a great upbringing.*

In addition to her recollections that her childhood was typical and happy Brenda also acknowledged there were difficulties. Specifically, Brenda talked about growing up surrounded by people from diverse backgrounds, religions, and races. She became aware of this diversity because it contrasted with the strong prejudice of her own parents.

*I grew up in a very prejudiced home, very prejudiced. I don't ever want my kids to know how I grew up because I don't see people that way. I might have been raised that way, and that might have been my parents' point of view, but my kids will never ever know that, 'cause it's just not right. I knew at a younger age that it wasn't right. A lot of my friends were people that my parents didn't like. I think growing up I kept some of my friendships quiet because of how my parents felt. I don't want my kids to be that way. I mean I was born in the sixties so I didn't grow up knowing about the white fountains versus the black water fountains. I saw pictures of it. But I think my parents being older knew about that firsthand. I mean we didn't grow up in the south, but they knew about it. They lived during that time. I don't know what changed in my mind that I didn't take on my parent's attitude toward things like that. I think it was just because I grew up with the different cultures, and there wasn't a difference. I rebelled against my parents and didn't*

*want their same beliefs and most of the things that they believed in. I knew the way America was moving and equal rights and diversity and all that other stuff. And my first-hand experience with different cultures and even different religions that you can't be this way. It just has to change. If you want the world to be better, you have to change and you have to start with yourself.*

Brenda's commitment to creating a world where everyone belongs and is welcomed began with her childhood friendships. She does not want anyone to experience discrimination. Brenda also shared that her parents' marital relationship was strained and how this brought her closer to her dad.

*My parents' relationship was very... it was an awful marriage. Their relationship was really a mess. I can remember when I was nine, they wanted a divorce. And I said something to them. "Why are you doing this?" My mom had forced us to pick sides between her and my dad. Well, I just couldn't understand why anybody would go against my dad. He gave me everything. He was everything to me. My mom was a stay at home mom, and she was always there for us. And she was a very loving mom. I think I just felt bad for my dad because she had the four kids against him, and my dad had nobody. So I just felt that I should probably go with my dad. He doesn't have anybody.*

Brenda aligned with her father, because she very much wants everyone to be connected and feel a sense of belonging. This caring and nurturing attitude is a recurring theme in Brenda's stories. Another theme in Brenda's stories of her childhood is the façade of an idealistic suburban life contrasted with the racism and marital strain she also described. Maintaining this false sense of everything being happy despite stories that demonstrate otherwise is another recurring theme in Brenda's stories.

Her parents reconciled and the family stayed together until the unexpected death of Brenda's father from diabetes and a heart attack when she was twenty-five years old. However his death prompted significant changes in the family's relationships.

*My father passed away when I was 25 from diabetes and a heart attack. He had his first heart attack when he was 40, passed away when he was 50. When my dad died, then everything hit the fan. That was incredible. The strong family that was always together, always did everything together all the time, ended like that. My mom threw us out. She was like, "You guys have each other. You're married. You're married. You're married.*

*So go and live your lives. Leave me alone.” That’s exactly what she did. So I think that at that point, everything that we knew as far as belonging was over.*

Again, Brenda describes a strong family that was always together despite her mother’s actions breaking up the family after her fathers’ death. Although Brenda states she has close relationships with her siblings, her mother’s grieving created isolation in the family relationships that continues to this day.

*I miss my father and I’m not real close with any of my family anymore. We don’t even talk to each other. Now that I’m older, nursing school has pulled me away from any relationships. I don’t have time to talk on the phone with people for 15-20 minutes. I have a brother in Colorado that we’ll talk for two, three hours at a time. I don’t have time for that. I don’t know the last time I even talked to him. I didn’t even talk to him at Christmas. But my brothers and my sister are all the same way too: you can just pick up and go on. Not to say that I don’t know what’s going on in their lives; that’s not true. ‘Cause I talk to my mom probably once every two weeks. In fact I talked to her Saturday. And she always gives me update of what’s going on. And everybody knows everybody’s busy, and everybody’s in their little world.*

Brenda repeatedly claims to be close to her family, then shares examples that demonstrate isolation. It is important for her to believe she is connected to her family, even if she can’t see that it isn’t necessarily true. After her father died, her relationships with her mother, brothers and sister significantly diminished and Brenda focused on her marriage and starting her own family.

Prior to returning to school Brenda’s attention centered on her husband and their two daughters. For the first 10 years of her daughters’ lives, Brenda dedicated her time to being a full-time, stay at home mom.

*My husband and my daughters are my family. My daughters are incredible. Abby is going to be 12, and Celia, our younger one is going to be 10. So they’re two years apart. They’re very involved with sports. All we do is running around in addition to going to school full time. They’re both in volleyball and swim team, and they’ve done that for about three years now. So we’re pretty busy. They’re great; they’re a lot of fun. We have good times together.*

Brenda’s commitment to raising her daughters is paramount. She was more actively involved in church youth activities, school, and sports with her young daughters; however, this changed

significantly when Brenda decided they were old enough that she could return to school full time. Currently her busy schedule contributes to the chaos and fragmentation that defines her life. As full time student Brenda has some regrets that she has been pulled away from her family priorities.

*Each day is different because school is different. My start times are different. There are two days a week that I get out of bed at 3:00 – 3:30 a.m. for clinical. The rest of the week I'm up 5:00 – 5:30 a.m. Some of those days I take my kids to school because they open enroll, and I am the bus. So I have to get them to and from school every day. Basically we're all in school for the most part. We come home. There's usually volleyball practice or swim practice. Our dinners are never organized. It's sandwiches and frozen pizzas a lot, unfortunately. And then homework. So that's basically our day. It's just, it's crazy. I can't wait for it to slow down. Some days I miss that stay at home mom and being able to make a meal and organize everybody's life a little bit better than flying by the seat of your pants as they say. So it's crazy right now. I think I've lost a lot. I think I've given up a lot. They understand why I'm in school, and why I'm doing this. As I think about the positive aspects of going back to school, I'm showing the girls what it's like to further your education and set a good role model example as far as studying and staying on top of things instead of watching TV and stuff like that. The positive role model is we're always active. We're either doing homework which you're educating your mind or you're physically active with swimming and volleyball and stuff like that. I've given up a lot of swim meets, a lot of volleyball meets, a lot of practices where I was always involved. I was always involved with volunteering as a swim coach. Where now, I don't do any of that. I mean I'm lucky if I make one or two meets a year. So that's hard, and I feel that I've given up on that.*

Brenda repeatedly reminds herself that she has a good life as she describes all that she has given up to be a full time nursing student and the isolation that she feels. She misses the relationships she had at church and through her daughter's activities. Contributing to Brenda's feelings of isolation, her husband travels for his job and is often on the road for extended periods of time.

*My husband travels, travels a lot. Last night I think he walked in the door at 1:30 in the morning He travels three weeks out of the month. So with him gone and not having family here, it's hard to find people that when I need to be at clinical at six in the morning to watch the girls. And there are times where I'm getting them up at 4:00-4:30 in the morning and taking them to a girl friend's house because I need to be to school early and they need to be up near their school. It is a little bit difficult, but it's worked, and we're almost done.*

As a stay-at-home mom Brenda repeatedly identified her daughters' school, church, and sports

activities as a source of relationships and support. However, these areas have not provided meaningful connections during her years in nursing school as she has prioritized her education. This isolation is more pronounced, because Brenda and her husband are not connected to their extended families.

*Our families aren't here, and we're not close with our families. And the friends that we had with the church that we were with; you thought you were friends with them. But since we've left the church, we haven't heard from any of those people. I think it's just a sense of belonging, a sense of being able to help out another person, and knowing that they'll help you if you need something. If I had a flat tire, who am I going to call? [My husband] is out of town; we don't have a lot of friends; we don't have family that we can rely on. I think being involved you feel people care about you, and they should know if you're involved that you care about them. It's just the whole... it's like a family. We've been away from our family for so long, and we've always picked up and moved. But the older you get, the less friends you have as you move because the older you are, you're set in your ways. You have your family; you have your friends. It's hard to step into peoples' lives when you're older. And I think that people are less accepting. So when you join a church, that's a community into itself.*

Brenda struggles with the loss of community and support she has experienced as a frequent single mom and student nurse. She wants stronger connections with friends and family but hasn't found ways to prioritize developing these relationships.

Brenda's faith journey is an important source of strength and meaning in her life. She remembers growing up in the Catholic Church and serving others in a variety of ways.

*I grew up Catholic, and my parents both attended Catholic schools and Catholic high schools. My grandmother would go to church every Sunday; in fact, she went every day. There was a point right before I was married that I realized no one's taking my grandma [to church]. She was borderline at that time whether she should be driving. She didn't have that far to go, but every Sunday it was a little special thing with her and I that we would go to church together. I would come pick her up, we would go to church, and I would bring her back home. That was all it was. I just felt, "All right, I'm doing something right. Not only am I spending time with my grandma, but I'm doing something that's helping her out 'cause she can do something that's so important in her life."*

Brenda's commitment to her grandmother exemplifies her value of family and caring relationships. Brenda will do whatever she must to take care of others, but struggles to prioritize

taking care of her own needs. As Brenda described this time in her life her own spirituality is not a focus, she is much more concerned with caring for her grandmother's needs.

Brenda left the Catholic church when she got married and was not an active church goer during the early years of her married life. Brenda described how she and her husband reconnected with their faith after September 11, 2001.

*My husband and I attended this church which was Brethren in Faith. I was used to a very structured, predictable, you sit, you stand, you kneel, you say this prayer kind of thing. And this was very different, more like a Quaker style. It wasn't like this free for all; it was structured, but it wasn't Catholic. So it was very different in that way. After the kids were born we decided to really focus on going to church. It was after 9/11: we had gone to a couple different churches that week just to pray with everybody else. We thought, "We have kids, why don't we just go to church?" Abby was two years old at that point. And we found the perfect church right away, and started attending it. But it wasn't just for the kids 'cause I got more out of it than that those kids sitting in the crying room got out of it. We just found the right church. We joined right away; we got very involved right away. You know, it was perfect. People were very open and welcoming. In a very small community, they were very accepting. It just was right. The people were very welcoming. The music was great. We loved the music; I think a lot of worship in our mind is music. I never made my confirmation growing up. I had stopped at my communion. I made my confirmation in 2004 through that church. Not because I felt like as a Catholic you're supposed to make your confirmation kind of thing. 'Cause even my husband pushed me. He asked, "Are you doing this because you have to?" And I'm like, "No, I think I'm doing this because I want to. It just feels like something I need to do." And people asked, "Wow! Why would you do this as an adult?" I said, "I don't know. There's just something that's telling me I need to do this." And I think there were two or three other adults that followed who said, "We were so moved, and it's just the right thing to do. You just, you influenced us." I'm thinking, "I did something for somebody else, not just for myself. I loved that church. It's a great church. We still have a plaque on our wall that was given to us when we left there. And I see it every day. It's in the kitchen, and I think about that church a lot; think about those people. A lot of them are still our friends even though we're far away from them.*

The caring relationships and connections in this story demonstrate Brenda's very strong value of being a part of an interconnected and mutually supportive faith community. There was a fondness in her voice as she recalled the feelings of being a member of this church. Although Brenda talks about the importance of her faith and being involved in her church, once again she has isolated herself from these connections while she has focused on her education.

One priority that Brenda has maintained as she has returned to school is raising her daughters. She understands that being a nursing student has provided opportunities to teach her growing daughters to be self-responsible and to provide for themselves.

*The girls have learned responsibility. They know how the washing machine works. They know how to wash the dishes. They know how to do a lot more things that they probably should know, but I was doing for them. I know my daughter does some community service through church. They have a lady that they help out with raking, with any little project she needs around the house. And she thoroughly enjoys that. So I think that the seed's been planted in the older one.*

Brenda is also concerned that the safety and comfort that living in their rural community provides are not fully preparing her daughters to navigate the diversity of a complex modern society.

*Life is not all good; it's not all perfect. This area is not multicultural. I was raised around more than one race. Recently we had gone out to dinner and the waitress had a Spanish accent, and my girls couldn't understand what she was saying. I understood her clear as a bell because I had always been raised around that. Well, here my kids have grown up in a white farm community with no diversity whatsoever. When you're raising your kids, you're trying to protect them from all that's evil; you're trying to raise them to be safe. You're going to have high academic standards; you're going to have everything that you want. But in the same point, in protecting them, you're not dealing with the reality of this country that we're not all White. We're not all English speaking. And I thought, "Wow. They're just missing out on something that I've always heard." I've heard a Spanish accent. I've always been raised around different cultures. Whether it's been color, whether it's been religion. I've been subjected to that all my life. It's just natural; it's just the way life is. And for them to not understand what she says. It's like, "Wow!" It's just mind blowing. So in protecting them, they're losing out on their education as far as how people are in this world.*

Brenda wants to ensure her daughters are prepared to succeed when they go into the world. She intentionally wants her daughters to value diverse experiences and perspectives so the interruption of her parent's prejudicial attitudes and beliefs is maintained in their generation.

As Brenda talked about her efforts to provide a good upbringing for her daughters, she also spoke about the benefits she received as a parent volunteer with various church and sporting

activities. She contrasted this volunteerism with her service learning project serving unmet community needs.

*We were pretty active in church for a long time. We did a lot of different groups where you would volunteer and serve on committees. I don't think I've ever done anything that big, that major. Volunteering for swim team and helping out with stuff like that. But to actually help out people in need as compared to just helping out to coach a kid is a different situation. They are two totally different situations. I think volunteering for your kids is not the same as helping out somebody out who really needs the help, like at a soup kitchen or a homeless shelter, people who desperately need your help. My kids will swim whether I volunteer or not. There's always a parent that's willing to step up. It's two totally different things.*

Brenda differentiates helping out with her children's activities truly serving the needs of society.

This distinction between volunteerism and service is noteworthy, because the outcomes are different. Brenda's experiences volunteering with church or her kids' activities provided meaningful connections with others like her. However, serving the community helped her to more fully understand the journeys of people with other life experiences.

*Helping people who actually need help is more gratifying than helping my own children. I don't think you realize what you get out of helping somebody. You realize what it's like to be homeless or put yourself in their shoes 'cause you've never been homeless. But if you're around somebody, and you see what they are and you see what they look like, and you see that they're hungry, there's just... it's a whole different world. People just don't see it. By volunteering I think you get a better understanding. "Okay, that is reality. I don't see it every day, but wow, it is this way."*

Brenda makes the connection that helping others is intrinsically rewarding. She also describes the eye-opening benefits of experiencing firsthand the realities of difference and privilege.

Brenda grew up in a typical suburban neighborhood and is raising her family in a safe, rural community. She values diversity, family, relationships, being involved in her community, and serving others. She repeatedly talks about strong family connections, yet seems to be isolated and lonely in her focused world as a mostly single parent and busy student. She values diversity, but lives in a predominantly White, privileged area. Brenda emphasizes education and teaching

her daughters important skills, but is concerned they are not fully prepared to navigate a complex, diverse society. Brenda attributes the many contrasts in her life to her busy schedule and academic priorities. She anticipates more effectively balancing her multiple roles and values as she prepares to graduate.

### **Brenda's Service Learning Experiences**

For her primary service learning experience, Brenda was assigned 12 hours of service in a nursing related placement as a part of her Lifespan Development course. There were several human service agencies available to choose from, along with the opportunity to help a family who had recently had quadruplets. While Brenda was open to the lessons her service experience might teach her, she initially hesitated to sign up with one of the agencies. After a few prompts from her instructor, Brenda signed up to help with the family of quads for two hours a week over a six week period.

*I volunteered with an individual family that needed help. The father of this family was a nurse. I don't know if he was a nursing student at a different school or how that worked, but they had had quads, four kids you know. They were incredible little kids. So they needed help and I thought, "Okay. The Red Cross gets their volunteers all the time. Let me help an individual family and make it more of a personal thing rather than a bigger organization." I think my service learning project was a lot different than a lot of the others because it was such a small, close knit family; it wasn't a big organization. I saw things from a different point of view. I thought, "I'm not a kid person. Why am I helping out this lady with four little babies?" But I think I got more from it than she did out of me. I enjoyed it. It was it was a great project.*

Brenda did not intentionally choose the family of quads because she was seeking a relational experience; however, she quickly became a part of the family as a volunteer in their home. Her assessment that she is "not a kid person" contrasted with her decision to work with the family, repeating the theme of contrasts previously described.

Brenda quickly connects with the four children and their mom. Brenda wasn't sure what to expect when she arrived for her first afternoon.

*The first day I didn't know where I was going because I hadn't been to that part of [the city]. It was kind of like south, and not being from the city I get real nervous about driving. So I get there, and there had been a lot of snow. I couldn't park on the road so I had to park in on the driveway. I walked in. It was a tiny, cute little older house like it was built in the 1960's. I thought, "Oh, this is perfect." I walk in and we're whispering right away. The mom and I were whispering. "They're still sleeping," she says. She explained to me how the day would go. They get up after their nap, and we have a little snack, and we do play time. She says, "And then you'll probably be gone." 'Cause I was only assigned for two hours. I said, "Alright, sounds good." She was just an incredible person from the minute I met her. She was just bubbly and full of energy, which I suppose you need to be as a mom of quads. She and I just hit it off instantly. She was just like this person I had known all my life, and I just felt I knew her. There was just something about her and I, we got along from the very beginning. I wanted to do anything I could to help her. I figured, I'm older than she is. I have the experience of having kids, not four at a time, but this is going to work 'cause I can help her. The first introduction to those kids, all they did was scream at me. They didn't know me; I was a complete stranger. It actually took quite a while, probably two or three visits, for them to actually calm down and smile when I walked in the room. The problem was that we had to be so quiet. Brandon, her husband who is the nurse, worked nightshift so he was sleeping when I got there. I would go from 4:00 – 6:00 pm. I don't remember what day it was; I think it was a Thursday, or something like that. We'd have to be real quiet 'cause Brandon's sleeping. Well, it's this tiny little house. We've got four kids screaming, and we're trying to be quiet. "Daddy's sleeping." We would get up and we would have snack. One of them had a problem with vomiting across the room. So when he would get upset, 'cause obviously he didn't know this stranger, he would become hysterical and not control himself very well. But eventually we did get to the point where they would relax a little bit. We would get done with snack; we would clean up. If they were sleeping when I got there, we would fold clothes, whatever I could do to help her. I dusted a lot; whatever she needed done. It didn't matter to me, I don't mind doing that kind of stuff if it was a help to her which she needed. There were times when she just wanted to lie down herself. "Go ahead and relax. I mean, I'll do stuff that I can do quiet. I can fold clothes quiet." We would do things like that. We'd go downstairs. They had the entire basement set up as a playroom. Just incredible. The kids just loved it down there. Bring all four of them down there. We would play; we would do different exercises. One of them needed physical therapy type work. So Eileen, the mom, would work on that. We did a lot of playing and a lot of diaper changes. Probably the biggest thing was that they finally stopped crying when I walked in the door. Which was nice 'cause I felt accepted at that point. While I was there, one of them started talking, saying his first words. So I got to hear one of the first words. I said to Eileen one day, "Do you hear he's talking? He just said..." I don't even remember what the word was. She says, "Brandon said the same thing, that he's talking." I told her, "That was as clear as a bell. I think it was dog or something like that." She complained, "I haven't heard it. That's not fair." One of them started talking. The daughter, Grace (They had three boys and a girl.) started walking, which was pretty neat. So I was there for that. The whole experience was just an incredible experience. I would bring them snacks all the time. "This is great," Eileen would say. "We're always shopping with coupons." With four kids it's hard to make a living with just him working 'cause she was*

*obviously a stay at home mom with four brand new babies. Two of them had been born with problems so they were actually hospitalized for a month when they were first born. They were a year old or a little bit over a year when I first started coming. [They are a] famous group in [this] area. They would make the paper all the time. I'd think "Oh. I know those kids." It was just a great experience. I can't say enough about it. Here I kind of went in thinking, "Okay, here's four kids. I'm not a kid person. I'm going to try to make the best out of this. I have to stay positive." And I just... I can't say enough about that experience. It was just worth everything. Yeah, incredible family.*

Brenda soon found confidence in her years of experience as a mom, and this provided plenty of connections and expertise in helping Eileen and the four children. The connection Brenda felt to Eileen and the quads filled the void of isolation in her life. While many of her peers were glad to complete the required hours and move on, Brenda found she looked forward to returning each week to spend time with the family of quads.

*I think the hardest thing was when we said goodbye. That was hard. Eileen had made brownies for me and said, "Give it to your girls." And she says, "You need to bring your girls back." Well, that's almost impossible to do, and I wish that we could have continued that relationship, but nursing school is so demanding, unfortunately. Until I get done with school... I haven't done anything like that, and I do regret that. That does weigh heavy on me. [Volunteering] is something that everybody should do, and I wish I could do it. I'm not even helping with my own kids volunteering and doing any of that. The biggest thing that stuck out was "This is really over." and I didn't want it to end. If I was told I had to do 32 hours, it would have been better. I think the relationship would have been cemented even stronger. The thing that stood out was that it was over. It wasn't like, "Oh, I did my 12 hours. Great. I'm done." I didn't want it to end. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed that family a lot.*

Brenda enjoyed the relationships she established, the lessons she was learned about herself, as well as the confidence that emerged as she helped the family. Most significantly, Brenda created an authentic connection with the family and was saddened when it came to an end.

In class Brenda's peers shared their initial reflections on their varied service experiences. Brenda noted that her classmates were having very different experiences serving at homeless shelters and teen pregnancy shelters. In contrast to the experiences of her peers which seemed to focus on the agency, Brenda's learning emerged from the relationships she developed with

Eileen and the quads.

*I enjoyed it more than I thought I would ever enjoy it. I learned that those kids affected me and helped me learn who I am more than I think I helped any of them. I just did this little stuff. They stimulated me mentally in learning more about myself. Patience was probably the biggest thing that was... I had already learned, but they helped reiterate. They were just an incredible group. They were so cute. I just can't say enough about the experience. I know I'm not a kid person, but I think it's just... it's easier for me to relax around them just because I have kids. And I think I learned that I can be an influence on younger mothers. That's not the first time I've done that. I can remember just a couple of clinical experiences with brand new moms. First child, and the women didn't even know how to bathe their child. And I'm like, "Wow!" I think back when I was a first time mom, I didn't know what to do with this thing and how to give it a bath. So you can look at it negatively, "Oh, I'm this old lady and I'm going back to school and all these other kids are younger." Or you can turn your age around and use it to your advantage, and educate people in the areas that you have the expertise in. I'm a mom. So I just learned to use that. They were so positive and upbeat. Eileen always had this positive bright outlook even though her two kids were so sick. And what they had gone through and raising four kids at one time. It was just incredible to watch her energy and her attitude. It wasn't like a homeless thing. It was different because it wasn't like they needed anything. They had so much love; the kids had so many toys. There was no want there: six people living in tiny little house. They were quite content where they were. I learned that it's not what you have; it's what you make of life. That's how they've made their life. I think that those four kids were just an incredible positive energy that... They were just an incredible group. They were so cute. It's just this happy family and when you went there, you had no choice but to be happy. Cleaning up vomit smiling. It was an incredibly positive experience all the way around.*

Brenda felt the opportunity to help the family and become a part of their lives over several weeks was unique because she wasn't serving anonymous strangers. By entering into the lives of the family of quads, Brenda learned important lessons that had been missing in her own life: such as patience, optimism and gratitude. Brenda also learned to appreciate how her own life experience makes her a better nurse, a better mom, and a better person.

Brenda also volunteered at a health fair for pre-school children sponsored by the nursing students at SLCC. Her class sponsored a booth on healthy nutrition and obesity and provided each child the opportunity to plant seeds and grow vegetables to eat.

*We did the health fair. It was just something that we did together as a class. We put on a health fair for preschoolers, and each group was assigned a different topic. There was*

*fire safety. There was stop sign safety, pedestrian type safety. Our group had done healthy foods. We taught them how to plant a seed, gave each kid a seed and a little pot, and you could grow a vegetable. Tying it in with Michelle Obama's vegetable garden that she was growing. It's still a push eating healthy and obesity and stuff. Anything that we do in nursing is volunteer. It's part of the program, but it's also giving back to the community. I think the kids enjoyed that and hopefully they grew some beans. You hope that you plant your seeds early enough with some of these little guys. Then it influences them maybe someday and like they'll say, "Remember that bean we planted."*

Brenda connects with the spirit of giving back to promote healthy communities that encompasses the nursing profession. She understands that being a nurse includes an ethic of service to individuals and the community at large.

Through her stories Brenda articulated a belief that service can improve the community for everyone and lead to a life filled with genuine relationships. Brenda talked about the role of nursing as a public service that brings a holistic and compassionate perspective to serving others.

*I've been educated as a nurse to do certain things, but also the whole field is based on compassion. It's not just going through the motions and physically taking care of somebody. It's called holistic medicine for a certain reason, because it's not just one issue you're taking care of. You're taking care of everything. You're not just taking care of a patient; you're taking care of family members that are there. It's more than just the physical healing of a wound or a disease. That person may heal better because my attitude was better; maybe I influenced that person to take initiative and eat the right diet, or exercise, or take [their medication] on a scheduled basis as compared to how they were doing it. Understanding that you can do right for other people helps me to be a better nurse. Knowing how to relate to a person, to motivate them to take care of themselves a little bit better in the future, to keep them out of the hospital, to maintain a healthy life style it all fits; it all goes together. It's just compassion it comes down to; compassion for others. Whether it's as a nurse or a mom or a member of society. It's just care. When you put effort into something, do it. You know, put your name behind it, and do it right. And in order to get something out of it, you have to fall in love with it. When you fall in love with it, your heart strings are pulled, and you bond and you get those relationships. I think that's what it comes down to.*

Compassion and connections with others are recurring themes in Brenda's stories. She also takes pride in her ability to help others, both personally and professionally.

*Giving back to your community, whether you do it professionally or personally, they're both important. Once you become a nurse, you're going to have everybody calling you whether it's somebody from the church or the neighbor down the street. 'Cause I do it*

*myself. My neighbor's a nurse. I'm always asking her, "What do you think it is?" She says, "I don't know. Get the book out." There is a sense that you should give back, but also I think that as a nurse, your compassion in giving back is there every day. It's a profession that I think is highly respected.*

Through her volunteerism and service learning experiences, Brenda recognizes the intersecting roles in her life converge through an ethic of care and service for others: her family, her community, and her patients.

As Brenda contrasted her various service experiences, she created a structure of significance in her descriptions. Her work with the family of quads seemed more personal and significant than the service learning experiences of her peers because of the meaningful relationships and lessons she learned about herself. These service learning projects serving the needs in the community were more meaningful than the health fair. Additionally, as Brenda described these projects addressing unmet community need, they emerged as more significant than other volunteerism such as helping with her daughter's sporting activities.

## **Reflection**

Brenda's commitment to succeed as a student nurse has driven her to forego important relationships and other priorities in her life. She has pushed through the isolation her educational goals have created in hopes that her work-life balance will return after she graduates. Although Brenda realizes that she will never go back to her life as a youth, or even as a full-time, stay-at-home mom, she longs for the supportive relationships she had when she was more connected to her family.

*When my dad passed, the family fell apart. I don't know if it was my dad that held it together. I don't know what happened. I still don't know to this day. Losing my father was the biggest thing. I mean he was my life. And I never thought he would be taken at such a young age. My youngest brother was 19 when dad passed. It was just an incredible event in life, and it was mind opening. It made me realize, "Alright, I have to just live, and I have to be happy. I have to be happy with what I have. That's the way it is*

*now.” My family, my brothers and my sister and my mom, we have nothing to do really with each other so my immediate family is everything to me.*

Brenda’s intense desire to establish meaningful relationships will continue to influence her life as she graduates and redefines herself as a nurse and working mother. Her busy life will likely continue to be a barrier in forming these connections. Brenda is beginning to understand and appreciate the value that involvement in her community can have in creating these connections, especially within her faith community. Brenda also values the example volunteerism and community service provides to her own daughters.

*I hope that I’ve set a good example for my kids. That’s another reason to get back involved in the community, in a church - whether you’re volunteering on an evangelism team, or a homeless shelter or something like that. If I can set that example, maybe my girls will follow. And it just becomes natural at some point in their life to do it. You just don’t think about it. It’s not like, “Oh I have to go and do this today.” It’s more like, “I get to do this, and I can’t wait to do it! Because last week I volunteered and this is what happened. It is great I was able to help out.” It’s kind of an “I” thing but I don’t think you realize how much the “I, I, I” becomes “I’ve helped this person.” You need to realize that you’re doing good, and it should just come as second nature. It needs to be taught initially, but it needs to be constantly re-fed like fuel in the fire. Keep that fire burning, and you’ll want to do it. It needs to start when they’re younger. It should just become like your food habits. If you start to eat the right foods when you’re three, hopefully you’ll stay that way through the rest of your life. I think it has to start when they’re younger because you can be forced to do anything and do it once. It needs to be constant. Parents need to do it. My parents didn’t do it, and I don’t do it enough. But I see it already in my older one that she wants to help, that she wants to step up. I don’t know if it’s because of her beliefs; I mean, her beliefs are so strong right now. She’s very strong willed, and strong headed. I hope she stays this way.*

Brenda understands that by role modeling and providing opportunities to serve others to her children, she is establishing a new pattern she didn’t observe in her own family. Just as she interrupted the pattern of prejudice in her family of origin and emerged with a commitment to diversity, Brenda wants to instill in her daughters a new commitment to serving others. She also makes the connection that serving others minimizes a self-centered attitude and focuses on the needs of others.

Throughout the past three and half years, Brenda's multiple roles as a mother, wife, and student nurse have overlapped. Ultimately, Brenda focuses on her role as a mother; guiding and shaping the lives of her daughters as her highest priority.

*I am a mom. I am a student. Each piece adds up to who I am. My education as a nurse; my experience is a mom. I've been a mom longer than I've been a nurse. It defines who I am. My experience as a mom helped with the community service. They all intertwine. It's how I take the individual pieces of who I am and put them together in each experience that I do. I want to be a positive influence on my kids. Now that I'm almost done with school I want to stay very involved in their lives. Because as they enter these teenage years, are they going to make the right decisions? So as a mom I still want to stay involved with that. My mind changes just constantly as I get older and reevaluate what I want out of life. But the core values are making sure that my kids end up positive and have a good life and do the right things. The biggest thing that plays into my future are my kids. My life will just go on day by day, but those kids are still my responsibility.*

Managing these multiple roles and responsibilities as a busy mom created confidence as Brenda struggled prioritizing the time and energy required to succeed as a student nurse. As she graduates and reflects on her experiences as a nursing student, Brenda's commitment to her family is once again preeminent. Brenda's service learning experience was particularly meaningful because it emerged from the nexus of her core values and multiple identities: prioritizing family, helping others, creating meaningful relationships, and being a nurse.

*I think just the whole thing with the quads just gave me a little bit more confidence in myself. And just having the confidence makes me feel that I'm doing the right thing. I've picked the right field. Because I was thinking even at the beginning of this year "I'm never going to get this, I'm never going to learn this." But it's the same thing with helping the quads' mom. I wasn't born a mom; I didn't just learn this stuff. I mean it just took years and years and years of bathing your child or feeding a kid over and over again: years and years, meals and meals, that kind of thing. You just don't know it. It's the same thing with being a nurse: you just don't know it. I didn't know how to be a nurse two years ago. Now I'm to the point I think "Wow! I can really see what I've done. I'm actually going to be a good nurse." 'Cause I was telling the instructors even a year ago "I'm never going to get this." They would tell me, "No, you'll get it." I didn't believe them, but you know what? In the last month or so, it all just clicked. I hope the rest of the world sees me as confident. Confidence is everything, in any part of your life.*

Despite this confidence in her professional and parenting roles, Brenda senses that important parts of her life are missing. Reflecting on her volunteerism and community service experiences helped Brenda to realize that she does not have the sense of belonging or supportive relationships she desires. As she graduates, Brenda is hopeful that re-connecting with her church community, serving others, and spending more time with her family will fill this void.

*I feel that I'm not part of the community because we've given up church. Because I haven't been involved in anything, even with [the girls'] teams and stuff that they're doing right now. I don't even know the parents on these teams. I feel like, "Yeah. We're missing out on everything. We're not doing anything other than school work." And [my husband's] gone all the time, so we've missed out on a lot. I know him and I both miss church because that is where you get involved. And that's where you have your friends. Right now we are not involved in anything. Our families aren't here, and we're not close with our families. And the friends that we had with the church that we were with; you thought you were friends with them, but since we've left the church we haven't heard from any of those people... It better change in May, and I think it will. I think life will go back to where it was. We'll find a church; we'll get involved, and life will be good. Something's got to change 'cause there's something desperately missing in our lives. I think it's just a sense of belonging, a sense of being able to help out another person, and knowing that they'll help you if you need something. If I had a flat tire, who am I going to call? [My husband] is out of town. We don't have a lot of friends. We don't have family that we can rely on. You know, I think we were raised as independent people so my idea is always I can do this myself. But there's still stuff missing. There's still the sense of being around people whether they need your help or you're just with a friend. You always want to belong.*

Brenda craves the sense of connection and belonging that is missing in her life. She is isolated from her community, and therefore she is unable to draw upon the nurturing strength it provides. Brenda remains hopeful that she can make changes in her life after she graduates and reconnect with her community to fill the emptiness she now recognizes.

Brenda Giordano is wife and mother who will soon be graduating and working as a surgical nurse. The desire for genuine relationships and a sense of belonging are recurrent themes in Brenda's stories as is the isolation that characterized her chaotic life as a student. As her daughters become teenagers and she begins her new professional life, Brenda desperately

wants to repair the relationships in her life. Brenda articulates a strong commitment to volunteerism and community connections in her personal life, as well as to public service in her professional life. She believes involvement in her community creates meaningful relationships with others. Brenda's service learning experiences transformed her in profound ways and helped her to recognize and appreciate the importance of family and authentic relationships. The lessons about gratitude and optimism she learned from the family of quads have shaped her life and helped her to be a better nurse and mother. By caring for others and re-discovering her ability to contribute through personal and public service, she hopes to rekindle the relationships and sense of belonging she desires.

### **Jeff Dalton**

*A community is kind of like an ecosystem.  
People need to do their part to make the whole thing work as a system.*

Jeff Dalton is a first year general studies major who plans to transfer to a yet to be identified four year university. He is an eighteen year old, Caucasian student athlete, and presidential scholar at Service Learning Community College. Jeff does not yet have a strong sense of vocation and remains open to various possibilities for his studies and career. Despite this lack of clarity about his future, Jeff is confident in his current goals to complete his associate's degree and to serve as team captain in his role as a student athlete. Jeff runs both cross country and long distance track at SLCC. He enjoys both being a part of a team and the individual competitiveness of running, as well as the opportunities long distance training provide for personal reflection. Jeff is a very self-aware individual who is able to see multiple perspectives. He attributes his confidence and self-assurance to the time spent training for long distance races. Jeff is proud of his contributions as both a student athlete and presidential scholar and is looking forward to becoming captain of the cross country team next season.

Jeff brings a very professional approach to his multiple roles as an athlete, as a student, and as a role model. Jeff repeatedly describes himself as a “well-rounded” person. Being a presidential scholar and ambassador for SLCC provides several opportunities to serve the college community. Jeff also has strong connections to his neighborhood community and frequently talks about the importance of social responsibility. Jeff wants to use his leadership capacity to serve others and improve their lives. Jeff talks about serving his community in his roles as a team captain, presidential scholar, and service learner. This connection to serving others also emerges as a theme in Jeff’s relationships with his family.

Jeff grew up in a suburban community near SLCC. He attended a private parochial elementary school and graduated from public high school. Jeff’s parents divorced when he was young. As a child he experienced first-hand the impact of his father’s alcoholism and is concerned about protecting his younger siblings from the negative consequences this creates. Through these experiences Jeff developed an appreciation for strong, nurturing relationships as well as the ability to see different perspectives. Jeff anticipates serving his community, both personally and professionally, in some capacity after college and is looking forward to starting his own family. Although Jeff has experienced adversity in his life, his fortitude as an athlete helps him to always keep moving forward and not let life’s difficulties limit his eventual success.

### **Jeff’s Story**

Jeff’s parents divorced because of his father’s alcoholism when he was young. Following the divorce Jeff’s parents shared custody and he lived primarily with his mother. His experiences as a child of divorce, along with his dad’s on-going alcoholism, have been very influential.

*I really haven’t had the best relationship with my dad my whole life because my parents were divorced at a young age, and I lived with my mom. [My dad’s] alcoholism didn’t help the relationship. When I was younger, I didn’t really know what was going on as much. I knew that there was a problem, but I didn’t really know what the problem was.*

*Like, he'd call me up one day telling me he's got to go away to go to rehab for a month. It was just kind of shocking, and it's upsetting. There's a lot of things that I didn't realize as a kid that I think I realize as an adult. My dad has two younger kids, so I have a half-brother and half-sister. And I think about them more than probably myself 'cause they're younger, and they have to deal with it. I can kind of be on my own and not have to worry about it as much, but it's going to affect them a lot more. Part of being alcoholic is your moods sway back and forth. One day I could do something, and he might think it's neat; and the next day he'd be pissed off about it. Now if I can't judge his mood, I don't know how my half brother and sister are going to be able to judge it. I don't understand how that's going to affect them. Are they going to be scared to do or tell him certain things 'cause they don't know how he's going to react? My dad tries, but he just doesn't realize a lot of things. That's what's upsetting about it: that he doesn't realize. And I think that's what makes me more upset than the actual alcoholism.*

Jeff struggles to describe his emotions surrounding his father's alcoholism. The unpredictability of his dad's behavior due to the alcoholism creates barriers in their relationship.

*I used to go to my dad's one or two nights a week. When I was in middle school it was more solid, I'd go over there every Wednesday and every other weekend; typical of divorced parents. My dad was remarried at this point, and I'd go over there to stay with him, and he wouldn't come home. I remember waking up in the middle of the night. He still wasn't there and I was pissed. I couldn't go anywhere. I was too young to drive or anything like that. So I'm there; my step mom was there. I remember one night, she was just as mad as me, and so we went out and found him. I was out in the car in the middle of the night on a week day, and he didn't even do anything about it. And that's not my dad. I know that's not my dad. That's not how he is. Alcohol just kind of... That wasn't him, he had a legitimate problem. And I think of that time a lot because of how messed up it is. I don't remember exactly how I felt, but it doesn't hurt me as much now.*

Jeff has difficulty reconciling his love for his father with the effects of his alcoholism. He opened up about the struggles his dad's alcoholism has created in his life, and why he now wants to protect his younger siblings from the disappointment and anger he faced.

*Having a younger brother and sister, [I] try to guard them. You don't really want them to see that. I think that I was kind of exposed to it at an early age, and I kind of dealt with it not at the right time of my life. I don't want them to have to deal with the same issues, just overcoming those obstacles. Even though my dad's given me a lot of things, but he's also lacked a lot of things in my life. Even though I might have some negative feelings towards my dad at times, I try to not show that to my younger brother and sister.*

Jeff is very protective of his younger siblings and wants to shield them from the emotional challenges he continues to navigate. Jeff's experiences growing up in the midst of his parents'

divorce have contributed to three key aspects of his identity: his ability to see multiple perspectives, his understanding of the impact that a stable home has on creating success, and his desire to create stability by caring for others.

Jeff attributed these values, along with his work ethic, to the role modeling of his mom. He greatly admired her sacrifices as a single parent and appreciates the example of her hard work to support him.

*I actually had a single mom for most of my life, and she's very hard working. I'm pretty close to her. She's a really good mom. She can be my friend, and I can talk to her about a lot of stuff. But she also knows that only goes so far, and she has to be my mom at the same time. I'd say she's what's really driven me to be a good student and have all the characteristics to be a student athlete. And I owe her a lot of credit on that end. Being a single mom, I got most everything that I've learned from her. And she did a lot. She never really tells me exactly what to do. She stayed on me when I started to get lazy. I have so much respect for her that I don't really want to disappoint her. She works Monday through Friday, and she'll bring her work home on the week-ends. She's under a lot of pressure at work. So I think just the fact that she can work through the week, work long hours and still be a good mom and not have a bad attitude at the same time. Her example reminds me that there's always somebody out there that's probably working harder than I am. So when I get mad about something I'm doing, I just need to remember that there's probably somebody else that's busting it a little harder than I am, and I shouldn't be so upset about it.*

Jeff's mom is a key influence in his life, particularly her hard work and constant support. Jeff's dad works as a realtor and auctioneer who is active with charity work in the community.

Growing up, Jeff accompanied his father to these events, and he learned a lot from this example.

*[My dad] is a licensed real estate agent and auctioneer. He does it for his own business, but at the same time a lot of people come to him to do Boy Scout auctions or just any type of charity auction for high schools or stuff like that. A lot of times I went with and helped with the process. Just being there you see that each little bit that you can do in your spare time can really help the rest of the community. You see a lot of people who are less fortunate than you. And you can see how much they appreciate things. I learned a lot from that. I try to think about my dad doing a lot of community things like that. On a business level, he does it because people see him and realize he's a good person so like they'll trust him with their real estate business. On a personal level, one day he'll be wearing a suit and tie, and the next day he'll be wearing jeans and boots. He sees the best of both worlds. He can relate to the business aspect and also the community aspect,*

*the hard work aspect. I think that's what motivates him is to connect with people. And you know he likes those relationships.*

His dad's volunteerism provides Jeff an influential example of active community involvement and social responsibility. This positive public persona contrasts with Jeff's private and personal struggles with his dad's addiction. Integrating the distinct influences of both his parents has contributed to Jeff's understanding of the importance of positive relationships as well as his awareness of the unmet needs in his community. Jeff has integrated these core values into his identity and value system.

In addition to the influences of his family life, Jeff's experiences switching from parochial to public school were also influential. Jeff went to a private catholic elementary school then transferred to the public schools for middle school and high school.

*When I was younger, I went to a private Catholic school. And then as I got into junior high, I switched to a public school where I really learned a lot. I was in a very tight community, [then] moved into a bigger public school. That's when I learned a lot about people. I think that's another factor that made me a well-rounded person. I've been around that tight community and met a lot of different types of people. When I [left] the Catholic school, it really opened my eyes. We never really thought about anything outside of that school. It was a very tight community. Everyone knew each other, and we didn't have any problems you know. It's a private school, so most of the kids there were pretty well off. And you didn't have as many "at home" issues. When I went to the public school, the first day I was there, I remember seeing a fight in the hallway. I was like, "Oh, my God." That really opened my eyes. I met so many different types of people. But I still kept in mind the people that live in that closed community. I still saw those people from the private school. I still was friends with them, and seeing both worlds melted me into a happy medium of the two. And I think that's what's made me really well rounded. I've been involved in a lot of different types of situations. You know just personal situations, like the things I said about my parents and stuff like that. And I think that's how all those things add up to make me who I am today.*

The dichotomy of these educational experiences contributed to Jeff's ability to see multiple perspectives. He contrasts the homogenous privilege associated with private school with the more socio-economic diversity, tension and lack of relationships he experienced in the public schools. These experiences contributed to Jeff's self-concept as a "well-rounded" person; an

identity he repeatedly takes pride in and values.

His parents' divorce and the change from private to public schools influenced Jeff's commitment to community. Jeff talked repeatedly about the importance of belonging and connecting with others.

*The neighborhood that I live in now is really pretty tight knit. We'll all get together at somebody's house and have lunch or something and help each other out. There's quite a few people, and a lot of the people have lived in that neighborhood for a long time. I think that's really brings everyone together. Having a single mom, there's a lot of stuff that needs to get done. If I'm gone things don't necessarily get done 'cause she's busy too. We've had neighbors come over and mow our yard for us before. It's small things like that really bring the neighborhood together. As the weather warms, I do small things around my neighborhood if someone needs something. I have two or three neighbors that I mow their yard. A lot of my neighbors are older; they're pretty uptight. They like their yard mowed on the right day and all that. I'll just go do it 'cause it's not that big of a deal. Just seeing how they depend on me to get it done, I see how dependent they are on me. They pay me, but I'll do a lot of extra stuff for them. If someone comes and does something like that for you, your reaction is next time they need something, you need to go do it for them. If someone does something for you, you should do something back for them. It's just helping each other out. And if you really think about it, it's really not that big of a deal to go work for an hour. You feel good after you get it done. It's not a big deal.*

Jeff values the connections he has with his neighbors, and the care they provide to one another.

He helps out others knowing they will help out him or his mom if needed. Jeff sees this as a reciprocal process that mutually benefits the entire community. He also recognizes these connections go beyond his neighborhood to the larger community.

*In [our town] the more people you know, the better off you are. I swear that everyone knows everyone; somehow they all know each other. The guy that mows the yard might not be the top of the line in the city, but the people he knows see how happy he is. I think it strengthens the community. I think it's just important. The stronger the community, the better it is when you have kids. I feel like [this town] is a pretty good community, a pretty strong community. There's a lot of people [here] that would do anything they could to help. Say I was a citizen of Chicago, I might be able to do my part, but I might not make that big of a difference. Where here in a smaller town, I'll count [this community] as a smaller town, you can really stand out and do your part. When you have the time, you make the effort. I think that that's what being a citizen's all about.*

Jeff makes the connection between the strong relationships with his neighbors and his role as an

active citizen of his community. He sees an interconnected community where everyone does their part as stronger and more stable. This sense of connection and leadership is also exemplified in Jeff's experiences as a student athlete.

Jeff started running track and cross country in high school. In his youth, Jeff was active with motocross events, and he still enjoys riding his motorcycle. However, his experiences training and competing in long distance running have been instrumental in the formation of his self-awareness and outlook.

*In a cross country race, everyone is running the same distance; everyone's going through the same thing so you have a lot of respect for everybody else that's running the race. Respect is a big thing. Day after day we're out running on the roads, going on long runs, and it just gives you a lot of time to think. I have become very self-aware through running. I think about daily situations and how to handle them. When I'm out on a run, I'll kind of replay the whole thing through my head. Say I get in an argument with someone, I try to think that maybe I did something wrong. I need to look at the situation again and kind of see if I really did something wrong, or what the actual problem is. I feel that I'm a pretty self-aware person and going on those runs and just having some time to think has helped a lot. I think being self-aware helps me say the right things or stay out of situations that I know are going to get me into trouble. Being self-aware makes it easy for other people to like you because you know who you are; you know what you're into and what you're not into. I think that's what really brings your true friends in, more than just people that you hang around. My true friends I've had for a long time. I can trust them. I can hang out with them every day, and we don't really have a problem. I have a really good friend now that's on the track and cross country team. We were rivals in high school; he is from [this town] as well. I used to think he was like a terrible kid, hated him. You know, I just never met him before and made that assumption 'cause he's from the rival school. Now we're really good friends and on the same team. Now I've actually met him, know who he is, and I think there's just kind of irony that I met him like that. I really got a lot out of cross country. It's a very humbling sport. I think it builds a lot of character. It's humbling because when you're three - four miles into the race and you're just exhausted, you just realize that you're not invincible. It's just a very humbling sport. I mean it takes a toll on your body, and I think that's what builds character.*

Self-awareness, respect for others, and perseverance come from Jeff's experiences as a runner.

He will connect these with his values for strong relationships, role modeling and serving others as he assumes the role of cross country team captain in the upcoming school year.

*I just had a meeting with my cross country and track coach, and I'm going to be the cross country captain next year. The title doesn't really mean that much to me. I think the outcome of whatever the season brings is what defines the team captain. Hopefully it's positive. If you're the team captain and you bring home some hardware from nationals that's the ultimate. That's what it means to be team captain. A big part of it is leading by example. Not saying what needs to be done, not telling people what needs to be done, but leading by example. People look up to you to do that, then they're going to do it. People don't like getting told what to do, so if you just lead by example, be a role model, then it works. I think that relates to the stuff I said about my mom. She never really told me exactly what I needed to do; she just kind of led. She's been a role model and just led by example. I think that her not nagging me and telling me what to do just gave me a lot more respect for her. Just doing what needed to get done, and not having her tell me what needs to be done.*

Leading by example is a key theme in Jeff's stories. He learned from the charitable example of his dad, and the work ethic of his mom. He strives to be a good example for his siblings and his teammates. Jeff anticipates providing leadership as team captain through his relationships and actions serving the needs of his teammates, both on the track and in their lives.

*I think paying attention helps build relationships. Understanding where someone comes from helps you understand who they are as a person. Being well rounded is the key 'cause you can relate to anyone and be open minded about it at the same time. And that helps you be a friend or a teammate or anything like that. We have a lot of foreign kids [on the Cross Country Team] that don't have cars. I'm giving them rides to WalMart, or letting them stay at my house at different times over breaks. That just about means more than trying to help them make cross country. Because a lot of these kids at this level, they already know what they want to do with their cross country season. And so you're not going to tell them what they need to do. You can lead by example, but you're not going to change their mind on anything. And so the biggest thing you can do to help them is outside of cross country. That's where I see it being positive. I want all the incoming kids to see me as a captain, but also trust me as just a teammate. If you're out there leading by example every day, and people are following you know you are doing the right thing. Being a team captain, I don't really like people to depend on me. But having that sense they need me is probably the most rewarding thing for me being team captain.*

Jeff articulates a philosophy of leading by example, believing his actions and service build trust and respect amongst his peers. Jeff also values the sense of being needed, that his contributions matter to others.

Jeff's experiences as the child of divorced parents, as an active community member, and

student athlete have significantly influenced his identity and values. He values doing whatever is needed to serve the needs of those around him. He believes helping others is a reciprocal, mutually beneficial process that strengthens the interconnected relationships in a community or team. As an athlete Jeff works hard and tries to model the actions, dedication and teamwork he believes in. His service learning experiences occur at the intersection of these multiple perspectives and roles.

### **Jeff's Service Learning Experiences**

Before we discussed about his academic service learning experiences, Jeff talked about his prior observations and experiences volunteering in the community. Jeff noted the importance of giving back to the community when he described his father's civic experiences and charity work. Jeff shared a previous service experience cleaning public bathrooms in a local state park.

*I worked at down at [the state park] with the Department of Natural Resources for three or four days in the middle of the summer. Actually it was pretty fun. Most of the stuff we did was pretty interesting, and it wasn't really hard work. I had to clean the bathrooms down there, and that was terrible. But it was a pretty good experience. I didn't really get to work with a lot of people in the community, but I got to see [the park]. I run through there all the time, and I don't really think about how much work it takes to keep it up and running. A lot of the guys that work for the DNR ended up being pretty cool guys. Now when I go down there, I recognize them, and it's kind of neat. I try to see the good in people. Somebody can make me really mad, but if I kind of step back from the situation, I always try to see the good things. I think that's another thing that my parents taught me is even though that was really dirty work, you've got to look at what you get out of it. I'm lucky that I don't have to clean public bathrooms every day. So that's where I get the positive aspect out of cleaning the bathrooms.*

In this example Jeff demonstrated a very optimistic attitude and approach to life. He reframed his efforts cleaning public restrooms into a positive experience. He is able to connect with the other workers, see the beauty of the park, and find gratitude for his opportunities. He is able to find positive lessons in any experience, even those that others might see as a difficult. This was also evident in his academic service learning projects.

Jeff's first academic service learning experience was a group project planning a youth event to promote healthy living sponsored in collaboration with the YMCA. Jeff worked as a group member to prepare the event; however, Jeff had to miss the implementation of the project because he was traveling with the cross country team.

*With my Intro to Business class we worked with different local companies. I worked at the YMCA and tried to host a youth event to promote exercise and healthy eating tips and stuff like that. It was kind of difficult for me. It was during cross country season, and we were getting ready to leave for nationals. So I was actually gone during the event. I tried to do a lot of work ahead of time, like make the flyers and distribute those. And that was really difficult because we had a larger group to work with. And we were working with the YMCA, and the YMCA wasn't really cooperating with us. It was very hard for us to get our whole group together. There was only one girl in the group, and she did pretty much all the work. I felt terrible for her. I tried to do as much as I could while I was there. When they hosted the event, [the other students] showed up even though they didn't do any work to build up to it. And nobody else showed up, so it seemed like a total disaster. I didn't get to see it first hand, but it seemed like a total disaster. But we learned a lot on the business aspect of how much work and cooperation it takes to get an event planned. You know that wasn't even a large scale event. And I think about bigger events and how much pressure and how much work that is to get something like that to work.*

While the event didn't meet expectations, and working in a group was challenging, Jeff tried to find the positive lessons both personally and academically. Jeff's optimism is another recurring theme in his stories.

Jeff also participated in selling flowers as a fund raiser for the American Cancer Society's Daffodil Days for his Marketing class. Based on his YMCA project, Jeff approached this assignment with more direction and goals. He created a business plan, identified a target market, and utilized the relationships in his neighborhood and the power of social media to increase his sales. Even with his more intentional plans, he was able to see his areas for improvement in this project and learn from the experience.

*We got the information about two months before we needed to turn it in, and that's where I made one of my mistakes. I waited 'til there was two weeks left. [Our teacher] told us what we needed to do. We pretty much had the freedom to do whatever we wanted to do to sell daffodils. My group chose to go out on our own and sell as many as you can then*

*we just pool them up. I think that worked pretty well. One of the girls in my group sold the most in the class so that was good. When I was selling, I kept in mind that we were going to have to deliver all the product, so I really pushed the fact on selling the ones that didn't need to be delivered or just making a donation. I was looking at it more as of a business type perspective. That really helped me out because I didn't have that many to deliver. I had more donations and stuff like that. And Melissa in my group sold tons; so I helped her go around and deliver, and that worked out pretty well. The delivery process was a little shaky. Trying to find time to get done in the first place was tough 'cause I knew it'd take a while. Then the delivery truck broke down so we planned on doing it on one day, and we had to wait a few extra days to get it done. So that was a little shaky, but we got it done. And we raised quite a bit of money so that was good. Everyone's very aware of cancer obviously. And the thing with that is, everyone knows someone that has cancer, and so people are more willing to give for a good cause. Daffodil Days was pretty good because a lot of people are already aware of it, and so they trusted giving you the money for it. The people that weren't aware were the ones that were a little more hesitant on donating. If they were aware of what it's all about, they would be very open to it. I've known several people that have passed away from cancer so I was all about doing it. And I just thought, it's a good cause; it'd be tough not to be successful in that cause. We were talking about target markets in marketing, so I kind of created my own target market: people that I knew would donate. I wasn't going to waste any time going to their door and not getting any sales. I did a few general things, like I put a thing on Facebook just so everyone could see it and would know I had them if they wanted them. And I sent out some text messages, made a few phone calls. And then I waited to walk around my neighborhood 'til the end. I live on campus here, but my house is only ten minutes away. I walked around my neighborhood on a nice day, and I think that made the most sales. I just went in, showed them the paperwork, and showed them what it was all about and their options. Most of my neighbors know me and know that I'm not trying to rip them off, so that worked really well.*

Strong relationships with others are important to Jeff as he makes sense of serving others. Jeff also articulates many business lessons about the process of implementing the Daffodil Days project. He easily integrates the operational lessons of the service project into his academic mindset. Within this context, Jeff observed that the older neighbors he approached were more civic minded and willing to donate to a good cause. He attributed this to the wisdom that comes from life experience combined with his own trustworthiness.

*I also learned how a lot of my neighbors view me. I'm pretty trustworthy. I have a motorcycle at home, and I'll run around the neighborhood, doing wheelies and stuff like that. I know they're not real fond of that. But they know that I'm a good student, and that I'm trustworthy. I'd go to the door and think maybe I can make 25 bucks here, and I ended up making like \$60. I went up to one neighbor's house, and I just walked up, and*

*he saw that I had paperwork in my hands. I didn't even explain what it was about. I just said something about a donation, and he just whipped out money. You know so those are kind of memorable moments. People just kind of feel like it's their part. I live in a fairly nice neighborhood. A lot of the people are older, and I think they have a good understanding of what it's all about; they realize that not everyone's as fortunate as them, especially people with cancer. And all they have to do is write a \$25 check if they can afford it. It's not really that big of a deal, you know. That can help a lot. I think that the younger generation hasn't really gone through a time where they realize that they need help. I see it in some people, but not in everybody. Like if you go into the gas station to buy gas and they're like, "You want to donate a dollar to... such and such." And you're kind of hesitant. You're like, "Naw, it's okay." If people have experiences when they needed help, then when they're doing better they realize that other people still need help and how much that little bit of help will brighten someone's day. I think you have to have your own experience before you can really give to someone else's experience.*

Jeff believes people will do their part, particularly if they have a direct understanding of the issue or connection to those in need. This belief emphasizes the importance of relationships and trusting others. Throughout his service learning stories, Jeff articulates a basic faith in others through his belief they will do the right thing if given the opportunity.

Jeff has enjoyed the opportunity to make a difference through his various service projects. His motivation to serve his communities emerges from the example of his father, as well as his own values and life experiences. Jeff sees his community as interconnected and describes both an individual and collective social responsibility to serve one another. He understands that people in the community are unlikely to serve others if they don't have a connection to the person or direct experience with the cause or need. Jeff introduces the concept of social responsibility as an important motivator in serving the community. Jeff is optimistic and confident that everyone will do their part to improve the community if given the opportunity to contribute in their own way.

## **Reflection**

Throughout our interviews I was struck by Jeff's confidence and self-assuredness, which he attributed to his introspective reflections as a long distance runner. This clear sense of self

provided a strong foundation for the themes that emerged from his stories. However, this self-assurance is contrasted with Jeff's lack of vocational clarity.

*I think about the immediate future a lot more than down the road. I'm puzzled in the immediate future. I mean I don't know where I'm going to go to school after this; I don't know what I want to study. Not knowing those things makes it difficult to see myself down the road. I don't really worry about it, and I feel pretty confident in having a good life.*

Jeff's easy-going, optimistic attitude provides a framework that keeps his unknown future in perspective. He is confident life will work out for him; even though he isn't yet sure what his plans will be.

As he continues on his own life's journey, Jeff's perseverance, self-awareness and commitment to doing his best will be powerful guide posts. The metaphor of finishing the race, despite not knowing how it will turn out is a key to understanding Jeff's stories and experiences.

*Even though I feel like I'm a pretty successful student and a pretty successful athlete, I've also been through a lot of things in my life that weren't so easy. Being a presidential scholar I think people look at that and they're like, "Oh, well, he's kind of had everything easy and things have just kind of worked out for him." That's not always been the case. I talked about my dad a lot, and he's a good person in the community. But he's also an alcoholic, and I've dealt with a lot of negative things through that. In my family, my aunts and uncles, there's a lot of addiction issues and a lot of family issues. It's kind of taken a toll, but at the same time taught me a lot of things. That's where I get a fear of not being successful. There's just been a lot of times that pretty much sucked. It's all about overcoming those obstacles. I have a tattoo on my side, and it has a person running. In a race if you fall down, you get back up and you finish. And in the life you have to overcome those obstacles. I think that's what it's all about.*

The challenges Jeff faced growing up in a dysfunctional, alcoholic family have created a fear of failure. However, this fear pushes Jeff to keep on moving forward and finish the race.

Throughout our conversations Jeff repeatedly emphasized that he is "well rounded." He values the diversity of his varied life experiences and the skills that navigating these challenges has provided. For Jeff the key to being well-rounded is being open minded and relating to others. This sense of connection and belonging is an important theme in Jeff's stories.

*I think being well rounded is the key 'cause you can relate to anyone. Being open minded helps build relationships. Understanding where someone comes from helps you understand who they are as a person and that helps you be a friend or a teammate. I think about certain things when I meet people maybe going to their house. After seeing where they're from, I can relate with them better afterwards. I kind of know what they want, what they're interested in, or their views on things. It's kind of weird how much attention I pay to how things work in someone else's home. I think paying so much attention to things like that makes me more well-rounded. Some people are just totally oblivious to that stuff. It just helps me be more comfortable with them. And even though there's no direct benefit from it, I think through life it'll really pay off. I kind of appreciate that I can do that I guess.*

Jeff pays attention to the needs and concerns of others. He serves his neighbors, friends, and family by being aware of their lives and attending to their needs. His actions embody his belief that in knowing the needs of others, people will be motivated to help where they can.

Jeff values being a trustworthy, responsible person and the respect he has earned by being a role model and leader.

*I really value respect. I mean that sounds pretty cliché. But a lot of people don't realize what other people go through on a daily basis. And you know they just see them in that moment. And a lot of people don't have respect for others when they may have no idea who that person really is. I'll relate that to Sean, the [previous] team captain. The only respect I had for him was that he was a good runner. I didn't have any respect for him as a person; I didn't know him. Now that I know quite a bit about him I have a lot more respect for him. So respect's a big thing. Hard work is another value I have. If you get up in the morning and you do a hard day's work, I think you really appreciate the things that you have. You earn what you get. There's a lot of people that don't know that. Hard work gives you that positive attitude at the same time.*

Jeff's strong work ethic emerges from his athleticism, as does his respect for others who also work hard. Jeff succeeds in the rugged individualism of long distance running because he works hard; but also thrives in the communities of his neighborhood, his teams, and his family because he cares for others.

Jeff's hard work and genuine relationships create a very strong interconnected community.

*A community is kind of like an ecosystem. People need to do their part to make the whole thing work as a system. And if one end of the system breaks down, the whole community is kind of shaky. But it's just a system that needs to work. And you know, the better that system works, the stronger your community is. Service is a responsibility. I mean if nobody works outside of their own personal bubble, then nothing gets kept care of in the community. People need to know that service keeps the system running and that's what keeps the community strong. One example is [the city park] downtown. If you don't get somebody to volunteer to pick up some trash in the community, that park's not going to be the park that it needs to be. If you see a dirty park, you kind of judge a book by its cover. And they might think this isn't somewhere I want to be. The look of a dirty park breaks down the community. If somebody pulls up and sees a very clean park, mowed grass, that looks nice, you think, "This is a good community."*

Jeff's commitment to positive, mutually respectful relationships drives his understanding of social responsibility and community as an interconnected system. Serving those in need is an integral function that makes the system work and improves the quality of life.

Jeff Dalton is a hard-working and responsible individual who believes in the collective power of his community. He is aware of and pays attention to the needs around him and does his part to address these needs as he is able. Jeff is optimistic about persevering through life's difficulties, and believes in the potential of others to do the same. He values the ability to put his observant reflections into action. Jeff sees the interconnected relationships in his community as a source of strength and mutual responsibility. Jeff believes that everyone can make a difference to improve the lives of others within their communities if they care for others, observe their needs, and work hard to take action.

### **Kennedy Martens**

*If every single person did one little thing, it would change the world.*

Kennedy Martens is an active and energetic first year student who graduated early from high school and began attending Service Learning Community College immediately. She is an eighteen year old Caucasian female who is a full time student majoring in Communications. As a first year student she is fully exploring a multitude of social and service experiences and

developing an emerging sense of self. Kennedy's excitement for serving others arose from her participation in several volunteer experiences and academic service learning projects. She believes helping others is her passion yet is unsure how her interests will inform her future career plans. She is considering options in social services but is hesitant based on her perceptions that these positions require a high level of emotional investment and offer relatively lower pay.

Family is an important value in Kennedy's life. She is particularly close to her mom and her older sister who has Asperger's Syndrome. Growing up Kennedy frequently felt like she was in the shadow, that she wasn't a priority. As she discovers her own identity and purpose in life, she wants others to feel that they are important. Throughout Kennedy's stories connections with other women are central. She believes every person has value and wants to be understood and cared about by others. Similarly, Kennedy also seeks validation and respect from others, particularly her friends and family. Serving others provided an avenue for Kennedy's self-esteem and confidence to emerge. She repeatedly expresses optimism about how positive relationships and serving others can change the world.

### **Kennedy's Story**

Kennedy grew up on a dairy farm in a rural community surrounded by her extended family. She enjoyed growing up on the farm and described a traditional and happy childhood. When the farm owned by her grandfather was sold in a land dispute, Kennedy's family moved into town where her parents both work at the local hospital.

*I had a pretty normal childhood. Nothing out of the ordinary happened to me. I was just a kid. I liked to play with my animals outside. I've always grown up in the country. I've lived in seven different houses, but I only remember two or three. My grandparents have a dairy farm, and my grandparents lived across from my aunt who lived next to us. So we had cows and all those animals. I always loved that. I miss living in the country. When my mom went back to school, that was when we moved. We had to move because my grandpa didn't want the dairy anymore, and we weren't getting along with people. There were a lot of conflicts about land I was too young to understand. I just felt like I wasn't a*

*priority to anyone. And when we realized that Andrea was different and what was wrong with her, I felt like I wasn't as important because I didn't have something like that. I don't know how to word it without sounding really selfish 'cause I don't mean it like that at all. But she got a lot of attention for it. It's not that I wanted that kind of attention, but I think I just felt like I was in a shadow.*

Kennedy's feelings of not being a priority and being in the shadows are a recurring theme in the stories of her youth. This is contrasted with the emerging confidence and purpose that comes from her service experiences.

Her interest in serving others comes from the example of her mother who went back to school and now serves as a surgical nursing supervisor. Kennedy appreciates her mother's selflessness and also recognizes that always prioritizing others can be detrimental.

*I've always looked up to my mom, but I feel like she's kind of a doormat because she just wants to make everybody else happy. She always puts everybody else first. My mom is a registered nurse, and she's the director of surgery. She went back to school when I was like thirteen or fourteen, so she was gone a lot. I'm really glad for her going back and getting her actual degree. When she went back to school, it was hard 'cause she wasn't there a lot, but she didn't do it intentionally. She didn't do it for herself. She was doing it so she could better herself and help more people. When my mom went back to school, I didn't get a lot of attention. Not that I was neglected or anything like that, but I didn't get a lot of attention. Maybe I found my sense of helping other people because it fills the void. I want to say my interest in serving others comes from my mom. I think I got my compassion for people from her. She's a nurse so she helps people every day. She's one of the most selfless people I've ever known. She's had her own share of life problems. She was married before my dad, and her brothers and sisters have some issues, like every family does. But she doesn't show it. She's really strong. She's a big role model for me, and I don't know if she realizes how important she is to me.*

Kennedy initially dismisses her mother's concern for others and doesn't seem to recognize the respect she has for her mom's selflessness and compassion parallel the passion for serving others she is discovering in herself. Kennedy admires her mom's strength and sees her as a role model.

Kennedy's story of her mother's worries exemplifies their evolving relationship.

*My mom and I are really close. We weren't at first then I gradually started being more myself and joking to her and she would reciprocate with another joke. I was like, "Mom, we're similar!" We're really close, but there's a lot that I don't tell her just because her sister has cancer and my mom is a chronic worrier. I don't want to give her extra things*

*to worry about. I deleted her as a friend on Facebook for a while because I wanted to look at [the University]; and she really didn't have time to set up a college visit, so I took matters into my own hands. Then it was mentioned on Facebook, and I got a call from her asking about it. She wasn't very happy with me. So I told her, "Mom, I'm deleting you for your own good." We're friends again now. Mom and I are really close.*

The closeness of this relationship is an important source of support for Kennedy. As she discovers her own identity Kennedy continues to value her relationship with her mother, appreciates her support, and seeks her approval.

Kennedy's older sister Andrea was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome three years ago. Because Andrea has had difficulty her entire life, she has typically received more parental attention than Kennedy. Despite being the youngest child, Kennedy feels a sense of responsibility for Andrea as both a role model and care taker.

*I have one sister. Her name is Andrea. She has Asperger's which is like a form of autism. We only found out about it three years ago. As we grew up, she was always slightly different. She'd have tantrums, and we wouldn't know why. Then we finally figured out, and she got treatment. I've always felt like the older sister because with Asperger's Andrea is socially behind. Right now, Andrea's 21 and she's going through that teen-age phase where she's being really rebellious. She wears the studded bracelets, and I did that when I was like twelve. I've always kind of felt like the older sister. I know Andrea looks up to me. If I were to start drinking every weekend or something like that, she would be like, "Kennedy does it so I should too." I feel bad because she's not really doing anything with her life right now. I know she has Asperger's, but sometimes she kind of uses it like a scapegoat to blame all her problems on that. She didn't do well in school so she's not here right now. She doesn't feel like she can maintain a job, so she just plays her computer games in my parents' basement.*

Kennedy balances her feelings of love and concern for Andrea with her frustrations that she was frequently left to find her own way as a result of Andrea's diagnosis and need for additional attention. She continues the idea of being overshadowed, this time by her sister's diagnosis and special needs. At the same time Kennedy is very protective of Andrea. Her relationship with Andrea demonstrates Kennedy's commitment to care for others and motivates her to address the needs of those who might be in the shadows through her service experiences.

Kennedy only briefly mentions her dad and their somewhat tenuous relationship. She talks about her desire to be closer to her dad and describes her efforts to win his affection and respect.

*With my dad, we have a love-hate relationship. When I was younger, my dad and I were fairly close, but he's not very affectionate. That's just the way he was raised. His family doesn't say, "I love you." They don't really hug a lot. He has a lot of other brothers and sisters, and I think they've always been competitive. That explains where his lack of affection comes from, I think. I've always wanted to impress him. He's never really told me, "Hey, I'm really proud of you." When I was younger we were close. We would go and explore outside. But when I started going through puberty and wearing makeup, he was like, "What are you doing? You look really bad." There was an awkward phase I went through, a phase when I was like, "I hate my parents. I hate you dad." For band and choir and my plays when I was in high school, my dad never really went to those. My mom always did though. [My dad and I] got disconnected because we didn't have a lot in common. Now that I'm older and I don't live at home anymore, we're a lot closer. We joke around sometimes. He gets crabby a lot though, so sometimes I'll just go in my room. He's hard on Andrea; well, he's hard on both of us. I feel bad that she's home and has to deal with him more than I do. It's not like he's not in my life at all. I'm just not as close with him as I am with my mom. I think he was disappointed that he had a daughter, because he wanted a son. So I feel like I'll never live up to that expectation, obviously. I think he just wants me to be successful, but I don't know what he considers successful.*

The need to be respected by others, her father specifically and her family in general, is a recurring theme in Kennedy's stories. She regularly seeks affirmation and external validation. Kennedy shares several stories about navigating the tensions in her family life: caring for her sister and being jealous of the extra attention she needs, looking up to her mom as a role-model yet criticizing her for being a doormat, and having a love-hate relationship with her dad. As her self-confidence matures she is beginning to see the inherent value of her own experience and contributions.

Kennedy graduated from high school one semester early and enrolled immediately at Service Learning Community College. After completing two semesters in college, she still isn't quite ready to travel further from home.

*I graduated a semester early from high school, and I wasn't ready for a university just yet. So I went to Service Learning Community College, and I knew people here. My sister went here for a little bit. It wasn't really an option to go [any place else], and I'm still so young. My aunt has breast cancer, then they found it in her brain and it just keeps getting progressively worse. So because I don't know what could happen with my family, I don't want to just leave and go thousands of miles away. I want to stay close. But I'll hopefully be transferring to the [University] next year. If I could have it my way, I probably wouldn't be in [this town] right now. But I feel like I'm trying to make the best of where I am.*

Kennedy's concern for her family keeps her close to home despite a strong desire to find her own pathway. Kennedy maintains a sense of optimism in the midst of the tension between her care for her family and her desire for independence.

As she navigates her transition to college and adulthood, Kennedy intentionally seeks out new experiences to serve others and find her own way. She has changed her major from early childhood education to communication studies and briefly considered a career in social work. She is preparing for a transition to a four year university and is poised to leave the security of home and family as she continues her journey of discovery.

*My whole life I've never known what my passion was. I've liked doing certain things. I've been in my choir and band and all that. I've always liked them, but I haven't had that thing that was my thing. I think it is helping people and volunteering. Service learning was something that I was really excited to do. I think a lot about my life when I was growing up. My mom was gone a lot by going back to school and my dad would work weird hours. I think that I felt kind of under cared about at some moments. I'm not trying to make myself seem like I was neglected by any means, but there are a lot of times in my life where I would wish that I was a priority to someone. I definitely want to let everyone know that there's someone that cares 'cause I don't think I always saw it. Because it wasn't in my immediate family. I consider myself well off and I'm fine. And even if I wasn't, I'd want to be helping other people. Reaching out and doing what you can to help others to make people feel like they're in a community. A family is important because every single person needs to feel cared about and needs to feel like someone cares about them. No matter who they are I want some everyone to know that there is someone that wants to help them and cares about them.*

Kennedy repeats her feelings of being in the shadows or not being a priority as a child. As she is discovering her path in life, this perspective reveals part of why Kennedy is motivated to care for

others. She wants everyone to feel that they belong and matter. The importance of caring for others and creating positive relationships creates a context for understanding Kennedy's volunteerism and service learning experiences.

As she grew up, Kennedy struggled to emerge from the shadows she experienced. She describes a variety of family and vocational tensions that influence her life such as being proud of her volunteer work but not sharing it outside her family for fear of seeming boastful. Kennedy started college a semester early and has fully explored the opportunities, relationships, and experiences this has provided. She is beginning to recognize how serving others fulfills her sense of self; how caring for others contributes to her own self-esteem, growing confidence and maturity. Kennedy identifies another tension between the extrinsic validation she craves and the intrinsic rewards that service learning provides. As she discovers her sense of self as a young adult, she remains hesitant in her vocation and career plans. For now Kennedy is enjoying her current opportunities and is very much focused on the present instead of the future. Kennedy's stories of volunteering and service learning provide additional insight into her journey of exploration.

### **Kennedy's Service Learning Experiences**

Kennedy was active in community and church activities before coming to college yet doesn't necessarily consider this to be service. She sees these contributions as a natural extension of involvement in her small, rural community. Kennedy described a wide variety of episodic service learning experiences at Service Learning Community College; some she initiated and others associated with her classes. She regularly initiates new service experiences as she explores her emerging sense of self.

Shortly after arriving at SLCC as a seventeen year old first year student, Kennedy

searched the internet in an effort to find something to do.

*I can't remember that exact day if anything happened that just made me do it. I think I was just kind of bored. I was surfing the internet, and I was like, "I'm finally here. There are a lot of opportunities that I need to be taking advantage of, so why not?" So I did. I just looked on-line: "Where can I volunteer?" I grew up in [a rural community], so when I came here [to the city] there are a lot more opportunities to take advantage of. [The Homeless Mission] is in downtown and there's a lot you can do volunteering there. I looked it up, and then I just e-mailed the coordinator, I think her name was Bethany, and we set up a time. It was kind of a shot in the dark because I didn't know that area very well. I used the GPS which throws me for a loop sometimes. And I went off by myself. "I'm going to find this shelter, and I'm going to do something." So I drove and met Bethany, and we scheduled a time for me to volunteer. There were a lot of different things you could do; you could serve food; you could clean. They have a Salvation Army kind of thing: all the clothes and everything in there is free for people that come in and need things. My job was to sort the clothes which was kind of a gross job. The things that had holes that nobody obviously would wear I'd throw out. It was gross because some of the clothes were really dirty and stained. But it gave me good feeling, because I mean somebody had to do it. I just felt really productive. If I wasn't doing this, if I wasn't doing something for somebody else, I would be sitting on my ass watching "Jersey Shore." This was such a better way of spending my time, trying to help somebody else rather than myself. I also donated my prom dress because they did a fashion show for prom dresses that were already worn and then have an auction for them so they were a lot cheaper. I was like, "I'm never going to wear this again," so I gave it away. I like the satisfaction that I get. I feel like that's what I'm put on this earth to do. I think that's my passion because every time I do something like that, I just feel like I should do it again.*

Kennedy wasn't satisfied using her newfound free time in idle pursuits; instead, she looked for an opportunity to serve others. Finding the [Mission] without help demonstrates her confidence and independence in pursuing service opportunities. Kennedy approached the experience with a sense of optimism and contribution. Although the work was dirty and difficult Kennedy reframed her volunteer contribution as easing the experiences of others; noting that her efforts were valuable because they made somebody else's life easier. These efforts gave Kennedy feelings of productivity and pride.

Volunteering at the [Mission] gave Kennedy a sense of purpose and excitement.

Energized by the success of her initial service experience, Kennedy soon discovered that the local animal shelter needed dog walkers. As she described her dog-walking experiences,

Kennedy recognized the intrinsic rewards of her efforts.

*It's good exercise. The puppies are cute and they need someone to walk them. Every time I do one thing, I feel like I should do that again. I feel like this is what I have been put on this earth to do."*

With each new experience Kennedy discovers serving others makes her feel good about herself and the contributions she is making. This gives her a sense of determination and confidence she did not identify in her life before coming to college.

Next, Kennedy described time she spent preparing and serving food at a Catholic homeless shelter with a friend from SLCC. Although the experience was fun and social, it was particularly meaningful because of the humanity and compassion Kennedy observed.

*Another [volunteer activity] was a soup kitchen at my friend's Catholic church, and we did it a couple times. That was really eye opening to me, seeing the different types of people that you were helping. We'd get everything organized, you know. My friend and I were just joking around in the kitchen and playing with onions and whatever. Once the lines opened and people started coming through, you'd see some people would be really thankful and they're like, "Oh, thank you so much. God bless." Other people were ashamed of themselves. We would say, "Hey, have a great day" and they wouldn't really acknowledge you. Out of all the volunteering I did that was one of the most like, "Wow, people need help." Everyone has a different story, I suppose. When you think of homeless people, you think of people on the street begging for money. These people didn't want to seem like they were begging: "I have to ask for food, and I'm embarrassed of it." Other people were just more like, "I'm homeless. Thank you. And I'm really appreciative of it 'cause you're helping me." But I think a lot of the [people] that wouldn't really talk were just embarrassed of their situation, or maybe they thought that we would judge them. Which wouldn't be the case at all, but I think maybe that's what they feared. I don't think that people know that those needs exist. I think it needs to be brought to light, and I think that's why service learning needs to happen. So people can see it, because otherwise everyone's blind to it because it's covered under other things.*

Through this experience Kennedy is becoming aware of the truly unmet needs in her community and starting to recognize the emotionality of genuinely needing help. This recognition of her position and privilege is a powerful realization for Kennedy. She observes that while some of the homeless and hungry individuals were thankful, others would not make eye contact and seemed ashamed or afraid of being judged. Through all of these individual responses, Kennedy connects

the humanity in serving others with her own capacity to help those in need. Kennedy also articulates a recurring theme in her stories: her belief that every person has a story to tell.

Kennedy's first academic service learning project was a group project assigned in her introduction to Business Communications class. Based on her previous volunteer work, Kennedy was excited when the assignment was announced in class.

*So we heard about [the service learning project] pretty early on in the semester, and it caught my attention. I was kind of like, "Service learning, that sounds neat." Then [the instructor] started giving us the options of what groups we could work with. I wasn't really sure because there was the [Homeless Mission] which I've worked with before on my own time. The other ones were like Girl Scouts or Hoops for Hearts and stuff like that. I worked with [Safe House] which was a shelter for domestically abused and sexually abused women. That one spoke to me because my sister has had some incidents like that. She didn't tell me right when it happened. There were a couple of incidents that she told me about years later. By then I was like, "Why didn't you tell me at the time? I would have beaten them up." She's my sister and I've always been really, really protective of her. Since she has Asperger's, I know that people took advantage of her. When she finally told me, at first I was really angry and upset about [what happened.] "How can people be so sick? How can no one... Where is their compassion?" It upsets me a lot. I went through a couple of years where it just made me really angry. Then I decided, "I'm going to do something about it." So that's why I felt like [Safe House] was something I wanted to do. I decided that I'm not going to be angry about it anymore. I'm going to try to channel my anger doing something positive by helping other people that have been abused.*

Kennedy chose [Safe House] because of the experiences of her sister Andrea. This personal connection to the stories of the women at [Safe House] created urgency and a deeper understanding of the importance of the project for Kennedy. Unfortunately, the other members of her group didn't initially share this commitment which caused some frustration.

*I ended up [working with Safe House] by my choice, but the people in my group weren't... I don't want to sound bad, but weren't my first choice of people. It was me and three foreign people that really didn't understand English very well or understand what was going on, and two girls that were just really apathetic. We had to schedule meetings and not everyone would come. But I was always there. I forgot there was one other woman. Her name was Sandra, and she was a lot older. She was probably about in her 40's and she was an ex-bus driver. She was really into it. She was awesome. I could just see in her that she really wanted to help out. Everyone in the group for the most part had good intentions. It just wasn't a priority for them; it was just like, "I want to get this*

*done.” Being with my group was really, really frustrating. I don’t mean to talk myself up or make it sound like they didn’t do anything because they did; but there were a lot of things that I’d assign people to do when I gave up on doing it all myself, and they wouldn’t. I definitely would call myself the leader. I didn’t want to be that girl that was just like, “Okay, everyone, listen to me.” At first I was kind of quiet and I was like, “What do you guys want to do?” No one spoke up so I finally said, “Okay, well I want a good grade on this project; I want to do this right.” I was definitely the leader because I would contact the other members of the group and let everyone know when meetings were. But after the project I saw a good change of heart in them; I think that they did regret not being more involved.*

Kennedy struggles to balance her passion for helping others and her personal investment in the project with her role as an informal group leader. She wants to help the women at shelter by providing a quality program; however, she has difficulty connecting with and providing leadership to other group members who don’t seem as invested. Kennedy works to accept that she can’t complete the entire project herself and has to rely on others. Kennedy’s concern for the feelings of others is evident in her hesitancy to criticize the efforts of her peers, as well as her optimism that in the end the project made a difference both in the students’ perspectives as volunteers and in the work of [Safe House.]

Kennedy’s personal connection to the mission of [Safe House] was strengthened when she came face to face with the women and families she encountered there.

*When we first got into the project I was really interested in it. My heart went out to all those women that have been affected. But it wasn’t until we visited the [Safe House] itself and got a tour and saw the facilities... It’s a shelter that some women stay in temporarily and some actually live there with their kids. And we saw everything. When we went upstairs and saw some women and their families it made it a lot more real. I could read any number of statistics of women being abused or raped and that’s really heart wrenching, but it’s not ‘til you see the women that have [survived] that really makes it real. When I think about the statistics, the women are just numbers. When I see them walking around and interacting with each other and their kids, it makes it a lot more real. It’s right in front of me, and I see it. It was really eye opening to see that. I don’t know how to put it in words. It was just... it was a really humbling experience. It was eye opening just to see this is a reality. We’d walk past a woman and her kids and I’d wonder, “What have they gone through in their life?” It makes me think about my life and how fortunate and blessed I am. And to see somebody else who is a lot less fortunate living in a place where I’m sure they don’t want to be exactly, being happy to get*

*themselves back on their feet and out of the situation that they were in. It was eye opening in the sense that it hit me right then and there that there are so many people that are affected by sexual abuse.*

Meeting the women at the shelter made Kennedy keenly aware of the reality of their experiences, as well as her own privilege. Interacting with the women and families at [Safe House] creates a powerful understanding of their lives and experiences. In combination with her own perspective and concern for Andrea, the reality of sexual and domestic violence in the lives of women and children motivates Kennedy to take action. Translating this awareness of community needs in the lives of people into service or social action is a recurring theme in Kennedy's services experiences at the homeless mission, the soup kitchen, and at [Safe House].

For the project at [Safe House] Kennedy and her group showed the film "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" on campus and used a discussion guide to raise awareness of community resources for those who have experienced sexual violence. Kennedy worked with the outreach coordinator at [Safe House], who was supportive and affirming of Kennedy's leadership on the project.

*I became really close to Becky Gustafson. She was the coordinator with [Safe House]. She was a huge help. I can't stress enough how much she helped us. She gave us a few options of what we could do to volunteer, but the one she recommended the most was to try to show a movie screening of "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" and have a group discussion afterwards and try to get everyone on campus to go or as many as we could. So we did that, and it was quite the ride. We had to talk to Maria Howard who is the SLCC media coordinator to get the word out there. We had to print out flyers and got turned down trying to put flyers up. We were on [the radio]. We had an announcement on the TV down in the cafeteria. We put it on the school web-site. We had a Facebook group. We just did as much as we could. I did as much as I possibly could. Some days were really overwhelming just because I felt like I had to do everything myself. But then I realized I needed to let other people do what they can, and if they don't do it right, then I have to accept that. I kind of just wanted it to be like my way or the highway. I wanted to make sure it was done right. Becky was awesome. She was so helpful. She told us what we needed to do, when we needed to do it. In the end we only had around twenty or thirty people show up which was not as many as I wanted, 'cause the main purpose was to raise awareness and let people know that there's a shelter. I feel like we could have had a lot*

*more people attend if everyone would have been more passionate about it or cared about it as much as I did.*

Once again Kennedy struggles with her perceptions that her peers are not as invested in the project or committed to success. She struggles to accept that she can't do everything herself.

Kennedy identifies the tension that exists when trying to create social change through individual efforts. This is particularly true for a topic such as working to end sexual violence when you are personally and emotionally invested in the issue.

*When we watched the movie there are a lot of graphic scenes that portray rape that really made me go, "Ugh! Wow!" When I watch things like that, I get a little angry. But once [the service project] was all over I had a good feeling. I like going to sleep knowing that I'm doing what I can to make the world a better place. Becky was [at the movie night], and she and I were the speakers. We asked the questions and introduced things. I had stage fright really bad which was weird because it was just in front of my friends. I was sitting on stage, and I kind of blanked out so I looked like a fool. But she was beside me, and she whispered, "You're doing fine." So she was always really supportive and encouraging. A lot of my friends and the groups' friends came. And my mom came. We didn't have anybody that I didn't recognize which was kind of disappointing. I wanted it to be a huge thing. I guess in reality I shouldn't have expected all that. But the group discussion afterwards went pretty well. Once people started talking, more people started opening up and giving some good suggestions. Working with [Safe House] was awesome.*

In the tension between her anger about sexual violence and her anxiety about public speaking, Kennedy finds solace in the fact that she is doing her part to raise awareness and create change. She is proud of this social action. She also talks about the importance of having a mentor who validated her contributions and provided affirmation.

*[Service learning] made me want to go out and do more. It's also made me more confident going out and reaching to people and talking to coordinators and things like that. After such positive feedback from Becky and everyone at [Safe House] that I worked with I have confidence that I'm not going to be turned down if I go to volunteer somewhere. I don't know why I would even think that. But now I realize how much they appreciate the help.*

Kennedy craves the external support and recognition she receives from others: Becky, her peers, her mom, and even her dad. She is learning to focus instead on the intrinsic affirmation she finds

in serving others and how her efforts can make a difference. The entire experience at [Safe House] was very meaningful for Kennedy. Through this project she was able to see herself as the leader in her group and connect her efforts to the experiences of the women and children at the shelter. Kennedy also came to accept that not everyone shares her passion or commitment for serving others. This is a difficult realization for her especially as she makes meaning of the challenging realities she has encountered in her various experiences. As Kennedy learns to accept that she cannot have to do everything herself, she is finding confidence in her capacity to serve others.

Finally, Kennedy participated in another academic service learning project for an Interpersonal Communications class. For this assignment Kennedy and two other students attended a monthly birthday celebration at a local residential care center.

*[The] other class we did service learning in was my Interpersonal Communications class, and that was a lot more laid back. We went to, I'm sorry I can't remember the name of it, but it was an old person's home. It was so fun. They have a birthday for all the months, so it was like, "October Birthdays." There were four people in my group, but we went on two different days. I went with this girl named Emma and our friend Henry. It was in [the city] somewhere. We went in there and we weren't really sure what to expect. We knew we'd be serving cake and chatting with the old people. There was guy with an accordion, and he was the performing entertainment. We got up and did the Chicken Dance, and he made us dance with him. It was just so cute. It was over kind of quickly so we were like, "We don't want to leave just yet. We want to get the most out of this." So we asked, "Is it okay if we just go and talk to them, and listen to their lives?" 'Cause, everybody needs to have attention like that. I think they get bored and lonely, so we're like, "Let's go talk to them." So we went to a bunch of different floors, and these people weren't as lively. They were the ones that didn't really want us there. They're not as nice as you'd think. They just seemed annoyed with us. The party was on the first floor where it was like a restaurant. We got to eat there, and the food was pretty good but they complained about it. And we just met the funniest women you can think of. It was like "The Golden Girls" on steroids. They kept complimenting us and kissing us. They were so funny. It was really fun meeting them and talking to them and asking them questions about what it was like growing up. This is going to sound really cheesy, but I really liked seeing their eyes light up when they talk about the past, talk about memories that make them happy. You can tell they always think about them, but I don't think they really ask each other about it. They probably just talk to each other about the news or the weather. They like young people that are genuinely interested in hearing about their lives. I think that was the highlight of*

*their day. It was really fun. Just seeing their eyes light up and seeing the reaction in their face, it just made me happy to see them so happy. A memorable moment was when some old guy approached Emma and I and said, "You guys are the dancers from earlier" like we were professionals. We laughed, "Yeah, that's us." That was kind of like a funny memorable thing. You could tell it meant a lot, and they thanked us over and over again. Making somebody's day gives you a good feeling inside.*

Kennedy reiterates that everyone has a story to share. She enjoys the opportunity to listen and connect with the residents. She contrasts the genuine and authentic conversations between the people who shared their stories with the residents who didn't want to be bothered. Kennedy recognizes that these conversations provided a meaningful opportunity to demonstrate value to each person. For Kennedy and her friends, providing the older residents an opportunity to share stories about their lives was re-invigorating. This builds upon the recurring theme in Kennedy's stories of listening and caring about the lives and experiences of others who might otherwise feel they are in the shadows.

In each of her volunteer and service learning experiences, Kennedy identifies how serving others makes her feel better about herself. Kennedy believes helping others is her life's passion and vocation. She is learning that she has the ability to bring happiness to others, and that her actions can make a difference to change the social injustices she has observed. Serving others is an intrinsically motivating reward for Kennedy and fulfills her desire for genuine relationships and her commitment to helping others to feel valued. These lessons have emerged from the intersections between Kennedy's life and the lived experiences of all the people she has served.

### **Reflection**

Kennedy has participated in a variety of episodic volunteer and service learning experiences during her first year of college. Serving others has provided opportunities to clarify her values and explore the ambiguity of the world around her. These experiences are an integral

part of her journey discovering her sense of identity and vocation. Kennedy is confident that serving others is her passion. Kennedy's commitment to serving others demonstrates a sincere faith in humanity and a general optimism for life.

*It would make the world a better place if everybody wanted to help somebody else. A lot of people are just focused on themselves or their families, but I think compassion is when you want to help a stranger. That's really important. If more people realized that they should try to help strangers it would just make the world a better place. Every time I volunteer, afterwards there's one moment where I feel like I want to do it again. That's what keeps me going back to it. Seeing the different types of people; feeling sad and also feeling happy and feeling blessed and grateful. All those things combined make me want to keep doing it. I think having a positive attitude is like the number one thing. If everyone had a negative attitude, then it would just be like nothing would really get accomplished. Even if things aren't going the way you want or things aren't quite where you want them to be yet, having a positive attitude makes everything a lot more enjoyable.*

Kennedy's experiences serving others have been profoundly meaningful in discerning her sense of self and her purpose in life. These experiences have provided the opportunity for her to escape the shadows she described in her life before coming to college. Serving others helps Kennedy to feel good about herself and the contributions she can offer to others.

With each new experience, Kennedy is also beginning to see how these individual episodic moments are part of a larger journey of discovery in her life.

*All these little voluntary things I'm doing, I'm not really doing them to lead up to something. Really, I'm just doing them because I feel like I'm living right now and I should do it. I'm not really like planning for something bigger, if that makes sense. I feel like people should volunteer. People should do the best they can to make somebody else's day better. I don't try to glorify myself and be like, "Hey! I volunteer." Just because I volunteer, I don't by any means think of myself as any better or higher up on a pedestal than anybody else. I just don't want to glorify myself, and I don't want to get it in my head that I'm doing it for the wrong reason. I don't want it to be one of those things I brag about. I don't want to make it seem like I think I'm better than someone else because I'm doing more. A lot of people don't know that I volunteer so much 'cause obviously I don't like to talk about it a lot. But my family is super proud of it, and they think it's awesome. Maybe I am setting a good example and getting other people around me to start thinking the way I do. Just making positive thoughts so that it carries on to other people around me and the community itself. I don't think I can see a big change right now, but it has to start somewhere. I want to change somebody's life for the better. I*

*just want to open more peoples' eyes to the power that they have to make somebody else's life better. I always ask myself, "What is life about? What's the meaning of life?" It's an impossible question. For me personally, I think it's to make other peoples' lives better in some way; just to help people. Every day to me is kind of like a new adventure. I try to make something happen so that I have a story to tell. And just like putting everything together that I have done gives me a sense of a really good story. Life is a journey that I'm going to keep going on.*

Kennedy began a journey in college that includes new experiences, new and renewed relationships, and the confidence to continue exploring new horizons. She has discovered her capacity to be leader and influence others along her journey. She still struggles navigating the disconnect between her life experiences and perspective and the realization that others have different experiences and priorities. She is becoming aware of her privilege in society, and the associated responsibility she feels to serve those in need. She is also learning to take pride in the contributions she is making, and to see her service to others as leadership.

*I was at Campus Crusade for Christ over at [the University.] I was there with a friend. The speaker had a sermon and I remember it always ingrained in my mind. He asked "Are you a leader who serves or a server who leads?" And I have to remind myself that I need to be like a servant who leads. That's what Jesus was like when he was here. He could have been a king, or he could have been anybody, but he came to the earth as the lowest of the low. I think of myself as a servant because I'm trying to do things for other people, which is the whole idea. But as far as being a servant who leads goes, since I was a leader of all the groups that I was in, I kind of made things happen. The leadership part is I should go somewhere with it rather than just help people and leave it at that.*

As Kennedy gains confidence in the authenticity of her true sense of self and her purpose in life, she is beginning to understand how she can emerge from the shadows and make a difference in the world.

*The older I get and more mature I get, I am going to start making it known that I'm into volunteering. Making more people around me know and trying to get others to do it too. In my life, I think [being a leader] will help me grow a lot more as a person. 'Cause it'll challenge me obviously and hopefully it'll change their mind set or turn a light bulb on like, "Oh, I can help people too." Anyone can do it. I think it would make the world a lot better of a place. I think there'd be a lot less crime; there'd be a lot less sadness and anger. I know that everyone needs someone to talk to. And I feel like, since I care about people, and I want to help, I should be doing it. I think it's crucial to do what you can. It*

*seems so simple and obvious to me, but I guess like if nobody does anything, then nothing is going to change. If every single person did one little thing, it would change the world.*

Kennedy believes that everyone she encounters has a story to tell and deserves to be cared for.

This relational and caring attitude is central to her commitment to serving others. She remains focused on the present moment of each of her experiences but is starting to see the bigger picture and patterns along her journey. She is passionate about making the world a better place and believes every person should do their part.

Kennedy Martens values genuine, authentic relationships that validate others and help them feel a sense of belonging and purpose in the world. She wants everyone to feel cared about and significant. This relational approach emerges from Kennedy's strong connections to other women, particularly the caring examples of her mother. She believes everyone can improve the world by showing concern for others, and has difficulty connecting with those who don't share this perspective. Kennedy maintains a youthful optimism and idealism that the world can be made a better place if each individual makes a contribution. At this time in her life, her commitment to serving others is more about intrinsic rewards; not necessarily serving the unmet needs of society. However, Kennedy is starting to question the social inequities inherent in her varied volunteer experiences. Through her journey Kennedy is becoming a confident servant-leader striving to turn her passion and experiences into action, to make a difference with her life, and also improve the experiences of others.

### **Mark Baxter**

*When you make someone's day, it makes you feel all jolly inside.  
It's priceless. It's God giving. I can't explain how it makes you feel.*

Mark Baxter is a Construction Trades major and a former high school student athlete who values teamwork, respect for family, and a job well done. He is a twenty year old, Caucasian

male in his second year at Service Learning Community College. Mark is practical and straightforward in his approach to life. He grew up in a small farming town and remains closely connected to the life of his community. Mark's family owns and operates several businesses in their small town. Mark spends his free time planning and implementing remodeling projects for the family businesses and helping his family any way that he can. He goes back home nearly every week-end and remains very close to both his family and his community.

Mark repeatedly talks about the influence of his parents and grandparents in his life. He has tremendous respect for their contributions to his identity and values. Mark sees his family, particularly his grandfather, father, and brother, as role-models in his life and emulates the lessons he has learned from their examples. Mark has an older brother who was one of his best friends growing up; however, this relationship is now more distant based on the strain of mental health issues that impact his brother's life. Mark is extremely dedicated to his family and would do anything he possibly could to provide support for them trusting that they would do the same for him. This is the essence of being a member of his family. Mark is single but hopes that he will find a partner who is interested in marriage and family, living in a small town, and becoming part of his close knit community.

Mark's love of sports and his experiences as an athlete are central to his identity. He values the rewards athleticism offers to hard work and dedication. Mark balances his strong work ethic with an easy-going sense of humor. He generally has an optimistic outlook about his own experiences and tries to make life fun and enjoyable in his peer groups. Connections to his friends, family, and community are such an intrinsic part of Mark's life experience he struggles to understand other perspectives. He questions changes in society and his small community that seem to disrupt the strong relationships he values. Mark firmly believes his experiences growing

up in a rural community with close friends and family have prepared him to succeed.

### **Mark's Story**

Mark was born and raised in a rural farming community of approximately 6,000 residents. His father was born and raised in the same small town, and his parents have lived there for almost thirty years developing a successful collection of family businesses.

*I was born and raised in [a small town.] I played sports in high school: football, wrestling, and track. My dad was born and raised in [my town]. My mom was a Navy brat. She moved all over the place. When her mom and her dad got a divorce, she ended up [out west]. She was a student athlete out there. She had a close friend that was the head track coach at [a local college]. He said, "If you run track, you run track [here]." So she ended up going there. Never set foot on campus or anything, just came for school out of the blue. That's where her and my dad met. My dad blew his knee out in high school, senior year, so he didn't win state. A lot of things fell right for them to meet. If my dad won state that year, he wouldn't have gone to [that college]. He would have went somewhere bigger, probably [the University]. My dad was not smart, that's where we get it from, but he passed. He made it through college. He showed us what hard work and dedication can do. He took \$10,000 from my grandma and grandpa and turned it into a million dollar business. It took him awhile, but it shows hard work pays off.*

Mark reveals the importance of athletics in his life when he summarizes his youth by stating "I played sports in high school." He also frames his parent's athletic experiences as one of the core reasons they met and developed a relationship. Mark makes meaning of his grandparents' divorce and his father's high school athletic injury as a part of the larger plan to bring his parents together. He accepts the foundation of his parent's marriage as an example for his own life.

Mark regularly summarizes the lessons of his life in short maxims such as "hard work pays off." He is very pragmatic in his approach to the complexities of life and relationships.

*[My mom and dad] always told us, find a friend and marry her. My uncle married someone because she got pregnant and had a miscarriage. But they weren't meant to be. They fight a lot and have their arguments. It's her way or no way, you know. They just don't mesh. My parents always used that as an example. "Do you want to live like that, or do you want to live with your wife or partner happy; where you both put the same amount of time in? Can you see yourself with them forever? 'Cause once you get married, you got to remember from that day on, you're stuck with that person for the rest of your life, day in and day out. Divorce, yeah, we ain't a strong believer in that; so make*

*sure they're the one." Basically, they taught us that type of stuff. They love each other. For the past 25-26 years, they've worked together every day at the store. So basically, they see each other 24 hours a day. And they still don't get into many fights at all. That just shows you how much love they have for each other.*

Mark's identity is intertwined in his family relationships, and he finds great support and pride in the examples of their lives. Marriage and family are a life-long commitment. As he described his relationship with his brother, Mark struggled to find a way to describe the distance that has recently emerged between them and still communicate the value he has in this relationship.

*I have one older brother. He's our head chef at our family restaurant. We did a lot of stuff together, almost everything when we were little. We've grown apart a little bit but we're still pretty close, I'd say. I don't want it to sound like we're distant, 'cause there are reasons. He's severely depressed. He's been in the mental hospital twice. That affected me a lot, you know. We're still close knit; it's just the depression has kind of torn me apart. If you've had someone close to you [with depression], you'd understand the toll it takes on family. That's why I said we were kind of distant. Before the depression, he stood up for me. He was a best friend and big brother all in one. He's three years older than me. When he was a senior, I was a freshman. So we were on two sports teams together. He never tried to miss anything of mine. In eighth grade year I wrestled and played basketball. I didn't know what I was going to do in high school, so he talked to his coach, and he missed a Saturday practice to come watch my last wrestling meet. 'Cause he hadn't seen me wrestle yet. He would do stuff like that. That meant a lot to me. He missed varsity basketball practice to come watch me wrestle for possibly my last time. He didn't have to do that. His basketball was more important than my middle school sporting, you know. Stuff like that, that's how we were so close. We're both athletic, and we both have very competitive natures so we'd always push each other more. He benched 260; I put up 285. He had a better vertical jump, but I was stronger. That competitive spirit made us very close. We're playing on a slow pitch softball team this summer together, so we're best friends basically.*

Mark struggles with the separation in his relationship with his brother because mental health concerns have created barriers. His admiration and affection for his brother are evident as Mark talks about their shared athletic experiences and the friendly competition that continues to define their relationship. Mark clearly works to establish that he remains close to his brother despite the difficulties they have faced. This reveals Mark's commitment to his family no matter what. This is particularly evident in Mark's summary that he and his brother remain best friends.

One of the biggest influences in Mark's life has been his paternal grandfather who instilled a strong work ethic and commitment to education through his family leadership.

*I relate to [my grandpa] a lot. We're close. You know, he's always given back. He's donated hundreds of units of blood in his life. He worked for the state for 50 years, which he's very proud of to say he's worked for one company for 50 years. He's never missed a paid hour, which is amazing. He would do anything for his family. He had three boys; my dad's the oldest. All three were extremely athletic. He taught them how to work hard. He had a great work ethic. My grandpa has his friends who he helps on the farm. He has a group of friends that he would do anything for, and they would do the same thing for him, which is great. He's always taught us how important education is; he set aside \$16,000 for each of the six grandkids to go to education. 'Cause after 25 years, he had all these people passing him that had education. He finally realized how important education is. He grew up on the farm so he has the farm ethic. Work hard, you know, and party hard. But you've got to get up the next day to work so you better be able to get up and do your job or else you're not going out again for a long time. He's taught us that. Yes, have fun: you're a kid. But remember you got stuff to do, so make sure you can still do your job the next day. Which is a great philosophy. I think a lot of people should learn that.*

Mark briefly talks about his grandfather's commitment to donating blood but quickly shifts the story back to more practical life lessons he learned from his grandfather's example. Mark values hard, honest work: "the farm ethic." He also values education and is thankful his grandfather provided the funding and the guidance so he would have the opportunity to go to college.

Another lesson Mark learned from his grandfather is the inherent value in being a part of a community where you can rely on others, and where all members care for the welfare of others.

*Back in the old days when my parents and grandparents grew up, people would drop what they're doing to help you. It don't matter what, especially in small towns like I'm from. Everybody knew everybody. It's a great community. Now, it's not like that anymore. The people are more focused about their own well-being, their own reputation, and their own kids, their own name. They're not worried about the circle of life, you could say. When you're young you take care of the elderly, and when you're elderly the young takes care of you. It's the circle of life.*

Mark sees that a rapidly changing world is diminishing the relational connections and care for others that promote the strong sense of community he values. He struggles with changes in society that discourage meaningful social connections and interconnected relationships.

Growing up in a small town is another core influence in Mark's life. His connections to his community are an integral part of his identity and childhood experiences.

*When I was little, [my town] was a place where there were no worries. I grew up in a happy Midwest small town where everyone knows each other, and there's no crime. That's how [my town] was. So when I was little we could do a lot of stuff that you couldn't do in a big city. I could go to the park by myself without a parent watching you all the time. 'Cause in a small town, you got to do more stuff like that. Everybody in town knew each other. When I was little with my sporting events, it was competitive with competitive town spirit. It's a generation town. People that grew up there with my dad, I'm playing in sports with their kids now. In my brother's class there was a kid whose dad graduated with my dad. His son was a year older than my brother. And then like in my class, I had kids whose parents graduated with my dad. I don't know how to describe it really; it's just a sense of community. Unless you grew up in it or experienced it, you don't know what it means really. I would say my childhood was about average. I mean there was nothing spectacular. It's basically an average childhood.*

These intergenerational relationships exemplify the connections and care for others Mark associates with life in his community. Mark observed that his family and neighbors could be trusted to watch one another's children or would do whatever was needed to help one another. This connection to community is so inherent in Mark's life experiences the practice of serving others comes naturally.

This spirit of community is also linked to Mark's experiences and identity growing up as a young student athlete.

*It was hard to be a kid when your parents knew whatever you were doing. I always had people. It was great cause when I was little, probably one of my best family friends was the Park and Rec. Director of [our town]. So we were very involved in that. My parents were coaching every sport until we got to Little League, and then they stopped. It was great because like even now during the high school football season, the atmosphere in [our town] is just amazing. We live for football in [our town]. That's the only sport we're probably good at. We're getting good at wrestling, but in football we're just a powerhouse. We've been to state playoffs 14 years in a row now, I think. Since 2000, we won four state championships, one runner-up. The community gets behind you on that; it's a very close community when it comes to football. You can go anywhere and talk football to [anyone]. We have the VFW in [our town]. On every away game, the guys make sandwiches for all of us. They buy pop and chips and cookies for us so on the way home we have something to eat. They've been doing that for as long as I know. When we won the state title, the whole town met us at a car dealership and the fire trucks lead us*

*through downtown. And the whole town follows us, and we had a meeting at the high school with cake and stuff. It was just awesome, and then you get to mingle with everybody and that's cool.*

Mark enjoyed the strong connections and the security of growing up in a close-knit, active, and intergenerational community. The close-knit relationships within his community also nurtured his own growth and development. Mark's strong connection to sports emerges from the athletic culture of his community.

Mark derives great pride in his experiences as a high school student athlete and repeatedly discusses his passion for and fond recollections of these experiences.

*I love sports. That's my life and passion besides construction. In high school pretty much every chance I had, I was in the weight room lifting. I was very dedicated to my sports. Every elective I took was pretty much construction related. I did drafting. I designed my entire house myself: electrical, plumbing, H-VAC. I could give the prints to someone, and they could build it. It's all professionally done. I did that on Cad 2. I did all my cabinetry work. I did a class with cabinetry. I built two bookshelves for our store. I was a two time state champion in football so I built me a little case for my rings which is pretty cool. My senior year, we have a shop class that we get to build a garage off campus. And I did that. My high school career was pretty much that and dedicated to sports. Summers I was in camps lifting every day. I was extremely dedicated.*

Mark starts to talk about his academic work in high school but begins and ends with his experiences as a student athlete. Mark's stories about high school establish recurring themes of teamwork, hard work, practical education, and dedication to achieving the best. Mark's experiences as a high-school student athlete also strengthened these core values.

*I always found my place on every sports team. When I played basketball when I was little, into middle school, I was never a scorer. I knew I couldn't score. My job was defense. I guard the best player on the team, and I shut him down. That was my job, and I knew that was my job. I knew I wasn't the one to take ten shots a game. You know, I get my one, two shots a game, sometimes no shots. I would buy into my job is defense. That's where the team needs me. Football is a little different story: my goal was play both sides. My coach didn't think I needed to play both sides. He said, "I just want you on offense." So I eventually bought into that and just focused on offense and my tight end position and became the best tight end I could be and played my role. I relate everything to sports 'cause I love sports. If you look at any great sports team in the past, they always have that key player that's a role player that no one knows about. But he just buys into his*

*role, and he makes the team go. He gets hurt, the team's not nearly as good. That's the way I am.*

Through his role as team player, Mark recognizes his strengths and how to utilize them to help the greater good. He is clear that his individual success is linked to the success of his team. Mark is also willing to do whatever is required or expected to succeed. This drive has influenced his academic accomplishments, in addition to his athletic achievements.

*When I was in elementary school, I was diagnosed with bad ADHD and ADD, and dyslexia. I'll tell you the truth, no one thought I would go through college. I got on the honor roll here. If you put your time into it and find the way that works for you, you can do it. I was extremely proud when I found out I got on the President's Academic Honor Roll last semester. I was thrilled about that. If life gives you lemons, make lemonade, you know. God gave me ADHD for a reason. There's some reason he gave me ADD. He gave me the disabilities I have for a reason. Don't dwell on them. Find the positive and take it and run with it. I'm not shy to tell anybody about that. I worked my butt off in high school to pass my English classes because that was the subject I struggled in. And it's paid off.*

Mark accepts the circumstances of his life without limitations. He will do whatever he can to make a contribution. Mark's work ethic and drive are also evident in his professional roles. As an example of this, he told this story of finding his niche during his summer internship.

*Last summer I worked for Jackson Construction, and I got put on a job that was just finishing up, so there wasn't much to do except things my supervisor thought I couldn't do. I disagreed because I knew I could, but... So he put me on clean up duty. So all summer I was pretty much pushing a broom and cleaning stuff up, but I eventually bought into that and became the best push broomer I could be, you know. There was going to be no dust on the floor when I got done with things, I'm going to do my best job 'cause that's what they needed from me at that time. So I just pretty much put it into perspective: I'll push my broom for a summer and eventually you work your way up. I know when I get out of here, I'm not going to go and become the supervisor of a crew. It's just, it's not feasible. It's not going to happen. I'm going to be low man on the totem pole, and I have to work to get people's respect. So I end up getting respect; just do what they say. Buy into [my role] even if I totally disagree with it. Bite your lip and do it and you earn respect and you move your way up. It's just how it's supposed to be done.*

Just as he accepted the tight end position on his football team to win the state championship, Mark puts his full effort into doing the cleaning duties during his internship. Mark does whatever is needed, whatever is asked of him. He takes tremendous pride in doing any job to the absolute

best of his ability.

Mark's parents were actively involved in his athletic endeavors. The involvement and support of his family in his athletic success was significant in informing his identity and values.

*My mom and dad were very involved in all our lives. They would never miss anything. They still don't miss anything. It means a lot, you know; they'd do anything for us. I know a lot of parents say that; but I don't know if they mean it. I know my parents do which means a lot. They've taught us the proper way to grow up, I think. My parents with the five stores, they never missed any of my sporting events ever. Since I've been little, to the day I graduated, they never missed a one. Which a lot of parents can't say that, and most of them don't have as much to do. My senior year in wrestling, Districts was on Valentine's Day which is a big day for flowers. The first round was the day before; my final round was on Valentine's Day. [My parents] told the florist, "We've got to go watch our son wrestle." And they missed Valentine's Day to come watch me wrestle. You don't tell anybody that's no big deal. But you don't realize when we had 150 deliveries made that day probably, plus pick-ups. There's a lot of stuff to be done that day at the store. It's the one day they left because it's more important to watch me wrestle my senior year at my last meet ever than to make that little bit amount of money; it was more important than that. I take great pride in it. I never shied to tell anybody about it, you know. It means a lot to me. My parents have done so much for me that I'm just grateful for it. You know they've given me so many opportunities and stuff. They've done a lot for me when I was little to get me where I am today. It's great. I take great pride in it. It means a lot to me.*

Mark's parents' unfailing dedication to his success provides a foundation for his confidence. He knows that their love and support are unconditional. This connection to his family exemplifies Mark's values. His work ethic and commitment to his education and to serving his community emerge from the values and priorities Mark learned from his family.

*My dad, ever since I was little, he always told me, "Do it right the first time so you don't have to come back and do it again; 'cause it costs more money the second time." Which is extremely true. That just stuck with me with everything I've done. My grandpa, he's taught me hard work always pays off in the end. Even right away if it don't pay off, eventually it will pay off. Eventually your time will come, and you'll get the great big promotion or something. It will eventually pay off, and I've stuck with that. I've always been proud in anything I do, you know. It's just who I am really.*

Mark is self-confident and comfortable pursuing life on his terms. This comfort emerges from the foundation in values he has integrated into his identity from his family, his athletic

experiences, his community, and his own successes along the way. Mark's relationships with others are integrated with his core values and identity.

Mark grew up in a small, intergenerational, farming community where he thrived as a student athlete. He learned core lessons and values from his parents and grandparents that reinforce his commitment to the importance of strong community relationships. In his stories, Mark introduced a core understanding that a community is a place where people rely on one another and the welfare of others is of mutual concern. From this interconnected network of support, serving others comes naturally.

### **Mark's Service Learning Experiences**

Mark described a variety of community service work in his youth involving his family, his faith, and his experiences as a student athlete. His values and attitude about belonging and being an active member of his community emerged from his observations of these service experiences. Mark described one of his earliest experiences doing a highway clean-up through his church youth group.

*I was born a Lutheran, Missouri Synod. I'm still strong in religion. I go to the same church my grandma and grandpa got married in; in the exact same spot that my parents got married. One of my aunt and uncles got married there, so it's a family church I would say. I will stand up for my belief in God over anything. I've had arguments about different beliefs, you know. I wouldn't say arguments, but I stated my belief over theirs 'cause I'm a strong believer. My grandpa even says, "God comes first." You can always make time for God. He gave His one and only child for your sins, and you can give that one hour a week to go to church and give your thanks for that. I'm thankful for what He's done. I'm thankful for what I've learned through it. I have family friends from church that I know I can tell them stuff if I need to and it'd be confidential. That's another small town thing, I think. I never lived in a big city so I don't know much about how it works in bigger cities. But that's the basics of my religious beliefs. When we started [volunteering in church youth group], I was little so I didn't think much of it 'cause I was in my own little, happy world. Nothing could go wrong, you know. We had to go for the highway trash pickup. It started at a young age. Basically back then we said, "Oh, if we have to do this, then we have to do it." We didn't see the big picture, you know, we were ten years old. You ain't going to see the big picture at that point. Looking back, it's a great thing. I'm going to get my kids involved at a young age in volunteering just 'cause it teaches*

*you self-respect, and respect for others. It teaches you a lot of stuff and it makes you... I think it makes you an all-around better person.*

The themes of family and community re-emerge as Mark talks about his faith and his experiences serving others. For Mark it is important to ground his faith community to his family history. Mark accepts being an active community member and serving others as a natural and expected part of life. Working hard and playing around are integrated into the values Mark learned from the example and leadership of his parents.

*When I talked about picking up of trash that was with my catechism class. We did that once a year for four years. My parents took over the youth group to get that started up again so we did a lot of service with that. We scooped driveways; we raked our church; we painted our rec. room at our church. They had a policy where we went to [an amusement park] at the end of the year, but you had to show up for the raking the leaves in order to go. So you just don't go for the fun. You have the fun, but you have to put the work in first. My parents taught us that, and they tried to reflect that on the other kids in our church which helped a lot.*

Mark uses the metaphor of “the circle of life” repeatedly in his stories. He accepts the circular connections between himself and others. He understands and embraces the intricate balance between work and play; youth and old age; self and community; and giving and receiving in the community.

Mark’s service learning experiences in high school and college are directly linked to his personal interests and his construction trades major. The first service learning experience Mark described was building a garage with a shop class in high school. In his construction trades major Mark has built a house for Habitat for Humanity. Through all these experiences Mark has developed an appreciation for the intrinsic rewards serving others can provide.

*The garage I built was all service learning. They pay for all the materials and give the school \$500 for tools, and then all the labor is free. We do everything except for the concrete 'cause we don't have the time. So they do the slab, and we do the framing. We set the trusses, sheeting, siding, windows, doors, garage door. We do everything for them in a semester. So that was service learning there. [Just like in] my midweek catechism once or twice a year we picked up trash along the highway. It feels good, if you have the*

*time to do it. You know with my family we're busy, we're always busy so it's hard to have the time to do it. But with catechism, it feels good doing it. It makes you feel more proud about yourself. That you're giving back; especially with Habitat now. You're helping people that are in need, who don't have the resources or money to get a house. And you're building them a house for no overhead cost, just the cost of materials, which means a lot to them. When you turn the house over, it's the best feeling. The happiness and appreciation they show is... You can't describe how it feels.*

Serving others is a source of pride for Mark, a way of being connected with others in his community. This connection is an integral part of Mark's sense of himself. Through his service to others, he builds his own self-esteem.

One of the most meaningful experiences Mark described was during his senior year in high school. Mark was selected by a local man with a mental disability to be his personal chaperone to high school athletic practices – a tradition that had started years ago.

*When my dad was in school, there was a guy named Fred Duffy who was a mentally handicapped guy. He's pretty normal; he's just slightly mental. He can't function by himself; he still lives with his mom and stuff. But ever since he was a freshman in high school, he's been a part of the [high school] football team. He's been there every season, and it's a great tradition we have. And every year a senior picks him up for practice and takes him home from practice – no, he walks himself home now. He sits in the locker room with us, [talks] with us. Every Wednesday we do "Duff Drills" which is... you can't describe how fun that is. And it's a great feeling cause I was honored to be his guide my senior year. I was responsible for him; that's quite an experience. It's an honor. Only one person each year gets to do it. In my class of 24 seniors, I was the one that Duff picked. So you know it's just an honor to do it. You're known around as "Duff's guy." People ask you about it, and it's an easy topic to talk to anybody about. It's an honor, a privilege. You got to take great pride in it. You can't never forget him. Never, you know. You have to be on time every time, and it's a great honor and privilege to do it.*

Mark showed tremendous pride as he talked about being selected to escort Duff to various team events and practices. He repeatedly comments on the honor and privilege of this role as he tries to convey the importance of serving Duff both personally and across his entire community. Mark sees the opportunity to serve others in these ways as a natural part of life, not as an obligation or burden.

Mark's college service learning experiences have primarily been building an entire house

for Habitat for Humanity through the SLCC Construction Trades program. For Mark this educational experience predominantly focused on learning tangible, professional skills.

*With Habitat, the owner, the recipient of the house has to do 200 hours of volunteer work to get the house. But our instructor said they cannot work on the house we are building. They can't do any of the framing or anything just because they could mess something up and it's degrading of the students. So we did it all. The only thing we did not do was the electrical, plumbing, and HVAC, 'cause we ain't licensed. And the painting we did not do. And the foundation we did not do. But besides that we did everything. The recipient came and painted the outside of the house, and they painted the inside of the house because we don't have the time to paint. And then we poured the driveway and sidewalks. It went really smooth considering it was most of the peoples' first time building that big a project. Our instructor, he's great. He is a great guy. He has the patience to work with us and teach us. And me, I was one of the advanced students so he would challenge us with the more difficult stuff 'cause he knows you're capable of doing it. And the rest of people, he didn't challenge; you know, he put on the easier stuff or put them under you. So it was a great process. I learned how to cut in a roof. I've never cut in a roof. That was fun. I've never done a staircase myself, and we did the staircase. So I really liked that. I learned how to box frame and stick frame. I knew how to box; I never knew how to stick. And then the drywall, I got more experience. I knew how to drywall; I wasn't good at it but I knew how to mud and stuff, and I got pretty good at that I'd say. I had my own room I drywalled and mudded myself. I was extremely proud of that room. I was extremely proud in the craftsmanship I put into the house.*

Building a Habitat house begins with the practical skills Mark learned in the construction of the home each day. Mark shared these daily experiences and the pride in his contributions with his family throughout the project. As the project was completed, just as his parents supported his athletic accomplishments, they came to the Habitat ceremony turning the new home over to the owner recipients.

*I would always come home, and [my parents] would say, "How's the house going?" At the end, I got to show them the house I built, which was cool. Showing them the house was fun. I got to say, "This is the final project. This is what I've been telling you about." They could actually finally see and admire the craftsmanship. And see how proud I was showing it. This is what I did. It's what I was telling them about. I could actually show them. I could tell them about projects all the time, but if I show you it, it's that much more, you know. Especially my grandpa came; he's the one that I walked with and he picked out every little thing. It just meant a lot because they never miss anything of mine, and they didn't miss that. So that was special.*

Sharing his Habitat project with his family exemplifies Mark's pride in his hard work and effort

beyond the athletic arena. It also demonstrates the support Mark continues to draw from his family and the influence this continues to provide in his life.

The Habitat ceremony was also a powerful reminder to Mark of the impact serving others and improving their quality of life can provide. This was evident to Mark as he described the completion ceremony where the home is presented to the owner recipients.

*You'd be surprised how many people from the community show up to it: the Dean of the college and everything. They talk about the house, they talked about our program and how we'd built it. They had cake and stuff for everyone that shows up. It's a pretty big event actually. Habitat for Humanity is a Christian organization so they blessed the house. They have a minister that comes and blesses the house. And then we all get to walk through the house, and then we get to turn the keys over to the owner. And that's just a great feeling, seeing how happy they are, emotional. You can't describe the feeling of seeing that smile and how happy and gracious they are for receiving the house and how much it means to them. It was an honor to be there that day when they got it. And to see the happiness you gave someone for doing it even though I was required to do it. It was my class. But besides all that it was still volunteer work and it gives you a sense of self-worth. It puts the world in perspective of how it should be and how it's not that way anymore.*

Through this experience, Mark begins to see that serving others is not the norm in today's society. This observation about the world is almost a revelation for Mark, who more frequently sees an interconnected world through the lens of his own community and experiences. He describes the strong emotional impact providing a home for a family in need has had on his life. Mark was also able to describe the ways he thought having a Habitat house would improve the quality of life for the family.

*They finally have a roof over their head for every day in and day out. No matter what happens, they have a roof over their head. They have a place to call home for once. I've never been in that situation, but I'm sure it's got to be... I can't describe how it would make them feel. But my guess would be... I don't know where they came from before they got the house. But they probably came from moving from house to house. I'm sure kids are doing better in school now because they don't have the worry about where they're going to live. If that's where they came from. The parents are probably more focused on work and stuff. I don't know where they came from, but my guess would be they are a lot closer and a lot more focused on what they're doing and doing better overall. That would be my guess.*

Although Mark isn't sure about the family's circumstance before taking ownership of the house, he is confident the stability of their new home will improve their quality of life. Mark's sense of this stability was a reflection of the safety and security of his own childhood experiences. He anticipates the new home will help the children do well in school, establish connections with neighbors, and afford the family a better future. This reflects Mark's own life experiences and his family's connections to their community.

For Mark serving others is a natural extension of community life. Service is not an obligation or a burden; it is instead a way of being in genuine relationships with others. Mark believes there is fundamental value in serving others. In his experience, serving others improves the quality of life by helping people feel good about themselves and their contributions to the greater good.

### **Reflection**

Mark makes sense of his life experiences through the lessons he learned from his family. "Do it right the first time." "Marriage is forever." "Hard work always pays off." "Friends will always be there for you." He lives by the Golden Rule: treating others as he wants to be treated. This "circle of life" approach is central to Mark's identity as a member of his community and his connections with others. His educational experiences at SLCC complemented this direct, practical approach to life.

*[My instructor] always included life lessons. The joke is "You can't fix stupid." That was one of the jokes he would always play around with. He would always tell us how if he promises you something, he's going to keep it. No one does that anymore. No one keeps their word. Back in the old days you could shake a hand and that's your contract. Now a written contract won't even keep up in the court of law. Back then a handshake would keep your word, you know. Just things like that that he could put into the learning. That that's the main goal they have here is teaching you to be a better person. Learn the construction, but teaching you to be a better person as you're doing it. He tries to put lessons into our curriculum. Service learning helps a lot, you know.*

This practicality reveals the true character in Mark's nature. Every construction project or act of service should be done to the highest possible standards. Each action is an opportunity to serve others with integrity and be a better community member.

Teamwork and dedication to achieving the best is another recurring theme in Mark's stories of athletic achievement. His successes as an athlete have taught Mark to believe that he can achieve his goals without limitations.

*Outside of my family, my role model is Michael Jordan. He went through a lot of controversy. People told him, "You can't play defense." Next year he was the defensive player of the NBA. He didn't make varsity as a freshman. Someone told him you can't do it. He said, "Watch me. I'll do it." And he would prove them wrong. With what I have, people always said, "You're too slow to play receiver." I was the second best receiver in my class. "You're too slow to play cornerback." I was the starting cornerback on my freshman football team. "You're not big enough to play linebacker." No, I will play linebacker. Just watch me. Some of my Special Ed. teachers knew I had the ability, just a matter of applying it. I can sit here and tell you the best story ever, but I can't put that on paper. My English teachers probably thought I couldn't do it. "How is he going to put that into college? 'Cause the teachers ain't going to sit down and help him with it. He's going to have to do it himself."*

Mark derives tremendous pride and personal value in his ability do a job well and his capacity to make a contribution. Mark believes that each person should work hard to do whatever is required to help those in need. He repeatedly talks about the interconnections between self, family, and community. He summarized this in his description of how he plans to raise his own family.

*Put your knowledge in life into the young generation. When you have kids, teach them the morals of life. They should have good morals and good values. Do anything for them. Put them first. Teach them the value of a dollar. No one has that aspect anymore. Very few, I would say, have that. Another thing about my grandpa is he's never borrowed a dollar in his life. That's something that he's very, very proud of, and I'm proud of that too for him. That he's never owed anybody any money. He's bought everything, he's paid everything cash his whole life. You know, so the value of the dollar is one big thing I want to put in my kids' life. Don't go buy the new car. Keep driving your old piece of junk and put that money towards education. Put that money towards the kids to have school supplies. 'Cause when they look back on it, they'll realize what you did and what it means to them. And then they will teach their kids that hopefully. No one has manners anymore. I don't know if you noticed I took my hat off. That's the proper thing to do. If I don't do that, I see my grandma yelling at me. You know she just drilled that in my head, you got to take*

*your hat off. In the cafeteria, I'm probably the only kid that does it. I just do it, you know. Say "Thank you" on the smallest things. Bobby Knight, one of the best basketball coaches ever in college, before he retired gave his players a lecture on thank you. And it made ESPN news about how you should never take for granted a thank you. If someone picks up a pen that you dropped, say "Thank you." It means a lot. Maybe not to that person when you say it, but you get in the habit, it would come back and help you eventually. That's just a small manner thing that I think's gone to the wayside. I want to make sure my kids know the correct manners.*

Mark is thankful for his family and their influence in his life. He repeats his circular, connected world view as he describes the importance of being thankful for even the smallest gestures of service. Mark would do anything to help his family or his neighbors. This is exemplified in the story of his grandfather's commitments to family first and service to others as basic matters of daily life.

*[My Grandpa] recently paid off my brother's college debt for him to get it off his back. My grandpa was a volunteer fire fighter for 32 years, I think it was, something around that number. And it hurts him now 'cause the volunteer fire fighters don't take it like they did back in the day. When he was working for the state, he actually saved a guy's life. When he had a heart attack; my grandpa didn't flinch. You know he just dropped [everything] and saved the guy's life with no hesitating. He didn't think much of it. He says, "Yeah. I saved his life." It's not that big a deal to him 'cause he did what was right. Bill Clinton was in office, and he sent him a thank you letter 'cause it was a state thing. You know, when the President sends you a letter, it's a big deal. And to him, it was not that big a deal 'cause he did the right thing. That just shows you the type of person he is. And that's the type of person I want to become.*

The circular connections between self and others are integrated so completely into Mark's world view; he struggles to make sense of any alternative perspective. This perspective makes serving the community a part of life that Mark accepts without question.

Mark gives completely in his effort to help others, because he believes that serving others will ultimately be returned to him in ways he may not even realize or expect. This is not only true in his family and community, but also in his professional life as well.

*There's the good leaders who get to know you, get to know your strengths, get to know your weaknesses, gets to know a little bit about you, gets to know what makes you happy. Which is the leader I want to be if I ever become in that spot. I'll get to know my*

*coworkers, get to know the people under me, the people around me. I'll make their life easier; 'cause if their life's easier, it just trickles down. If I'm the job supervisor, and I make the superintendent's life easier, who's going in return make the foreman's life easier, which is going in return is make the worker's life easier, which in the long run is going to make my life easier cause they're all getting the job done faster which is going to save my butt in the end. That's the type of leader you want; one that's willing to go above and beyond what's expected, take a little bit of time of his day, a little bit of his things and you know pitch in. It's a give and take system.*

Mark's interconnected approach to being a part of his profession, his family, or his community is integral to his core sense of self and his way of being. Through these relationships Mark creates the stronger community he values. This is intrinsically valuable and rewarding.

*When you make someone's day, it makes you feel all jolly inside. It's priceless. It's God giving. I can't explain how it makes you feel. I think [volunteering] keeps the world turning like it should. If you don't volunteer then how are the elderly that can't get out of the house supposed to eat? How are they supposed to get their sidewalks scooped? You know how are they supposed to do stuff? You know the daily needs they need help with, how are they supposed to get done if they ain't capable of doing it? 'Cause someday, tomorrow, you might be in that situation: you might fall and break your back and can't walk anymore. So you'll want a person to help you then, so you should help now. And then in return, like I said earlier, hard work pays off. It'll pay off in the end.*

The emotions Mark experienced in serving others were difficult for him to describe in words, but they were always there in the genuine concern he communicated for others. Mark truly believes that providing help to those in need is an integral part of life.

Mark Baxter values family and community. He firmly believes the mutual concern for others that emerges from an interconnected system of close relationships creates a better quality of life. Serving others is a natural extension of living in community. Mark's faith in his world view strengthens his belief that people will do whatever they can to help those in need. Mark does seem to understand that societal values are changing in ways that make his idealistic vision of family, faith, and community harder to achieve; however he absolutely believes he can make his community better by doing his part in the circle of life.

## **Linda Mason**

*When you hit hard times, you don't need a handout, you need a hand up.  
And you have to have somebody there willing to give you a hand up.*

Linda Mason is a recently divorced single mom with two young children: a three year old son and a two year old daughter. She is a twenty two year old Caucasian female completing her first semester as a full time student at SLCC. Linda previously attended a private college prior to the birth of her son. She has returned to college to provide a better life for her children. Linda is a Human Services major specializing in Addictive Studies. Linda chose this major because her ex-husband is an alcoholic as was her biological father and step-father. Linda grew up in a small town, and both her parents were active members of the community. As Linda observed the contributions of her parents, she developed an awareness of serving others. In high school Linda was also active in her church and in her community.

As she got married and had children, Linda described a dark period of being lost. She attributed this to her ex-husband's addictions and the physical abuse that accompanied his alcohol use. Linda doesn't reveal much about this period of her life, but she does briefly mention being homeless and attempting suicide. When her husband's abuse worsened, Linda decided to pursue a better life for herself and her children. After divorcing her husband, she emerged with a renewed sense of purpose as a single parent. Linda is focused on creating a new future and a better life that a college education will provide.

Through her recent academic service learning experiences, Linda has rediscovered her passion for helping others and the intrinsic rewards that result. Her own struggles have provided a pronounced awareness of the unmet needs that still exist for many people in her community. In response Linda strives to be a role model for her children and a leader among her peers. The stories Linda shared about her family, her service experiences, and her hopes for the future

weave together the various intersections of her life. Her stories provide a rich understanding of how one person can make a difference. Linda is excited about the potential to change the world by helping others, particularly those who struggle to survive. Linda is a compassionate, caring, and empowered single mother who is committed to creating better community through genuine relationships and helping others.

### **Linda's Story**

Linda was born and raised in small, rural town. Her mom was divorced when Linda was two years old and soon remarried. Linda describes her stepfather as the only dad she has ever known. Linda's stepfather served as her town's funeral director, a position of some prominence that connected her to many people in the community. There is a tension in Linda's descriptions of her childhood between the privileges associated with such prominence in the community and keeping her step-father's alcoholism a secret.

*My childhood was very difficult. I grew up with an alcoholic father. My mother divorced my father; she married my step-father whom I consider my dad basically because he's been here my entire life. But my step-dad also had an addiction and was in and out of rehab for most of my childhood. I grew up in that suburban neighborhood with a mom and a dad and a cute picket fence. Everybody thought my step-dad had back surgeries so that's why he was gone so much. He was actually a very prominent leader in the community where we lived. He's a funeral director there. He and my grandpa were very well known. I can still walk through the streets of town and everybody goes, "Oh, my God, that's Linda, Mark Miller's girl." That's me. My parents were very active in the community. I always felt so privileged. I always felt like I had more than a lot of people ever do have. And so if I could give something back like money or my time or help make an event better for somebody else, then why not do it? I mean there's just no reason not to. My mom has always volunteered. Always. I've been raised to be grateful for what you have and to give back what you can. It was always so important to my mother. She lived in a house with basically nothing. She lost her dad when she was two. Her mother had a stroke when she was three. She was with her thirteen year old sister and her ten year old brother raising her while her mother was trying to get out of bed and learn how to walk. She said without the volunteers coming to the house and cleaning the house and taking care of the kids for their mother and helping her mother walk... If it weren't for them, she didn't know where she would be. From that experience my mom learned that helping others can shape and change somebody's life. So I kind of grew up with it. I remember*

*being eight and going to Christmas dinners and serving food and carrying trays. I just grew up so grateful for everything that we had that I wanted to give back.*

Linda is both aware of the privileges in her childhood and grateful for the opportunities she has enjoyed. Linda's gratitude is contrasted with the instability associated with keeping her step father's addiction a secret. The illusion of an idyllic family life was maintained by false stories of "back surgeries" instead of the truth of multiple stays in rehab. Linda is strongly influenced by the example of her mother, which continues to inform her experiences now as a single parent. Both of Linda's parents participated in a variety of events that exposed Linda to serving her community at a young age. Her dedication to serving others comes from the active civic examples of her parents. Linda's earliest memories of serving her community were accompanying her mom to serve dinners at a homeless shelter.

*I was four and my mom and I went to a homeless shelter, and we were serving food to the homeless. I met a little girl my age, and of course I shrugged off my duties and went and played because it's more fun. I remember going home, and I remember for the first time praying to God and thanking God for everything I had. I remember playing with her and hearing her talk about, "Well, you know, Daddy's not here and Mommy's gone some times. Mommy and I had a good place to live. She would leave me alone a couple of times a week, but we had a good place to live. But then the State said she couldn't do that anymore." From a young age I learned to be very grateful for everything that I had. I learned that sometimes, even the most insignificant thing to you can be the most important thing to somebody else.*

Throughout her stories Linda repeats this awareness of other experiences and gratitude for the opportunities she has in life despite the difficulties she has also experienced.

Following her recent divorce from an alcoholic and abusive husband, Linda's primary commitment has been raising her children as a single mom. Both of Linda's children have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and are highly intelligent. Linda is thankful for the blessings her children bring to her life and thrives in her role as a loving mother.

*My son is three and very much a handful. My daughter is two and so very cute. Both my children have ADD disorder, so my house is not like a normal household. It's a very high*

*energy household. That's the reason that I drink just about enough caffeine a day to kill somebody by normal standards. I really enjoy being a mom. I think it's the best thing I could have done with my life. I really do like it. Matthew is three and started pre-school this year. Addyson will start pre-school next year. Both my kids, although they are ADHD and they have issues keeping their attention, both of them have already been tested at almost genius IQ statuses. For a three year old and a two year old that means they can count to 50. They know all the colors in English, Spanish and French, and they can read their names, write their names and they can spell ten or more three letter words. So my children are very smart. Thank God.*

Being a single parent requires patience and dedication to meet the demanding needs of raising her children alone. Despite this, Linda is grateful for her kids and the unique challenges they provide.

*My children usually only sleep for 6 to 8 hours at a time so I'm usually up by six in the morning. We all make and eat breakfast together, so by about 7:15-7:30 we're eating. It takes me an abnormally long time to get both my children to focus long enough to get dressed and eat and all that. By about 8:00 everybody's fed and dressed and we'll sit there and we'll do flashcards for an hour or we'll work on pronunciations, or spelling or something like that. By 9:00 we usually leave the house and I drop them off at day care. I'm usually on campus from about 10:30 to about 3:00, sometimes 4:00 depending on the day and what I have to study for. Then I go pick up my kids, go home and we all make dinner. I make my children clean up their own messes which means that my daughter wipes off the table; my son picks up the toys; and they help me do the dishes and dry them and put them away. That's the reason I have plastic dishes instead of glass dishes. My children get a half hour of TV, and they need about an hour and a half to calm down enough to be able to sleep. So then we do reading, or we do flashcards again, or something like that. Then it's bedtime. I usually stay up a couple of hours studying and doing homework and making sure that my schoolwork is done. Then I go to bed.*

In the midst of playing and developmental learning, Linda is already teaching her children to be contributing members of their household by providing age appropriate responsibilities. Linda prioritizes her kids, then finds time to do her own work. In addition to the busy routines, Linda is also intentionally introducing Matthew and Addyson to a life of service in their community.

*I've already started my children volunteering, and they don't even know it yet. My children and I go to a nursing home every weekend. And to see the old people's faces when you bring two young kids in is... to see the energy that those people can get, I mean. My son, I saw him take a guy's walker the other day and challenged him to a walker race. So he grabs another guy's walker and starts trying to beat my son in a walker race up and down the hallway. The nurses said, "We haven't seen him get that*

*much energy and get up that fast a speed in about three years that he's lived here." It's an amazing thing; it really is. The sunshine and joy you can bring to somebody else's life, it's just phenomenal. I want my children to grow up and learn the value of helping somebody else; to be grateful for everything they are given in this life. To show them that sometimes the best thing that you can do for yourself is help another. Sometimes the best experiences that you have in your life come from helping somebody else.*

Linda is conscious about the importance of sharing with her children the positive examples of service she saw in her own parents. She also wants her children to recognize the power they have, even as children, to make the world a better place by developing relationships and connections with others. The intrinsic reward of bringing happiness into the lives of others with relative ease is another recurring theme in Linda's stories.

Another important theme is Linda's participation as an active member of a strong, supportive community.

*Every year we have a coats, hats, and gloves drive; and every year we set the mark higher and higher because of last year's donations. Even in this recession, we had to find a place to store all of the hats and gloves and coats that were donated. It's really just an amazing thing. Our community is very, very special about giving as much as you have received in your life. I think it's an amazing community to grow up in and it's an amazing lesson to learn to be grateful for everything that you have and to be able to give back what you can. We try to do what is best for others in our community.*

Linda recognizes the value of being connected to the community. She articulates a belief that everyone can do their part, and in doing their part each person helps others along the way. This sense of giving back to the community is important to Linda because she and her kids benefit from the reciprocal nature of this process. In serving others the community is strengthened, and a stronger community can more effectively support those in need.

*In serving my community I can kind of guarantee that my kids will grow up in caring community. To know that I had a part in that is amazing and wonderful. I can't explain how many values and how much love and support I learned from just growing up in my small little town. My town's a thousand people, and we had a fireman's dinner last week. I can stand at the fireman's dinner, and I can seriously look in a room full of 500 people, and think "I know 400 of those people." And the other 100 I want to learn about. You learn about so many different life stories, so many different experiences that people have*

*had and so many different aspects of a life that you never thought could happen. I mean, we had a family from New York move into our town two or three years ago, and to just sit down and talk with the kids from New York. It's so much different than [this area]. It's so much different from what I've grown up in. To hear their stories about how they used to take the subways to school. It's like, "Dude, I wasn't even allowed to walk across the street when I was that age." But to know that the care and love and support you put in the community, you will get back out of the community. It's simply one of the most amazing things. Really, it's amazing.*

Through her experiences growing up, Linda developed an appreciation for the inter-connected relationships in her community and an awareness of her ability to help others. As she grew up, Linda put these values into action in her own life experiences.

Linda was active as a youth in her church: volunteering as a Bible school leader and helping with community events, fundraisers, and charitable donation efforts. In high school Linda regularly volunteered implementing a monthly blood drive. She recalled the fun and enjoyment she experienced with the other staff, volunteers, and donors at these events.

*In high school, I did a couple of things. I worked for the American... I'm trying to think. I worked blood drives. I also was a Bible school teacher for Bible school in my church. I also organized fundraisers and stuff like the CROP walk for my church. I organized different events like dinners... I was very, very active. I like to donate my time or my money, anything that I can give back. I really enjoyed it. I got to meet wonderful people. I got to spend my time doing something that seemed worthwhile. Raised as an only child, you can get selfish pretty quick. I learned very early on that there are other people in this world that might benefit from me giving an hour or two. So I did the bloodmobile thing. That was one of my favorites because of the people you meet. The people make the entire experience good. The blood drives were, oh my gosh, just funny. There were jokes made or things said or things done that you cannot take back or say in a paper. They were amazing. I learned how to have a sense of humor, even in dark times and how to overcome even the hardest times in your life. With the right support and even a little bit of humor, you can move mountains.*

Linda's stories reveal she values the relational connections that come from serving others. Linda shares stories of building relationships and having fun in the process of serving others. She seems keenly aware that these relationships are a source of strength and support in her life. These connections, in addition to the intrinsic rewards associated with helping others, are powerful

influences in her life. Linda also makes the point that by helping others serve, she can broaden her ability by influencing other to value giving back to improve the community.

*I will always, always, always remember one blood drive that we had. A man was sitting there and he's squeezing that little ball, and he's looking at the needle and he says, "I hate needles. Don't let me look at a needle." He's looking at his arm, so I put a napkin or something over his arm so he wouldn't look at it because he said he was getting dizzy and woozy. I said "Don't look at it, silly." He says, "How can you not look at it? It's sucking the life out of your arm!" I'm like, "How can it be sucking the life out of your arm? You have how much more in you that could save somebody. That right there could save somebody." So he's like, "Oh. Well put another one in the other arm." And I told him, "We can't do that." His wife drove him there, he did not want to go. But to make him realize how much he could help somebody else was... I mean for years after that experience, I saw him at almost every blood drive we had. Once a month we would have a blood drive, and I would see him walk in and I'd say, "Hey, I thought you weren't coming back. You don't like needles." And he goes, "Well, it could save somebody's life." Then he'd make a joke, "Sharing my life with somebody else makes them that much more fantastic." It was good.*

Linda uses her care for this older man to create a connection and motivate him to continue donating blood. In recalling this memory, Linda describes her prior service experiences fondly. She describes these experiences as both fun and meaningful.

Linda seems to recognize that service not only helps others; it provides a sense of perspective about her own life. Linda realizes that she would not be as successful as a single parent or as a new student without receiving support from community agencies and service programs.

*When you're getting divorced from an abusive husband, or if you're a single mother, you really need to learn how to build up a strong support base before attempting to go back to school. I was very grateful that I was already in a group called Young Parents which is for people under the age of 20 that have had a child. I was 19 when I had my son. I was 21 when I had my daughter. I very much qualified to be a Young Parent. It is a volunteer program. The counselors there don't have to be there. They share some common things that you wouldn't know like, infant CPR or how to deal with the terrible twos. They go down to basic things such as changing a diaper, breast feeding, feeding a baby, or feeding a child. They helped me find a great doctor for my pregnancy. They helped me find an amazing support base for going back to school this last year. They also helped my ex-husband find his new wife, but that's just beside the point. They helped me set up a base of support so I could better myself and my children. They helped me get in touch*

*with Human Services so I don't have to work a 32 hour week and attempt to go back to school and raise two kids. Just today they got me a job so I can work a ten hour week here at school and still be able to have my kids go to school and just have a little extra money in my pocket.*

Linda is grateful for the resources and assistance the Young Parents program provides. She understands this help and support are getting her through college. The importance of accepting help from others was most clear when Linda described her participation in a holiday gift program in her community.

*I'm in a Christmas program right now where it's... I didn't have the money to buy my children Christmas presents this year. Basically, I pay rent, I drive to school an hour and a half each way, and I pay for day care. I just don't have the resources to buy my kids Christmas presents. So my community signed me up for a Christmas outreach program. The Christmas presents arrived yesterday, and they were wrapped. It had a box of Christmas presents for me and the kids from the community. And it had a box of Christmas presents for the kids from Santa that said "Hide." And to be able to give my kids a gift even though I couldn't buy it, but to be able to watch them open that gift and that joy on their faces. It's going to be so amazing. And to know that somebody else cared enough to take time or money out of their day to help my kids' Christmas be so much better just makes me want to give back that much more. Right now, I don't have the resources to give money, but I have the resources to give time, and I will do that to the best of my ability.*

As Linda described the significance of receiving this generosity, she was overcome with emotion. She is simultaneously thankful for the kindness and generosity of her community and motivated to give back as she is able. Once again Linda describes a reciprocal process where she benefits from the community and in turn gives back to create a strong community that supports those in need.

Through all of her experiences, both providing service to others and receiving help from others, Linda developed her civic identity as an active member of her community. Serving her community creates a web of interconnected relationships between Linda and her family, friends, neighbors, and the community at large. However, when Linda got married and became a young parent her life took on new roles and responsibilities and this sense of community was lost. As

Linda prioritized surviving her abusive relationship with an alcoholic husband, she lost her own sense of self and some of the core values that gave her life meaning. Enrolling at Service Learning Community College and participating in two service projects as a part of her “Introduction to Human Services” course helped Linda to rediscover herself and her passion for serving others.

### **Linda’s Service Learning Experiences**

Linda introduced her collegiate service learning experiences by describing her reaction to the required service learning hours. She was initially less than enthusiastic about adding more to her already busy life as a single mom.

*I used to volunteer in high school, but my life is pretty hectic right now. I enjoy volunteering, but the last couple of years I have not really had time to volunteer. So when I was assigned service learning, it was kind of like, “Now how am I going to schedule this into my life?” I kind of lost touch over the last couple of years. I hadn’t volunteered since I was about 17. Then life got busy and kids got busy. I forgot how much I used to enjoy it. And how much I just really enjoyed doing it and helping somebody out. So it was kind of like, “Oh my God, I’ve got to go do this...” But when I got there, I was like “Oh my God I actually love this. I always used to love this.”*

Linda soon rediscovers why she enjoys serving her community and helping others. After some initial difficulties finding a site that was directly related to her human services major, Linda spent two Saturdays working with Habitat for Humanity.

*I did my service learning at two places. I’m an addictive studies major so I was trying to get into an addiction house or a half-way house. I wasn’t able to because instead of assigning just a few classes to do service learning this semester, [my instructor] assigned all of his classes. So that’s about a hundred students attempting to get in with places. I split my time between Habitat for Humanity and Teddy Bear Hollow. Habitat was fun. Habitat was just fun. I love being able to get my hands dirty and to know that I helped build somebody’s house. Not only did I get to work with my hands and help somebody build a house, but I also got to work very closely with the head of my human services department. We got to know a lot about each other, and it made it a lot easier for classes.*

This relationship with the head of her academic department provided a sense of relief for Linda as she described her first day volunteering with Habitat. This relationship provided a foundation

for her as she proceeded with the rest of the day, as well as with class the rest of the semester. Genuine relationships are an anchor in Linda's life.

She really wasn't sure what to expect when she arrived on the first Saturday morning with thirty-five other SLCC students. She was nervous about the prospect of building a house and not particularly excited about sharing her morning with her more energetic peers.

*The first morning I went to Habitat it was 9 a.m. I'd just driven an hour and a half. I woke up at seven o'clock on a Saturday to come work on a house. I'm not a hands on type of girl, so I was really dreading it. But when I got inside and the energy was just so amazing. The people were just so bubbly which usually gets on my nerves that early in the morning, but they were just so happy and excited to be there. I was really nervous. That day Service Learning Community College had a leadership program that required [students] to do a service learning project. I was very surprised to see how many 18, 19, 20 year olds were there to volunteer. Obviously it was for credit for school but still they could have chosen something at night or something else. They had 35 volunteers for a seven bedroom house, which was amazing. Because it was crowded, people were fighting over paint brushes. It was nice to see people working on the house. But as the day went on, people kind of went off and by the end there were about ten of us left there finishing. It was fun. We just had a lot of fun. We were joking. We unplugged one of the floor saws so we could plug in a stereo with an I-Pod, so we could dance and have fun. It was just a great bunch of people.*

Through the enthusiasm of the group and working together with the other students, building the house quickly became an amazing, transformational experience. In telling the story Linda moved from a sense of dread to being energized remembering the fun of working on the house.

Linda's excitement grew as she continued to describe her second day and the thrill of power tools and hands-on construction projects. The experiences throughout the second day built upon the positive experiences of her first day and allowed Linda's own empowered self to emerge.

*My second day of Habitat, we were hanging door moldings. And it was just, OMG! It was just amazing. I got to use a stud finder. I got to hang shelves. This girl was using the nail gun, and she did the very biggest "No-No" you could ever do. She pointed it at her face. So she lost her nail gun privileges; then I became the nail gun girl. I'm not a power tools kind of girl, but I have to say I kind of enjoyed the feeling of using the power tool. It was the power to know I could wield this object and not hurt myself. I am very accident prone,*

*so to be able to not hurt myself or others was a very, very empowering experience. I also got to meet a couple of people, and it was just a fun experience. We didn't really exchange names the second day because I was the second 'Nail gun girl.' And there was 'Stud finder guy' and 'Shelf hanger guy.' And there was 'Expert guy' because you could tell that he had hung molding all his life. So there was 'Molding guy' and 'Expert guy' and Ted 'cause Ted's just the general contractor so everybody knows his name. I was really happy and kind of surprised to see how many college students would give up a Saturday morning to go work for volunteer work. I mean, that just really amazed me.*

Linda reveals in her stories of the other students her assumption that most young people today do not value service and volunteerism. More significantly through her stories Linda continues to describe her own transformation. There is a pride in her voice as she talks about using the stud finder and the nail gun successfully. Through these successes Linda is finding confidence in her capacity to make a difference, both in her own life and in her service to others. This transformational process was made manifest as Linda had the opportunity at the end of the second day to meet the family who would be living in the house.

*When we left the second day, the family had showed up to see how the house was coming along. We got to meet the family, and that was awesome. I got to see how excited the family was to have a house. They've been living at a homeless shelter for a year and a half. It was just so... to see that six year old little girl go, "This is going to be my room." "This is my room, and this is my room, and this is my room." She walked out and she looked at us dead square in the face and said, "But my room's not pink." And her Mom was like, "We'll repaint it later. Just say thank you that they're building us a house." She was just so excited to be able to say that something was her room. That just turned the experience around for me. It's easy to give back and volunteer. Sometimes you forget why you do it. So it was really good to have that positive reinforcement: to see that look on her face. The family was telling us how amazing it is to have a house, and I go home and take my house for granted. I mean I take for granted the fact that I have a warm, safe place to sleep at night. It really made me value and cherish what I have. It made me really just grateful for everything that I have. I have a house, I have two wonderful kids, and I have the means and the support from my family to be able to go back to school. That's very important. Service learning projects have shown me that even the strongest of people can fall on hard times and need a smile or a hug or a house or a hand to hold or something to help them get back up. It was just an amazing experience.*

As the little girl ran through the house imagining her new home, the importance of Linda's efforts and contributions were inescapable. This turned the initial nervous anticipation and sense

of the unknown when the service learning project was assigned into feelings of gratitude, contribution, and confidence.

As a result of these experiences, Linda is looking ahead to future volunteer opportunities with Habitat. She has already planned to volunteer with Habitat on various building projects during week-ends when she does have responsibility for her children. Linda is also looking further ahead to organize a Habitat project in her community next summer.

*I learned a lot about Habitat, and I've actually signed up with the general contractor for Habitat to work on the weekends I don't have my children. My ex takes my kids every other weekend. Actually, Habitat is going to build a house in my area this summer. I live an hour and a half off campus. I've already talked to my advisor, and although I will not have started my class for the fall semester yet, if get a whole bunch of volunteers for a day, I will be able count it as my leadership project. I was very happy to learn about that.*

Linda anticipates organizing friends and family to volunteer for the project to fulfill an upcoming leadership requirement in her human services curriculum. She is confident she will be able to get her friends involved.

*I'm a very persistent person. My friends know this. So basically if they say no to me the first time, they will see me again. Last time since it didn't directly affect my grade, my friends really didn't want to volunteer. But they're the type of people that if it will help me out or if I can get them talked into it and show them how much it will help somebody else, kind of open their eyes to it, they would totally be into it. One of my friends got mad when she heard I got to use a nail gun because she's like, "I didn't think they'd let you do that or I would have gone." It was amazing. One of my other friends said, "Oh my God, you got to paint." I'm like, "Yeah. We're building a house." So she said "I didn't think painting was part of building a house otherwise I would have been there." I think informing people what the activities are that you are going to be doing and how much fun you can have and how much it can help somebody and change somebody's life.*

Her friends want to participate after hearing Linda's stories of volunteer responsibility integrated with having fun and helping others in a meaningful way.

*After I volunteered for Habitat, I went home and I got on Facebook and posted, "It's an amazing feeling being able to give just a simple eight hours to somebody else to build a home: somebody living in a homeless shelter right now with her two kids. And it's amazing to see her face and be able to tell her that she's going to have a house. The tears of joy that she has from being able to live in a home of her own." I said, "It's an amazing*

*feeling. It's a better high than I've ever gotten in my life. If anybody wants to join me, contact me. You all know my phone number or leave a message if I'm not here. I'll get you set up with Habitat. Because it's not necessarily for somebody else; do it for yourself. To show yourself that you're that person." And within the day, I had 20 of my friends contact me and tell me that they wanted to sign up for Habitat. I had three people who are friends of my friends who had commented on my post contact me and tell me that they wanted to know how to sign up for Habitat. More are probably going to sign up for my summer program for Habitat 'cause they're actually building a house in our hometown. Everybody's like, "We can't travel to Habitat." And I said, "Well, they're building one right here in town." You can kind of see some of them thinking, "Okay. How am I going to get out of this now?" And some of them were saying, "Oh my god, we can walk there and we'll get our daily exercise." And I'm like, "Yeah. I'm going to drive there though. Even if it's five blocks from your house, after you do Habitat, you don't know how tired you're going to be." I'm going to drive. I'm not walking home.*

Linda is turning the power of her experience into a motivating influence for her friends. She is sharing with others how such a meaningful experience can be transforming. And she is providing leadership to organize others to get involved in their local community. This transformation gives Linda a sense of confidence and purpose as she continues through her college experience.

Linda completed the 20 hours of assigned service learning experience for her Introduction to Human Services course by volunteering with a holiday grief counseling program. She chose the program because it was a good fit for her own life experiences: she was able to bring her kids who recently lost a grandparent to the program. At the event Linda assisted two families entering into the holiday season following the death of a loved one.

*I didn't know that Teddy Bear Hollow existed before my service learning project. I chose Teddy Bear Hollow because my children lost their grandfather, their father's dad, in a very tragic and sudden car accident this year. I've seen how my children need help with the grieving process and they're just three and two. Tinsel and Tears was a thing to help celebrate the remembrance of a lost family member during the Christmas time. It was for children and for all families. Teddy Bear Hollow does a lot with kids' grief but they do a lot with family grief as well. I wanted to try that out and see if maybe my life experiences could help others get through the Christmas season. It's very hard to explain to a three year old why you see Grandpa every day and then you just don't see him anymore. It's very, very hard to explain to a three year old because you can't use words like "He's gone" or "We've lost him." Because to a three year old, they take that very literally. "We lost him so let's go look for him" or "He's gone, where did he go?" Yeah, so it's a very hard thing to do. I got to work with two families at Tinsel and Tears. We were*

*shorthanded for volunteers that day. I worked with a family, a mother and a father and a brother and a sister who had just lost a baby sister. She was two weeks old and coming home from the hospital and to talk with the family and to listen just made me so grateful I'm able to go home and kiss my kids at night. We were making ornaments that you hang on your Christmas tree, and they were clear ornaments so you could put ribbons in them, you could draw on them, you could do whatever. And this little boy was so creative. He grabbed a Kleenex off the table, and he ripped it up. He stuffed it inside it and he drew a snowman next to it. Then he says, "She was born on our first snowfall this year; she will always be a snowman baby." And he hung it on the tree. You learn so much from other people and so much about yourself just by being able to listen. We helped the families realize that you can still have good Christmas memories and happy times. It's okay to be happy. You can remember them through happy times.*

Listening to the families who attended the holiday grief counseling event one again provided meaningful connections for Linda. She was able to share her own life experience with the families who attended the event. She was also able to internalize the message of being happy in the midst of the challenges she had survived. The genuineness and emotion of this experience also provided Linda another opportunity to find gratitude for her own kids and the joy they bring to her life.

*I also worked with a little boy who lost his brother in a tornado. I remember sitting there and talking with this little boy who said he wished... He wished he had gone with his dad and his brother to this retreat 'cause then he wouldn't have to be in so much pain to miss his brother. To hear that little boy in so much pain, it just made me so grateful I still have both my kids. To watch these grieving parents and to watch them made me so grateful that I do still have both my children. I'm grateful every day for everything I have. I want to make sure that I say thank you to somebody for holding open a door or stopping at a stop sign for me to walk across the street with my kids. Or say thank you to my day care provider for watching my children and helping them learn and helping them grow. And say thank you to my children for being themselves; as trying as it may be some days. Just be grateful for everything that you have.*

This experience reminded Linda of the powerful impact volunteer efforts can have in the lives of others. By listening and offering comfort to those attending, Linda came to realize the importance of being available to help others in genuine need. She translated this into thankfulness for the many blessings in her own life.

*I went home from that experience, and I looked at both of my children, and then I gave them the biggest hug in the world. And my son looked at me just straight in the face and goes, "Mommy, I missed you." And I said, "I missed you too, but I had to go help the kids who were sad." And he looks me straight in the face and he goes, "Did you help them, Mommy? Did you help them smile?" And I said, "Yes, baby, I helped them smile." And he goes, "Good job, Mommy. Good job." And to be able to see a three year old recognize that making someone else smile is a good experience. It's amazing how much you can give to your community, and it's amazing how much - this is going to sound really, like, flaky - but how much good energy you can give to a community and how much good energy is returned to you. It is astounding!"*

The raw emotionality of this experience served a powerful reminder to Linda of the significant impact serving others can have in her life, in the lives of her family, and in her community. The reciprocal process of strengthening the community through service improves the lives and experiences of all.

Linda started her collegiate service learning experience unsure of what to expect and unable to remember the value serving others could bring to her life. An initial connection with the director of her academic program created a network of genuine relationships with her friends and peers, strangers in need, and her family. These relationships helped Linda to understand and appreciate the impact her service could have to improve the lives of others. Through her service learning projects, Linda rediscovered service as a guiding value and initiated a transformative and meaningful journey in her own life.

## **Reflection**

Linda grew up with parental role models who demonstrated a commitment to serving others. She was active in high school, church, and her community. Through these experiences Linda developed an active commitment to serving others. She enjoyed the relationships and intrinsic rewards of helping others. However, she retreated from these connections with others and her community as her life became increasingly complicated, and her abusive, alcoholic husband forced her to withdraw as a means of survival.

*You don't really notice when you stop volunteering because something else in your life has stepped in. Something else in your life has taken over. A lot of people who live with an addict don't know how much time is taken up by an addict; how much you're wrapped up and invested in that person until you either choose to move that person away or that person chooses to get help. I didn't really realize how much of my life my ex-husband had taken over before the divorce. And even after the divorce, I still felt lost because I had two children to take care of. Even after I left my ex-husband, I felt very lost. Especially on the weekends I don't have my kids, I feel lost. I have no one to care for.*

Caring for others is a core value in Linda's life, and the key to her experiences in multiple roles, particularly as a mother. Caring relationships also inform her contributions serving others and her professional aspirations. Based on her lived experiences, Linda brings a genuine understanding of and appreciation for the unmet needs in her community to her re-emerging commitment to serving others.

*You don't know how people feel until you've been there. I've been there. I've hit hard times. I've had to buy a week's worth of groceries on \$20. I've been in their shoes where I don't have a home. I was seven months pregnant and I didn't have a home. Me and my husband, we were living out of his truck 'cause we didn't have a home. I would park my car at the college in the student section and leave it parked there all night, and me and my husband would sleep in his truck or walk around Walmart to stay warm in the winter. You don't know how important some of the small things in your life are until you don't have them. To be able to see somebody's face light up because you recognize their joy of having simple things like a home, running water, or a shower. It's amazing. When you hit hard times, you don't need a handout, you need a hand up. And you have to have somebody there willing to give you a hand up. I was there. I had several people willing to give me a hand out when I wanted a hand up.*

As Linda talks about the dark times in her life, her tears reveal the genuine struggles she has survived. This is contrasted by the gratitude and appreciation she feels for the help she received; help she knows she can give to others. Linda also makes a key distinction between charitable handouts and real, life changing help. Although Linda is grateful for the help she needed along her journey out of the dark times, her self-efficacy as a change agent is critical.

*I started with changing my own life. I woke up a year ago on the seventh. I actually remember the day because it's my birthday. I had lost my father-in-law, and I watched as in two short months the husband that I loved (who had had an issue with alcohol, and who was abusive when he had issues with alcohol) went from three years of sobriety to*

*being a full blown alcoholic: drinking a case of beer a day and possibly a bottle of whiskey, depending on how bad of a day it was for him. I decided that's not what I wanted for my life. I wanted something better for my kids. So I divorced him. When I started out I realized I could continue working as a manager of a gas station and make okay money and not really challenge myself, or I could stand up, challenge myself. I could go back to school. It's going to be a hard couple of years trying to raise two kids and go to school, but I can do it. To be able to sit at one place in your life and decide that's not where you want to be and get up and actively change it is so empowering. I stood up and I said I didn't like where my life was. I never imagined I'd be a single mom; I never imagined I'd have the kind of ability, energy, and patience to be a single parent. I'm making myself a better person.*

By succeeding in college, Linda is changing her life; she is improving the lives of her children.

This commitment to provide a secure and stable home for her children is an integral aspect of Linda's story. And just as she was helped along the way, she wants to give back and empower other young parents to do the same.

*I'm going to start asking around to local churches, and see if I can get a Young Parents Group going in my town. We don't have one; the nearest one is [in the city an hour away]. Well for a parent who is going to school and working, it's hard to drive that hour both ways. And when it starts at six o'clock at night, you still have to get kids from here when it starts at six and gets over at eight and then you have to go home and it's still bath time and story time and all of that. It's really difficult, and I know of several young parents in the community who would love to have a group program. So I'm starting to work with the chapter here to see if I can get a chapter in [my town]. They said I would be a perfect candidate to be a teacher. I would not be the only teacher because that would just be too overwhelming, but I would be one of the teachers. I would show these young parents, these 16-17 year old girls who have kids that they can go back to school and change their life and still be a mom.*

Linda's growing confidence and belief that she can help others is another key theme in her stories. As she is taking control of her life, Linda is learning powerful lessons about her capacity to succeed.

*I'm changing my future. I'm changing my kids' future. I can't change the past. I can't change the years with my husband. I can't go back and change him. I can change me. I can change my kids' lives from here on out. I can either scrape by and live paycheck to paycheck, or I can have a job where I can support my kids, and I can do what I want to do: I can help others. So I enrolled in school and I just completed my first semester. There was no happier day than when I got a letter in the mail telling me that I had made the Dean's List for my first semester of school in three years. I sat down and I cried. And*

*my son said, "Mommy, what's wrong?" And I said, "Baby, Mommy just got really good news. Mommy just did really good at school." And he goes, "Well that's cause Mommy is smart." And I said, "You're right. Mommy is smart." And my son goes, "Well, why are you crying?" And I said, "Cause Mommy's really happy. Mommy did it. Mommy did what she wanted to do for years. She did it." And he goes, "Good job, Mommy. Good job." And then in typical three year old fashion he says, "Mommy, I'm hungry. Make me a peanut butter sammich." I kept telling everybody that my Dean's List was my present to myself. And with my degree I can help others. That's empowering.*

Linda's commitment to provide a better life for her children is another recurring theme in her stories. Linda's children are central to her desire to change the trajectory of her life. Succeeding as a student who is a single parent provides Linda with tremendous confidence. The service learning project with Habitat for Humanity provides Linda a metaphor for the understanding how these changes and success are rebuilding her life.

*Since my divorce, I felt like the house. I felt like I needed rebuilt. I needed to change myself, and make myself the person that I wanted to be. I felt very privileged to be able to go and work on a house. It was very representative of my life. And then I got to meet the family, and I got to see how it changed their life. Me making a small change dedicating eight hours in my life changed their life permanently. At that time it went from being about me and being about my life to I was doing it to help somebody else, and it was more about them. It was their life and their home. I guess at some point in time you have to realize when you volunteer, it's time to give something up and walk away. It's not yours anymore. So working on the house the first day it was easy to call it my house because I was helping build it. I had built a whole room to myself: mudded, and dry walled and nailed it. It was my room, it was my baby. Then I had to turn around and realize it wasn't my room; it wasn't my house. It was her room, or her daughter's room. And I was like, "But I built it." But it is not my house; I had built it for them. So it's theirs. I was able to give them something.*

Building a home with Habitat for Humanity helped Linda see that there were areas of her life that needed to be re-built. As Linda mastered power tools, made friends, and realized she had the capacity to help others; she created self-confidence and re-ignited her passion for service.

Linda recognizes that she has been helped by others in her efforts to change her life. She continues to be grateful for the kindness and generosity of others who cared enough to help her.

*I know for me personally, I would not have made it through this last year without volunteers. I would not have made it through all the hardships of my life without that kind*

*smile or that helping hand. To see the joy in somebody's face, to give back time or money that you have that is just extra that you'd spend lying on a couch or at a shopping mall; it really just helps strengthen the idea that we can help each other out in a time of need. I've used a lot of volunteers in the past couple of months this last year. I've sent so many thank you cards to so many people who just took the time to sit and listen. I can't tell them enough how much it's helped.*

Linda's gratitude for the help she has received is a powerful motivator in her commitment to give back to others who continue with their own struggles. As Linda talks about her gratitude, she reveals a belief that every person has the power to improve the lives of others. Her repeated examples of kindness and connectedness as the foundation for helping others demonstrate her commitment to creating mattering interactions and relationships.

*I'm just so grateful for everything that I do have. Grateful for everything that has been given to me, my family, the opportunities to volunteer, the opportunities to help somebody else. I wake up every day and try to be a better person than I woke up yesterday: showing a little bit more patience to my three year old, or if that's taking 30 seconds out of my day to help somebody grab a trash can that blew away, or help somebody cross the street. To bring a smile to somebody else's face by listening or helping is just the most amazing thing. You can bring the world to somebody by donating five-ten minutes or an hour of your time. I try to see the world in my community. I try to help my community open up and to be more of a loving community. I just tie it all back together with being very grateful for everything I have and realizing that I'm truly a very lucky person for everything I do have.*

Linda's conviction that serving others begins with moments of listening and caring is the foundation for her belief that every individual has the power to change the world. This perspective emerges from her gratitude for the kindness and help she has received. It is also central to her efforts to create change in the world by sharing her perspective with others.

*I'm going to teach my kids to start thinking of others instead of themselves; and maybe by teaching my kids, I'll teach others. And by teaching others, this is like really corny, but you can change the world. It takes one person. One person can change the world. I can change the world. If I can get my friends, my age group, to step back and realize there is more to life than yourself, we could change the world. Imagine how much better the world would be if other people said, "I'm going to help out. I'm not going to get anything from it, but it's going to help this person." It's not about you anymore. It's about somebody else. I went through a time in my life where I was suicidal. I tried to commit suicide three times in a month, and somebody reached out and helped me. They gave me*

*their time for me to still be here and to be with my kids now. Imagine what I can do. You can change lives with an hour a day, an hour a week. You can change a life.*

Linda believes that she has the capacity not only to change her future, but also to improve or even save the lives of others. Linda doesn't just want to change her life; she believes helping others is the key to changing the world.

Linda's emergence from the dark times in her life combined with the rekindling of her passion for service and her successes as a student provide a context for understanding her commitment to helping others. A unifying structure in all of these stories is Linda's authentic, caring relationships. Through these relationships, Linda is not just helping others, she growing in her confidence and self-esteem. She is empowering others and she is changing the world. And she is doing it every day, moment by moment.

*I went grocery shopping yesterday. I was so proud of myself because for the first time in three years, I didn't use food stamps. I bought my own groceries 'cause I was financially stable enough to do that. I was so proud of myself. But I had an old woman in front of me. You could tell she was a grandma, and you could tell she was stressed beyond belief. This kid was just, "Grandma, I want this. Grandma, I want that. Grandma, Grandma, Grandma." And she's trying to get the stuff on the conveyor belt. She's trying to get checked out. She's trying to get this two year old home because it was time for a nap. I was at the grocery store along with my two kids. My two kids were cranky; they wanted to go; they wanted a nap. I still took five minutes out of my day, and I got down on my knees, and I talked to this child. I gave that grandmother three minutes of peace. Now that might not have seemed like a lot to somebody else, but to that Grandma, maybe that was the defining factor in [her day]. I talked to that kid, and I said, "Well what kind of candy bar do you want?" And he goes, "Well, I want the Snickers bar." I told him, "The M & Ms are my favorite." And my son pops up and of course he can't say M & Ms, so my son says, "Nem & Nems are good." Then my daughter pops up, "Skittles are better." The three kids sat there and chattered for a while and it gave her a minute of peace, gave me a minute of peace. It gave her five minutes to check out and go home. It was five minutes to me. It was five minutes I had to stand in line behind this person, and it wasn't going to hurt me to talk to this kid. And it wasn't going to hurt this kid. But it probably changed her day. And if she took that five minutes of kindness and held the door open for somebody or helped a neighbor in with the groceries... Give five minutes of your day to somebody. It could change a person's life. It really could.*

Linda has realized that she has the capacity to improve the lives of others and to create real

change in the world, and the confidence to make it happen. The genuine connections that define Linda's concern for others create mattering, authentic relationships. Her various life experiences have helped her see the importance of creating an interconnected, involved community that supports everyone. Service learning has provided Linda with an appreciation that even small, individual efforts helping others in the community can collectively change the world.

Linda Mason is a single mom who balances taking care of her two young children with her academic priorities and renewed commitment to serving others. She values genuine relationships and community involvement. Linda is intentionally providing an example of an active civic life to her children, just as her own parents role modeled for her. Linda has survived an abusive relationship, homelessness, and past suicide attempts through the caring efforts of her community. She values the connections and support that being a part of a strong community provides. As she has rediscovered her commitment and passion for serving others, Linda is providing leadership to strengthen her community even as she continues to be supported by others in her own journey. Linda is confident in her ability to make the world a better place through her actions and interactions with others.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented the global impressions for the seven students who participated in my research. The findings and analyses in my research narrative are not objective. These stories represent the weaving together of my reflections and observation with the stories each student chose to share with me during our interviews. This process has resulted in the co-creation of these research narratives. Because the re-telling of these stories cannot completely reveal the complex lives and lived experiences of the students who participated, it is important to recognize that these global impressions are brief encounters exploring their lives as community

college service learners at one moment in time. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

My professional training and my education in student affairs and community college leadership, as well as my own service learning and volunteerism experiences, have influenced my retelling of their stories. My own life experiences as a traditionally aged college student, as a Caucasian male, and as a father have informed my perspective and the co-creation of these global impressions. In an attempt to be transparent, I have presented the students' experiences and reflections in their own words. I have shared my findings and analyses distinctly, and made every effort honor the students' voices in this process. As I moved backwards and forwards through the three dimensional narrative inquiry space, I worked diligently to bring life to the students' stories, keeping in mind the context of service learning as civic pedagogy and mission of the comprehensive community college. As I created these stories, I have intentionally resisted making comparisons across their individual perspectives. In chapter five, I explore the similarities and differences in the participants' stories, service learning experiences and reflections. In my analysis, the students' narratives are synthesized individually and collectively using the frameworks defined by my research questions.

## CHAPTER FIVE – ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The narratives in Chapter Four explore the individual life stories and service learning experiences for each participant in my research study. In Chapter Five, I revisit the data to analyze how their stories and experiences are similar and different. By looking at the stories with the lens of service learning as civic pedagogy, I am creating a new narrative that answers my research questions and reveals another interpretation (Riessman, 2008). As I move recursively through the students' journeys using this lens to guide my analysis their stories are illuminated in a new and compelling way.

Three organizing structures were identified in the presentation of the students' narratives in Chapter Four: *Personal Stories*, *Service Learning Experiences*, and *Reflections*. Although the individual participant's experiences and reflections are unique, an examination of how these stories intersect provides a robust opportunity to understand service learning as a civic pedagogy. I chose to focus on the themes that were most striking to me based on my researcher's perspective. My interpretation emerged from the integration of the students' stories and the research questions I identified as I began the study. I am confident in my findings based on my thorough analysis of the rich stories and meaningful experiences the students shared with me; however, I am also aware that other interpretations exist.

I begin this chapter by sharing some of my experiences serving others, particularly how my thinking about service has evolved in my life. This framework provides a structure for integrating the students' narratives with my researcher perspective. Next I briefly summarize the recurring themes that emerged from the participants' individual stories. Then I analyze the content within and across the students' stories to answer my research questions. In this analysis I

build upon the organizing structure that emerged from the stories in Chapter Four. In the first sub-section, *Personal Stories*, I weave together the individual stories of the students' lives by identifying the similarities and differences in their core experiences. This analysis answers my first research question. In the next sub-section, *Service Learning Experiences*, I re-examine the students' service learning experiences in the context of leadership for the common good. By looking at these experiences using multiple lenses I answer my second research question. As I reconsider the students' stories in the context of the community and commonwealth frameworks of civic engagement introduced by Boyte and Kari (2000) I answer my third research question in the third sub-section *Reflections*. I end this section and answer my final research question with a summary of my analysis and findings. Chapter Five concludes with a description of a focus group interview conducted with four of the seven participants that confirmed the trustworthiness of my findings and analysis.

### **Research Context**

My research questions explore the narratives of community college students who participated in academic service learning to gain a better understanding of how these experiences develop civic engagement and a commitment to leadership for the common good. My research considers service learning in the context of the democratic purpose of higher education and the civic mission of the comprehensive community college. In Chapter One I began by framing my research in the context of Dewey's (1916) charge that a primary role of higher education should be to renew and strengthen students' commitment to active civic life. In Chapter Two I narrowed this overarching theme by describing the democratic purpose of higher education and the civic mission of the comprehensive community college. Service learning was identified as the most viable way to educate students as both scholars and citizens prepared to lead an increasingly

complex society. The students' narratives presented in Chapter Four provide a robust milieu for exploring service learning as a civic pedagogy. The data analysis in Chapter Four and Chapter Five is guided by my own service learning experiences and researcher's perspective.

### **Researcher's Perspective**

My life experiences influence my awareness, perspective, and skills as a researcher. My professional perspective has emerged from my education and experience as a student affairs professional and as a doctoral student in community college leadership. My belief that serving the community is an important value was shaped by the examples of my parents' service I observed as a child, my experiences serving others as a 4-H member and student leader, and my life-long work as a volunteer and community leader. The intersection of my professional training and personal values culminated in the opportunity to serve as the project director for the *Broadening Horizons through Service Learning* grant (*Horizons*) at Laramie County Community College, Cheyenne, Wyoming (LCCC). My analysis of the students' stories is shaped by the multiple perspectives and complexities I bring to the research process. The multiple perspectives that come together in my researcher's perspective are indicative of Dewey's philosophy that in our lives we inhabit multiple senses of self (1938).

One of the most significant influences on my research is my training and experience as the project director for the *Horizons* grant. The grant's core purpose was to infuse the campus culture with a commitment to service learning across the curriculum. At LCCC, this process integrated academic service learning with co-curricular leadership experiences. To engage the faculty and administrative leadership in the grant's goals I developed a three stage framework to describe the potential of service learning as an effective pedagogy across a variety of learning outcomes. This framework emerged out of multiple conversations with faculty, administrators,

students, and community partners about potential academic, personal, and civic outcomes. The framework begins with Awareness, which leads to Action, and culminates in Activism and Advocacy. As I reviewed the literature in service learning I found a similar model identified by the qualitative research of Westheimer and Kahne (2003a). Three stories of my own service experiences illustrate this framework and describe the intersections of my personal and professional experiences that informed and guided my analysis of the students' narratives.

### **Awareness**

During my junior year of college I volunteered to chaperone a Lutheran youth retreat at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado, over the Thanksgiving holiday. The retreat was scheduled Friday through Sunday. I didn't have an opportunity to travel home for Thanksgiving with my family and return for the retreat so I just stayed on campus. A group of friends and I signed up to serve Thanksgiving dinner for the homeless at the Denver Civic Center. I was nervous: it was a new experience. I had never really encountered homeless people in my sheltered, privileged life. The University of Denver campus is in a private, residential area south of downtown Denver. I vividly remember the sounds and smells of downtown as we journeyed to the Civic Center that cold November morning. I was assigned to table clean up; the great hall was a sea of folding tables and chairs. The tables were covered in white vinyl film and set with plastic ware and paper plates. It was as if the entire meal was disposable. It was chaotic and loud as the crowd dined on a traditional Thanksgiving menu. My job was to clear the tables and prepare them for the continuous flow of dinner guests. As I reflect on these memories, I remember going home at the end of the day feeling a sense of duty fulfilled: I had served the homeless. I could check that off my list of good deeds done. However, I am not certain I ever spoke with any of the hundreds of homeless people I helped serve that Thanksgiving. My only

memories are of my friends and me doing our good deed for the day and eating a mediocre holiday meal. After serving the meal we returned to the comforts of college life without really having to engage in the messiness or complexity of homelessness in society.

The focus of this volunteer experience was on serving the disadvantaged through a charity paradigm rather than emphasizing personal reflection about the experience or a connection to academic learning (Battistoni, 1997). Service experiences in this paradigm are “infused with the volunteer ethos, a philanthropic or charitable viewpoint that ignores the structural reasons to help others” (Bickford & Reynolds, 2002, p. 230). In isolation, this perspective can perpetuate social injustice and maintain a fragmented social order (Battistoni, 1997). However, volunteer experiences can introduce students to the concept of serving others as an integral part of being an educated person. Westheimer and Kahne (2003a) labeled students with this level of commitment as *personally responsible citizens*. I believe that charitable volunteer experiences introduce important civic lessons into the educational process; however, these isolated experiences do not achieve the democratic and civic mission of higher education.

### **Action**

As a graduate student in Student Affairs and Higher Education at Colorado State University I participated in a service learning experience during a training retreat. The retreat was scheduled as a part of my Hall Director assistantship with the Department of Housing and Dining Services. We spent the day at a community youth center, packaging school supplies for the upcoming academic year. It was a great time of team building and laughter as we helped assemble the community’s donations into handmade bags ready for the low-income children who qualified to receive the kits. First we helped to make fabric duffle bags, and my friends and I had such fun creating stylish combinations. We wanted the bags to be more cool than simply

utilitarian. Next, we sorted donated pencils, crayons, and other supplies to fill the bags. The afternoon flew by as we raced through the assigned tasks with enthusiasm. Later, as we reflected on the experience, the intersection of socio-economic privilege and access to educational opportunity served as a call to action. We committed as a group of residence hall directors to work on sponsoring additional service activities that raised awareness of socioeconomic status, diversity, and educational access. Some of these activities were fund raisers, and some were youth activities at the center. These activities engaged students, student leaders, and staff members in cooperative, community-based action for the common good.

Westheimer and Kahne (2003a) also identified this perspective of service for the common good and labeled those taking action in this way as *participatory citizens*. Participatory citizens assume a mutuality in serving others that moves academic service learning beyond charitable acts of volunteerism (Rhoads, 1997). Service learning builds individual and community capacity by encouraging participants to take action and engage in their roles as community members and leaders. “Preparing graduates for their public lives as citizens, members of communities, and professionals in society has historically been a responsibility of higher education” (AAC&U, 2010, ¶ 3). This perspective on the role of higher education resonates with me and defines my standpoint as both a student affairs educator and as a researcher.

Academic learning and student development are recognized as shared purposes of higher education (NASPA, 2004). Specifically, the student development perspectives of recognizing the whole student and balancing challenge and support to encourage developmental growth are guiding values of the student affairs profession (Evans, et al., 1998). These values guide my professional practice and further define my research perspective. A commitment to recognizing and celebrating the diversity and experiences of all students is another significant value for me

personally and professionally. While I was in graduate school at CSU, I was also discovering the literature on leadership as I focused my Master's thesis on training student leaders. The emergent leadership paradigm provided a more inclusive, empowering, and relational model that fit for my world view and my roles as a student affairs professional and leadership educator (Komives, et al., 1998). These professional values continue to inform my perspective as a researcher.

### **Activism and Advocacy**

During the *Horizons* grant initiative at LCCC I worked on many service learning projects. One of my particular favorites was trail building at Curt Gowdy State Park. This was an annual fall kick-off event sponsored by the Student Activities Board as a part of their year-long Saturdays of Service initiative. The event was co-sponsored by the State Park Service and also included students from the AmeriCorps program at the University of Wyoming and local community members. The work itself was hard, physical labor: clearing brush, moving rocks, and building erosion control ridges. The location was beautiful and the weather most years was ideal. The orientation information from the event organizers provided an overview of both environmental conservation and keeping public spaces accessible for all citizens. This message was repeated during the reflection activities at lunch and again at the end of the day. There was a core message of public works: the trail system we were building belonged to us as citizens. We should use it, maintain it, and support the state park service politically and financially to ensure its future. The physical labor of building the trail was immediately rewarding because at the end of the day our group walked back to the parking area along the miles of trail that did not exist when we started that morning.

I find there are many trailblazing parallels both to my experiences creating a comprehensive service learning program and to my researcher's perspective. For example, the

*Horizons* grant initiative required that LCCC have a Service Learning Advisory Board comprised of faculty, students, and community partners. The involvement of community partners was instrumental in helping me understand the important role of moving from action to activism and advocacy. Through my relationships with our community partners, I realized that participating in service learning can create community leaders and change agents. An educated citizenry is more than technically talented professionals contributing economically in the workforce; education should result in active and engaged citizens prepared to solve community needs (Rhoads, 2000). Westheimer and Kahne (2003a) described individuals with this perspective as *justice oriented citizens*. Justice oriented citizens don't address the un-met needs of the community through one charitable day of service or even a series of service contributions. Justice oriented citizens work to "critically assess social, political, and economic structures and consider collective strategies for change that challenge injustice and, when possible, address root causes of problems" (p. 5). This perspective emerges when service learners mutually engage in the shared goals of academic learning and the needs of community partners.

As I reflect on how my perspective as a researcher is informed by these examples of service from my own life, several themes emerge. First, volunteerism and charity are important gateways to creating personally responsible citizens. While this perspective is often dismissed by some proponents of a social justice service learning perspective, community partners value and rely on the contributions of charitable citizens. All acts of service are important. Second, as a student affairs professional who values diversity and a holistic perspective, I believe all students are learning and growing as their individual narratives unfold. I also believe in an emergent, postmodern leadership philosophy where everyone can serve as a leader and change agent in their community. Effective service learning engages students in action to address community

needs. Thirdly, I believe college and university leaders have an obligation to prepare graduates ready to engage as active citizens in the work of our democracy. Service learning provides a unique opportunity to achieve this objective. Finally, it is important to recognize that I have an intentional research agenda of educating other faculty and administrative leaders about service learning and its potential as an effective civic pedagogy.

In this section I described my researcher's perspective and how my own service experiences have contributed to my understanding of community service and civic engagement. My personal and professional experiences along with my own education have shaped my beliefs about higher education's purpose and my research perspective. I have highlighted the model of awareness, action, activism and advocacy that emerged as I developed a service learning program at Laramie County Community College. This model has been explored through my own stories of service learning and supported by the findings of Westheimer and Kahne (2003a). These authors summarized their model with the illustration that personally responsible citizens develop awareness as they donate to a food drive, participatory citizens take action and organize the food drive, and justice-oriented citizens seek to discover why people are hungry and advocate for social change. I believe the multiple perspectives I bring to the analysis of the students' stories have prepared me to explore the civic engagement of service learners in a rich and meaningful way. In the next section I analyze the data in the students' stories to answer my research questions exploring service learning as a civic pedagogy.

### **Service Learning as Civic Pedagogy**

In telling their stories the students chose what to share with me so that I might come to understand their experiences. Some began with childhood stories, while others focused on high school, and some started with their college education. The stories the students shared provide a

context for understanding their service learning experiences. The integration of their personal journeys with their service experiences reveals their capacity to create change for the common good. Service learning is a powerful teaching and learning process that engages students and connects their lived experiences to the genuine relationships and life lessons they encounter. This creates a catalyst that increases their capacity as citizens and leaders in their communities.

### Student Narratives

The student narratives in Chapter Four provide a rich and dynamic research space to explore and understand service learning as a civic pedagogy. The information in Table Two summarizes the analysis of the individual stories presented in Chapter Four.

**Table Two – Summary of the Students’ Stories**

| Name   | Demographic Information                     | Academic Information  | Academic Service Learning Projects                        |
|--|---|---|---|
| Cynthia Solis de la Cruz   | Age: 45<br>Gender: Female<br>Race: Hispanic | Class: Sophomore<br>Major: Addictionology<br>Human Services | 1. Homeless Shelter Administration<br>2. Grief Counseling |
| <p><b><i>“I am who I am.”</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cynthia’s identity and resiliency as a survivor provides a sense of self-worth and creates a context for helping others.</li> <li>• Acceptance of her life makes Cynthia the person she is today and gives her the capacity to serve others.</li> <li>• Comparing her dual diagnosis treatment and recovery to having two broken legs is a key metaphor in Cynthia’s stories. She understands the need to address both to get the appropriate help.</li> <li>• Cynthia shares that she is haunted by the “<i>shadow of her children’s laughter.</i>” This perspective motivates her to connect with others in authentic relationships.</li> <li>• Through her service learning experiences, Cynthia affirmed her desire to help others. She discovered her life experiences have prepared her for building the genuine relationships necessary to serve others.</li> <li>• Cynthia expressed care and concern for the clients at the shelter where she volunteered. Her previous life experiences were instrumental in shaping her perspective. She was thankful she was able to offer help.</li> <li>• Cynthia is committed to empowering others, particularly women and girls, to find their pathway to success; for Cynthia this is a mutual process.</li> <li>• Cynthia is the first student to introduce the concept of the circular connections inherent in the mutual process of serving the community and benefiting from the service of others.</li> <li>• Service learning provided Cynthia the opportunity to put her career aspirations into practice; developing skills and confidence about her vocation in the process.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Fundamental Lesson:</u></b><br/>Self efficacy is an essential capacity required to realize the transformative potential of service learning.</p> |   |   |   |

| Name                  | Demographic Information                    | Academic Information   | Academic Service Learning Projects |
|-----------------------|--|--|------------------------------------|
| <b>Adam Nickerson</b> | Age: 27<br>Gender: Male<br>Race: Caucasian | Class: Freshman<br>Major: Human Resources<br>Business Management | 1. Flood Response Certification    |

***“Sometimes you have to go out of your way to help out others. If you don’t, how can you expect anybody else to do that for you?”***

- Adam’s identity is defined by his friendships with other men who share his interests in adrenaline rush activities: hunting, cars, motorcycles, military service. In particular, Adam’s military service was a defining experience in his identity development; and his motorcycle accident was life changing.
- As he has become increasingly self-aware, Adam has revived his once struggling marriage and family relationships. Adam has learned to persevere to find contentment and create stability in his life.
- Adam struggles to navigate the emotional highs and lows of responding to the disability caused by his accident; the loss of his career aspirations, his lack of independence, etc.
- There is a tension between the emerging stability in his family life and the lack of clarity in his professional goals and future. This tension is reminiscent of Cynthia’s “two broken legs” metaphor.
- Serving in the military created a unique perspective on the role of “public service.” Adam introduces this perspective on service and vocation. He is rediscovering his capacity to contribute after his accident.
- Adam talks about seeing the world from multiple perspectives. He attributes this skill to his reflections making sense of military service helping the people of Iraq.
- Adam’s revelation that “*Helping others helps my own self-worth*” is a repetition of Cynthia’s theme.
- Adam shares an evolving civic attitude: self-centered and care-free – through his conceptualization of “public service” – to community-based service with friends and neighbors that is personally rewarding.

**Fundamental Lesson:**

- Thoughtful reflection connects us with others. It helps us make sense of the complexities of life and understand our ability to serve others.

|                        |  |                                    |   |
|------------------------|--|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Brenda Giordano</b> | Age: 44<br>Gender: Female<br>Race: Caucasian | Class: Sophomore<br>Major: Nursing | 1. Family Childcare<br>2. Youth Health Fair |
|------------------------|--|------------------------------------|---|

***“You always want to belong.”***

- Brenda describes the confidence that caring for and helping others has created in her intertwining roles as a mother, wife, student, and nurse. Caring for others and nurturing their emotions is a recurring theme.
- She craves strong connections in her life but has not prioritized developing these relationships. Brenda takes care of others, yet struggles taking care of her own need for connections. She claims, “*I’m too busy right now, maybe later when I graduate...*” Additionally, there is a façade of strong connections to her extended family.
- Faith is important in Brenda’s life; as is belonging to a faith community.
- Brenda has an initial hesitancy about her service learning project; but quickly finds confidence through her connection to the family she helped; particularly with Eileen, in their shared experiences as mothers.
- Brenda talks about role modeling for her kids, but doesn’t recall any examples of service in her parent’s lives.
- There is a differentiation in how Brenda describes the levels of significance in her service experiences. This emerges from the intersection of authentic relationships and fulfilling unmet need in her service learning experience contrasted with a more emotionally detached effort volunteering at her children’s swim meets.
- Brenda believes service reduces self-centered attitudes by focusing on the needs of others. She notes that service learning provides an opportunity to see and experience the reality of unmet need in her community.
- “*There is stuff missing.*” Brenda is not connected to her community. She feels isolated and believes nobody is there to support her if she were ever in need.

**Fundamental Lesson:**

- Authentic caring relationships create a sense of confidence that facilitates serving others.

| Name        | Demographic Information                    | Academic Information                      | Academic Service Learning Projects              |
|-------------|--|---|---|
| Jeff Dalton | Age: 18<br>Gender: Male<br>Race: Caucasian | Class: Freshman<br>Major: General Studies | 1. Youth Fitness Event<br>2. Cancer Fund Raiser |

***“A community is kind of like an ecosystem.  
People need to do their part to make the whole thing work as a system.”***

- Jeff’s identity is centered on three related core principles: the ability to see multiple perspectives, understanding the impact of a supportive home and family, and the desire to create stability/care for others.
- The example of serving the community is a lesson Jeff observed in the role modeling of his father. The value of a strong work ethic, and care for others are lessons Jeff learned from his mother.
- Jeff values being “well-rounded,” being open-minded, and relating to others. He frequently pays attention to the needs of those around him.
- Jeff believes helping his neighbors is a reciprocal process that benefits the entire community. He sees an interconnected community where everyone does their part as strong/stable.
- Self-awareness, respect for others, and persistence come from Jeff’s experiences as a distance runner.
- Finishing the race despite not knowing how it will turn out is a key metaphor that frames Jeff’s perspective. This is manifested in his core values: working hard, persevering and trusting the process.
- Jeff talks about the privilege of his generation and the fact that many people his age have never wanted for anything, or experienced difficulty. This makes it harder for them to see the benefit of helping others. He believes people don’t feel compelled to serve others if they have never experienced unmet need.
- Throughout his service learning stories, Jeff expresses a basic faith in others through his belief people will do the right thing if given the opportunity. He articulates a social responsibility to serve the common good.

**Fundamental Lesson:**

- Awareness of the needs of people around you and concern for their well-being are key motivators for public service as a role model and leader.

|                 |  |  |  |
|-----------------|--|--|--|
| Kennedy Martens | Age: 18<br>Gender: Female<br>Race: Caucasian | Class: Freshman<br>Major: Communications | 1. Sexual Assault Awareness Event<br>2. Elder Care |
|-----------------|--|--|--|

***“If every single person did one little thing, it would change the world.”***

- In her youth Kennedy often felt like she was marginalized/in the shadows. “*I didn’t get a lot of attention.*” She repeatedly talks about tension in her family experiences.
- Kennedy is considering a career in social work, but hesitant because it might require emotional investment and because she perceives careers in human services offer lower pay.
- Family is important; particularly relationships with her mom, sister, and aunt. Kennedy wants to be respected and validated for the work she does, but doesn’t talk about it outside her family.
- Kennedy’s service learning experiences give her confidence and self-esteem. “*Serving others is my passion.*” As her confidence grows, she starts to realize the value in her own experience and contributions.
- Serving others makes Kennedy feel good about herself and the contributions she is making.
- Her service learning experiences open Kennedy’s eyes to the humanity and reality of unmet need and social injustice. She is beginning to question these harsh societal realities.
- Kennedy’s awareness of/intersection into the lives and stories of the women at [Safe House] resulted in gratitude for her own privilege and security.
- Kennedy values listening to and validating the stories of people who might be in the shadows. The stories of people aren’t just statistics: “*Every person has a story to tell.*”

**Fundamental Lesson:**

- Experiencing the unmet needs in society directly (encountering people who are in need face to face) makes the awareness of social injustice clear and present.

| Name               | Demographic Information                    | Academic Information                           | Academic Service Learning Projects                     |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Mark Baxter</b> | Age: 20<br>Gender: Male<br>Race: Caucasian | Class: Sophomore<br>Major: Construction Trades | 1. Habitat for Humanity<br>2. Campus Athletics Project |

***“When you make someone’s day, it makes you feel all jolly inside. It’s priceless. It’s God giving. I can’t explain how it makes you feel.”***

- Mark demonstrates a very pragmatic approach to the complexities of life. He believes in the life lessons he learned from his family: *Hard work pays off. Marriage is forever. Family first.*
- The value of being a part of a community where people rely on one another and the welfare of others is of mutual concern is a central theme. Mark comes back to the “Circle of Life” metaphor repeatedly.
- Several recurring themes are also evident throughout Mark’s stories: teamwork, hard work, practical education, and dedication to achieving the best.
- Mark uses his strengths to achieve the greater good. Individual success is linked to the success of the team. He does any job to the best of his ability.
- Mark believes serving others feels good and is proud about making a contribution. Service is a natural part of community life, not an obligation or burden. It improves the quality of life for the entire community.
- Each act of service is an opportunity to demonstrate integrity and to be a better community member. Every person should do whatever is needed to help others in need.
- The circular connections between self and others define Mark’s world view. He serves others believing it will be returned to him in ways he may not realize or expect.

**Fundamental Lesson:**

- Strong connections to the community result in an inherent and natural commitment to serve others.

|                    |  |  |  |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Linda Mason</b> | Age: 22<br>Gender: Female<br>Race: Caucasian | Class: Freshman<br>Major: Addictionology<br>Human Services | 1. Habitat for Humanity<br>2. Grief Counseling |
|--------------------|--|--|--|

***“When you hit hard times, you don’t need a handout, you need a hand up. And you have to have somebody there willing to give you a hand up.”***

- Linda’s commitment to serving others comes from the active civic examples of her parents. Linda is already teaching her young children to help/volunteer. The intrinsic reward from bringing happiness and joy to the lives of others is key theme in her stories.
- Giving back is a reciprocal process: serving others strengthens the community, and a strong community supports those in need. Providing stability for her kids is a part of Linda’s commitment to service.
- Linda is active in her community. She knows 400 of 500 people at an event in her town and wants to get to know the other 100. She recognizes and values this community connection.
- Service learning is transformational for Linda: she rediscovers she is empowered and capable. She is also sharing this with her friends and recruits them to participate as well.
- Linda values that serving others builds significant relationships/support systems. She sees that service can be a fun and enjoyable experience as well.
- Awareness of privilege and gratitude for the blessings in life motivate Linda to give to others who may still be struggling.
- Caring for others is a core value for Linda; there is genuine empathy for those who share her struggles.
- Linda differentiates between charity (“a hand out”) and life changing help (“a hand up”).

**Fundamental Lesson:**

- Everyone has the power to change the world through caring and authentic relationships: small, individual efforts helping others can change the world.

The students shared powerful and intimate stories of their personal journeys and unique service learning experiences. However, their stories also contain common themes that illuminate the impact serving others has had on their lives.

The analysis across the student's stories is organized using the structures that emerged in Chapter Four. In the first section, *Personal Stories*, I explore the connections between the students' service learning experiences and life stories. These connections reveal how service learning that is integrated with the student's previous experiences, values, and identities is particularly meaningful both personally and academically. This is accentuated further through genuine relationships and personal connections that bridge the theories of academic course content with the realities of navigating a complex social environment. In the middle section, *Service Learning Experiences*, the pedagogical influences of how service learning is implemented and experienced are explored. When service learning instruction moves beyond a technical or transactional teaching and learning strategy to a transformational process, students are more likely see themselves as civic leaders and discover their capacity to create change for the common good in their communities. Finally, in the last section, *Reflections*, I explore the efficacy of service learning as a civic pedagogy that fulfills the mission of the comprehensive community college. Meaningful service learning experiences characterized by genuine relationships transform students from individuals to active and engaged community members. The analysis of the students' stories through this structure answers my research questions and provides a richer understanding of service learning as a civic pedagogy.

### **Personal Stories**

When students make meaningful connections between their lived experiences and their academic service learning assignments the process is more educationally purposeful. This is the

first theme to emerge from my data analysis. Understanding service learning as a meaningful process connected to students' lives begins to answer my first research question: *How do community college students who have participated in service learning reflect on their service and tell the stories of these experiences?* The lessons learned and life experiences of service learners are closely intertwined. Immersing students in educationally purposeful activities in the community promotes lifelong learning (Eyler, 2002). This experiential approach links the process of learning with community life and embodies Dewey's democratic purpose of education (Rhoads, 1997).

Understanding the complex lives of students reveals the significance of their service learning experiences in the context of their lives. When students can connect their service experiences to their lives, they share stories of significant learning and personal growth.

*I used to go down to the shelter and eat because all I had was 540 some dollars a month and \$450 of that went to rent... I think the most significant thing about going down to the shelter is that even though I'm going down there to help other people, I'm always the one who walks away feeling like I've gotten the most out of it. I was happy to be there. I felt really humbled by the fact that I was able to be the one to hand them a cup of coffee. And I'm grateful that I was given that chance to be the one to talk to somebody when they were having a bad day and not always be the one needing [help].*

- Cynthia

*There was the year we had flooding that went across the highway, and it was coming into town. And the town being a small community, you know, they needed help. So we went ahead and went down there. We were just kind of joking while we were doing the chain to get the sandbags up and everything... [Now] it's not fun anymore. It's all about people's personal property. I've kind of grown up a little bit. I have my own property. If it needs to be sandbagged, I really don't have any time for people playing around and having fun.*

- Adam

*I volunteered with an individual family that needed help. They had had quads, four kids you know. They were incredible little kids. So they needed help and I wanted to do anything I could to help [the quads' mom]. I figured, I'm older than she is. I have the experience of having kids, not four at a time, but this is going to work 'cause I can help her. I kind of went in thinking, "Okay, here's four kids. I'm not a kid person. I'm going to try to make the best out of this."*

- Brenda

*Everyone's very aware of cancer obviously. I've known several people that have passed away from cancer so I thought Daffodil Days was a good cause. It'd be tough not to be successful in that cause. Everyone knows someone that has cancer, and so people are more willing to give for a good cause. One of my really good friends, been friends with him forever, his mom's had cancer pretty much since we were eight or nine. Daffodil Days was a good project because a lot of people trusted giving you the money for [cancer].*

*- Jeff*

*I worked with [Safe House] which was a shelter for domestically abused and sexually abused women. That one spoke to me because my sister has had some incidents like that. She didn't tell me right when it happened. There were a couple of incidents that she told about years later. By then I was like, "Why didn't you tell me at the time? I would have beaten them up." She's my sister and I've always been really, really protective of her... That's why I felt like [Safe House] was something I wanted to do. I decided that I'm not going to be angry about it anymore. I'm going to try to channel my anger doing something positive by helping other people that have been abused.*

*- Kennedy*

*Every elective I took [in high school] was pretty much construction related. I did drafting. I designed my entire house myself: electrical, plumbing, H-VAC. I could give the prints to someone, and they could build it. It's all professionally done... With Habitat you're helping people that are in need, who don't have the resources or money to get a house. And you're building them a house for no overhead cost, just the cost of materials, which means a lot to them. When you turn the house over, it's the best feeling. The happiness and appreciation they show is... You can't describe how it feels.*

*- Mark*

*You don't know how people feel until you've been there. I've been there. I've hit hard times. I've had to buy a week's worth of groceries on \$20. I've been in their shoes where I don't have a home. I was seven months pregnant and I didn't have a home... It's an amazing feeling being able to give just a simple eight hours to somebody else to build a home: somebody living in a homeless shelter right now with her two kids. And it's amazing to see her face and be able to tell her that she's going to have a house. It's an amazing feeling. It's a better high than I've ever gotten in my life.*

*- Linda*

All the participants faced challenges in their lives; yet, through their service learning experiences, they found ways to move through these challenges. The students' stories of service learning demonstrate that serving others contributed to their own self-efficacy and belief that they have the capacity to make a contribution to others.

Service learning integrates academic knowledge attainment and interpersonal growth as

connected processes, facilitating the development of identity and clarification of purpose for students (Rhoads, 1997). The opportunity to evoke this learning is most evident when the service learning is personally relevant to students' lived experiences. Through the open access mission, comprehensive community college students frequently come from the margins of American society and bring "border knowledge" to the educational process (Giroux, 1992). Service learning engages students with border knowledge in the educational dialogue and validates their life experiences as educationally purposeful. Service learning is a teaching and learning practice that empowers and transforms students and contributes to an institutional culture that embraces multiple perspectives (Shaw, et al., 1999, p.3).

A second overarching theme that emerged from the students' stories was the desire for belonging and significance. The students' search for self-esteem and sense of purpose is a clear manifestation of this desire. The importance of genuine and mattering relationships with others is an indicator of how students make meaning of serving others.

*It's that little man coming in from out of the cold and me being able to hand him that cup. And that smile that he'd give me. That I cherish. That smile, and me being able to return that 'cause there's such gratitude over something as simple as a cup of coffee. You can make such a big difference in a person's life. And it's the simple things, I think, that make the biggest difference.*

- Cynthia

*I help out folks when they ask for it. I work on their cars or help if they have any construction projects. I try to help out people as much as I can. I work on neighbors' vehicles for them, I help them walk their dogs, watch their houses. If they need help working on their house, I do that that type of community work. I guess by helping others out, that helps my own self-worth. I get a sense of pride and accomplishment that I've helped out others. I get a sense of accomplishment and worth. And if I can do something to help them out, fantastic.*

- Adam

*[Eileen] was just an incredible person from the minute I met her. She was just bubbly and full of energy, which I suppose you need to be as a mom of quads. She and I just hit it off instantly. She was just like this person I had known all my life, and I just felt I knew her. There was just something about her and I, we got along from the very beginning. I*

wanted to do anything I could to help her... I enjoyed it more than I thought I would ever enjoy it. I learned that those kids affected me and helped me learn who I am more than I think I helped any of them. I think the hardest thing was when we said goodbye. That was hard. I didn't want it to end. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed that family a lot.

- Brenda

I think paying attention helps build relationships. Understanding where someone comes from helps you understand who they are as a person. Being well rounded is the key 'cause you can relate to anyone and be open minded about it at the same time. And that helps you be a friend or a teammate or anything like that. If you're out there leading by example every day and people are following, you know you are doing the right thing. Being a team captain, I don't really like people to depend on me. But having that sense they need me is probably the most rewarding thing for me being team captain.

- Jeff

When we first got into the project my heart went out to all those women that have been affected. But it wasn't until we visited [Safe House] itself and got a tour and saw the facilities... When we went upstairs and saw some women and their families it made it a lot more real. I could read any number of statistics of women being abused or raped and that's really heart wrenching, but it's not 'til you see the women that have [survived] that really makes it real. When I see them walking around and interacting with each other and their kids, it makes it a lot more real. It's right in front of me, and I see it. It was really eye opening to see that. I don't know how to put it in words. It was just... it was a really humbling experience.

- Kennedy

We walk through the house and turn the keys over to the owner. And that's just a great feeling, seeing how happy they are, emotional. You can't describe the feeling of seeing that smile and how happy and gracious they are for receiving the house and how much it means to them. It was an honor to be there that day. And to see the happiness you gave someone for doing it even though I was required to do it. It was my class. But besides all that it was still volunteer work and it gives you a sense of self-worth. It puts the world in perspective of how it should be and how it's not that way anymore.

- Mark

When we left the second day, the family had showed up to see how the house was coming along. We got to meet the family, and that was awesome. I got to see how excited the family was to have a house. They've been living at a homeless shelter for a year and a half. It really made me value and cherish what I have. It made me really just grateful for everything that I have. I have a house, I have two wonderful kids, and I have the means and the support from my family to be able to go back to school. Service learning projects have shown me that even the strongest of people can fall on hard times and need a smile or a hug or a house or a hand to hold or something to help them get back up.

- Linda

Every student discovered that by entering into relationships serving others their own self-worth

was enhanced. The relationships that emerged from their acts of service reduced a self-centered, individualistic approach and replaced it with an awareness of the interconnected needs of the larger community.

Mark introduced the core metaphor of the “circle of life” which was repeated conceptually by most of the other students in their stories. Cynthia observed that serving the community is a mutual process. Jeff pointed out an interconnected community is strong and stable. Brenda pointed out that separation from the community created barriers and isolation. Linda spoke of reciprocity and the value of being a part of a community that cares for all members. As the student’s told their stories, the importance of both individual action and collective responsibility emerged. The students reflected on their service learning experiences positively. These experiences were powerful opportunities for students to learn academic content knowledge as well as invaluable lessons about themselves as individuals, their place in society, and their capacity to contribute to the common good.

### **Service Learning Experiences**

In sharing the stories of their service learning experiences, the students framed these experiences in the context of the lives and personal stories. The students told stories that connected to their lives before and after the distinct service learning assignment providing internal validation for choosing a narrative methodology for my research. In this section I analyze the students’ stories to understand how they make meaning of their service learning experiences building upon the framework introduced previously. This understanding addresses my second research question: *How do students make meaning of their contributions serving the unmet needs of their communities?*

For the purpose of my research I used the AACC definition of service learning, which combines community service with classroom instruction, and focuses on critical, reflective thinking as well as personal and civic responsibility (Garcia & Robinson, 2005). I have also introduced a continuum for understanding service learning that begins with *awareness* of the unmet needs in society, moves through *actions* serving these needs, and builds to engaging in *activism* and *advocacy* to create change for the common good. Exploring the reasons service learning was utilized in their course work provides a framework to understand how students make meaning of the experience. First I will begin with the students' perspectives, then I will look at the stories through an academic or faculty lens. Revisiting the students' stories of service learning from these perspectives provides a context to better understand how they make sense of serving their communities' unmet needs.

The students' perspectives on service learning demonstrate a range of understanding. Kennedy is newly encountering a variety of service opportunities and entering a stage of awareness in her life and identity. Brenda values service as an opportunity to develop awareness of the diversity in her community. Brenda also distinguishes between volunteering and serving the unmet needs in society. Jeff is moving from his awareness of his privilege toward social action. Brenda, Jeff, and Adam all see serving the community as an act of public service. Mark sees helping those in need as such an inherent component of community life that he doesn't frame his actions as service. Linda's stories demonstrate acts of charity transformed into leadership and service to the community. These perspectives provide additional examples of the awareness-action-activism and advocacy continuum.

The students expressed very distinct perspectives on service learning as a teaching and learning activity. For some, it was a technical way to learn career skills or put theoretical

classroom knowledge into practice; while for others it was an intrinsically rewarding opportunity.

*Service learning is about empowering people and ourselves. I've been homeless before. I'd eaten at shelters before. Being able to turn around and give back the same kind of services that were given to me is what makes it worthwhile to continue on with my education. [I'll remember] the look of handing a gentleman his cup every morning. He came in every morning; this little guy just wanted his cup so he could get his coffee. And to hand him his cup, he'd tell me thank you. For me, to be able to be there to hand him that Styrofoam cup and to say morning Grace with him was such a reward.*

- Chris

*I think education is more than just knowing facts and reading out of a book. Service learning combines the facts that you learned in the classroom and puts it to use. You learn things about life and how things work. When we actually go do things education is more valuable than reading vocabulary words out of the textbook. Combining the lessons of life with the lessons out of your textbook, that's what makes service learning valuable and successful at the same time.*

- Jeff

*I think [my instructor] understood the importance of community service. It shows a different nursing opportunity. It goes back to realizing that not everybody is healthy and well. It's realizing that there are homeless people out there. Volunteering isn't always seeing the positive aspects of the world. There's negative. So I did this wonderful thing helping the homeless, but this guy doesn't have a place to live tonight. How can I make things better that way? By being told to do a community service project we might come up with an answer. I think that it goes back to just volunteering, doing good. If everybody did that this world would be a better place. If [my instructor] didn't assign service learning, nobody would have ever have done it.*

- Brenda

*It's one thing to read a book and study and like learn something, but it's a whole different level actually doing it in the real world. It actually helped me take it in and remember it. Ten years from now I'm not going to remember a project like a power point I did over Chapter Seven, but I'm going to remember my service learning.*

- Kennedy

*What I learned is what I will be doing every day when I get out of here. It's basically a job, but not getting paid though. Academically, it helped a lot because if I made a mistake here, it's no big deal because I'm not using company money. It's a learning environment here so making a mistake is no big deal. You can learn a lot more getting out there and doing it that way.*

- Mark

*Having somebody teach you how to talk to a person is different than actually going out there and talking to that person. Service learning reinforces the skills that the college is teaching you. It's reinforcing the skills that you're learning for your career. In our field, it's so important, and when you read it in a book, you learn it. But when you go out there and actively use it, you can step into the career field more prepared because you have more experience under your belt about what you're doing. Service learning doesn't only help you professionally, it helps you personally sometimes. It's a life changing event. Stepping out and doing something you haven't ever done before is life changing.*

*- Linda*

Students made meaning of their service learning experience in the context of the academic setting. The opportunity to serve others was a significant personal journey that went far beyond the content knowledge of the course. Service learning helped students to develop personally as well as to clarify their career aspirations. The experiential learning process also provided opportunities to develop self-confidence, again both personally and professionally. The multi-layered perspectives the students shared in their stories are reflective of the multiple senses of self Dewey described (1938). Shaw (1999) also identified that in particular community college students inhabit multiple understandings of their various identities.

Just as there are multiple perspectives that emerge from the student experience, there are also multiple perspectives faculty bring to the service learning process. Halford (2007) explored the faculty experience teaching with service learning using a narrative lens. She identified four constructs faculty utilize when assigning service learning: technical, feminist, social justice, and emergent. For faculty coming from a technical perspective the focus is on content knowledge and the act of service frequently comes from a charity paradigm of doing for others. In this construct there is little attention on awareness, action, or activism and advocacy. The feminist and social justice perspectives take a critical educational approach. Service learning is a means to create awareness of gender and privilege with an intentional emphasis on promoting a more socially just world. Halford (2007) acknowledged that in these first three constructs, students'

perspectives are not influential for faculty. “I overlook the uniqueness of my students, of their ways of knowing” (p.141). “I did not consider the need to increase students’ critical thinking skills as a means to create a more socially just world” (p. 152). In her fourth construct Halford identified an emergent perspective that focuses more holistically on students, and embraces service learning as a transformational teaching and learning process. Service influences how students see and act in the world and profoundly influences their learning and personal development. “The process of education we offer our students provides a vital pathway for building the caring self essential to affect social concern and practice public engagement” (p. 160). This emergent perspective views service learning as a civic pedagogy resulting in personal development and growth, academic learning, and collective action for the common good.

This emergent understanding of service learning as civic pedagogy transforms the traditional roles and views of education. “Solely didactic educational practices” are set aside in favor of “participatory pedagogies” that engage students fully in the learning process (Halford, 2007, p. 165). The stories of students who participate in service learning reveal that through serving others they begin to see themselves as able to make a difference, both individually and collectively. Students make meaning of their service learning experiences by transforming their lived experiences into genuine caring relationships; then leveraging these relationships into social action to improve their own lives and the lives of others. This perspective is consistent with the awareness-action-activism and advocacy continuum; as well as Westheimer and Kahn’s (2003a) model of personally responsible citizens, participatory citizens, and justice oriented citizens. When service learning is intentionally connected to students’ lived experiences it develops students’ self-worth and self efficacy. They enter the experience timidly and exit with confidence in their capacity to contribute to society both personally and professionally.

## Reflections

As I reflect on the lessons I learned from the students' stories, I am repeatedly reminded of their examples of resilience and success in college. Their stories demonstrate how the comprehensive community college improves the lives of individuals and the community at large. As students develop greater awareness of the unmet needs in their communities, their perspective and understanding are transformed. They move beyond an individualistic world view and begin to see their actions in the context of their relationships with others: friends and family, particularly their own children, as well as strangers and neighbors in need. This transition in their understanding represents a shift from individualism to communitarianism.

Communitarianism is defined as the strength of character which arises from participating in the development of, and ongoing involvement within, a strong community (Winkler, 1994). In contrast with individualism which sets the needs and existence of each person as preeminent, communitarianism harnesses the strengths of individuals to support of the needs of the greater good (Boyte & Kari, 2000). This perspective provides a framework to answer to my third research question: *How do students build upon their service learning experiences to engage in civic leadership for the common good?* The students' stories reveal how these communitarian ideals collectively emerge from their service learning experiences.

*I love being a part of a community. I love being a part of my neighborhood; I don't neighbor too much, but I do know folks. I just love it because it really is important. I wasn't sure I could do it, but with every step I know I can do it more and more and more... I want to give back what was so freely given to me. I just want give back because I had the opportunity that people gave to me. 'Cause everything's a circle. Everything goes around. The earth goes around; the sun goes around. Everything is a continuum. By doing service work, I think you keep that continuum flowing in a way that it's supposed to flow. And we all become part of what we're supposed to be and the whole works together.*  
- Cynthia

*It's very difficult to go from a position of power to a position of complete helplessness. And being a proud person and having to swallow your pride and ask for help. I still go*

*through the highs and lows of that. I'm still independent. I can still do all this; and then I'm completely helpless with all that and I have to have somebody help me... I see myself more as localized now; like we have our neighborhood watch program. I'm an extremely active member of that. We have a lot of older folks in the neighborhood. I walk up and talk to them often, make sure everything's still going all right. I try to help out people as much as I can. You know I work on my neighbors' vehicles for them, I help them walk their dogs, watch their houses. If they need help working on their house, I do that that type of community work.*

- Adam

*I feel that I'm not part of the community because we've given up church. And [my husband's] gone all the time, so we've missed out on a lot. I know him and I both miss church because that is where you get involved. And that's where you have your friends. Right now we are not involved in anything. It better change [after graduation] in May, and I think it will. I think life will go back to where it was. We'll find a church; we'll get involved, and life will be good. Something's got to change 'cause there's something desperately missing in our lives. I think it's just a sense of belonging, a sense of being able to help out another person, and knowing that they'll help you if you need something.*

- Brenda

*The neighborhood that I live in now is really pretty tight knit. We'll all get together at somebody's house and have lunch or something and help each other out. We've had neighbors come over and mow our yard for us before. It's small things like that really bring the neighborhood together. As the weather warms, I do small things around my neighborhood if someone needs something. If someone does something for you, you should do something back for them. It's just helping each other out. I think it strengthens the community. I think it's just important. The stronger the community, the better it is.*

- Jeff

*Maybe I am setting a good example and getting other people around me to start thinking the way I do. Just making positive thoughts so that it carries on to other people around me and the community itself. I don't think I can see a big change right now, but it has to start somewhere. I want to change somebody's life for the better. I just want to open more peoples' eyes to the power that they have to make somebody else's life better... And I feel like since I care about people, and I want to help, I should be doing it. I think it's crucial to do what you can. It seems so simple and obvious to me, but I guess like if nobody does anything, then nothing is going to change. If every single person did one little thing, it would change the world.*

- Kennedy

*When you make someone's day, it makes you feel all jolly inside. It's priceless. It's God giving. I think [volunteering] keeps the world turning like it should. If you don't volunteer then how are the elderly that can't get out of the house supposed to eat? How are they supposed to get their sidewalks scooped? How are they supposed to do stuff? You know the daily things they need help with, how are they supposed to get done if they ain't capable of doing it? 'Cause someday, tomorrow, you might be in that situation: you*

*might fall and break your back and can't walk anymore. So you'll want a person to help you then, so you should help now. It'll pay off in the end.*

*- Mark*

*Our community is very, very special about giving as much as you have received in your life. I think it's an amazing community to grow up in and it's an amazing lesson to learn to be grateful for everything that you have, and to be able to give back what you can. We try to do what is best for others in our community... I'm going to teach my kids to start thinking of others instead of themselves; and maybe by teaching my kids, I'll teach others. And by teaching others you can change the world. It takes one person. One person can change the world. I can change the world. You can change lives with an hour a day, an hour a week. You can change a life.*

*- Linda*

Communitarianism promotes the ideal that we thrive as a democratic society in relationship with our neighbors, friends, and families. Community life is characterized by mutual care and concern, reciprocal relationships, giving help as you are able, and accepting help when you are in need. By participating in service learning, students come to realize their part as contributors in the circle of community life.

This connection to community manifests itself in many ways. Cynthia, Adam, Brenda, and Linda all mentioned the importance of providing strong examples of civic involvement to their children. Likewise, Jeff, Kennedy, and Mark describe the importance of role modeling when sharing their volunteer service with their siblings and families. For all the participants service learning opened their eyes to the importance of role modeling active civic engagement. Cynthia, Linda, Kennedy, and Jeff described influencing others through their leadership roles. Cynthia, Adam, and Brenda talked about the role of service learning as a gateway to public service through their professional work. The influences of resiliency, faith, and self-discovery contributed to the students' understanding of their varied experiences. No matter how the students made meaning of their contributions and capacity serving their communities there was a unifying theme across all the stories demonstrating their belief that actions to serve the common

good could change the world.

The communitarian benefits of service learning provide an avenue to develop the habits of active civic life Dewey envisioned. This demonstrates service learning is a civic pedagogy that fulfills the democratic purpose of higher education and the mission of the comprehensive community college. Community colleges are well positioned to develop the habits of active civic life through their mission to serve their local communities (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Hodge, et al., 2001; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). By integrating service learning across the curriculum, today's comprehensive community colleges can achieve the democratic purpose of higher education and fulfill their community centered mission. This demonstrates Dewey's experiential philosophy of applying knowledge in real world settings and practicing the habits of active citizenship, as well as his belief that democracy begins in neighborly communities.

### **Summary**

In this section I presented the analysis of my first three research questions utilizing the organizing structures that emerged from the students' stories. In the first section, *Personal Stories*, the importance of connecting service learning to the lived experiences of students in meaningful and personally relevant ways was identified. Framing service learning in the context of students' lives creates more educationally purposeful experiences, increases the students' self-efficacy, and emphasizes genuine relationships. In the next section *Service Learning Experiences* I revisited the students' stories with through my research lens, as well as from various faculty perspectives. This analysis demonstrated that service learning provides students the opportunity to increase awareness of societal needs and translate this awareness into action for the common good. The emergence of self-confidence combined with an interconnected understanding of self in relationship with the community is transformational. In the third section, *Reflections*, the

transition from individualism to communitarianism provides a context for understanding service learning as a civic pedagogy. Boyte and Kari (2000) characterized communitarianism as a balance between individual perspectives and a shared responsibility for the larger community. The students' stories demonstrate service learning creates capacity for active, reciprocal community engagement.

Boyte and Kari (2000) also presented the commonwealth framework where higher education develops the public imagination and builds capacity for civic action and the application of knowledge. This framework emphasizes the ability of citizens to engage in the work of democracy as problem solvers and leaders for the common good. This framework also builds upon the analysis of the students' stories and provides a place to explore my fourth research question: *How do students connect their service learning participation, civic responsibility, and leadership skills?*

As I analyzed the students' stories I was surprised to discover that for the most part they do not connect their service learning activities with leadership for the common good. Generally their service experiences, while meaningful and educationally significant, remain episodic moments that do not connect to their lives beyond the campus.

*I'm not ready to quite get out there yet. I know that I'm not ready, and it's hard to balance that because I really want to be ready. But it's all in God's timing as to when that's going to be. I try to be super Cynthia and do everything, be everything. I end up expelling too much energy without putting anything back in, and I've done that before. I've been super mom and super wife, all of these things. Then you end up falling down because you can't expel more than you put in or you end up empty. And that's not a good place to be.*

- Cynthia

*Since I'm not able to work as a public servant anymore, [serving the community] is not going to carry the same meaning. My community service comes down into my actual small community instead of the community in general. Am I going to get into it hard core and all that? No. I have a lot of other stuff going on, which is unfortunate. I will always do community based and family based service. I'll help out. But as far as the larger*

*community I kind of see that I've already done my fair share. I'll do enough to get my son interested, to get him going in the right path, and I'll do enough to keep him encouraged and interested in it, but as far as beyond that, I probably won't do very much in all honesty.*

*- Adam*

*I don't think I learned anything. It just reiterated that it is important, that it's a good feeling, it's positive because I helped a family. If anything, it's just growing up and realizing that not everybody gives. There's just so many more people that take. And I think that as you get older, you see it more. You definitely see values have changed from when I was growing up. Everybody has everything that they want all the time. I think that the values have just changed, and that sense of need and helping out and being involved in your community is gone.*

*- Brenda*

*It's going to take more than just one person. You can be a leader; I could be a leader and go out and help a bunch of people. But if they're not willing to give anything back that makes it tough to do anything. It could be just the small things; just trying to do small things for other people that I'm capable of doing and they might not be. I do see [these service projects] building on each other, but I don't know what they're building towards. I just don't know. I know that serving others probably will play a role somewhere in my life. I just don't know where.*

*- Jeff*

*All these little voluntary things I'm doing, I'm not really doing them to lead up to something. Really, I'm just doing them because I feel like I'm living right now and I should do it. I'm not really like planning for something bigger, if that makes sense. I feel like people should volunteer. People should do it the best they can to make somebody else's day better.*

*- Kennedy*

*My life's construction. You don't have much free time. You work twelve hour days. So I don't know how much service I will keep doing. I will probably be involved in the Park and Rec. Association 'cause I love sports and I like kids so I'll probably be involved with that. That'd be the main part of my service.*

*- Mark*

*Society has gone to such an amazingly dark place right now: a minimalist and an individualistic society. Minimalistic is "What's the least I can do to get by?" Individualistic is "What's in it for me?" You can set your own path; you can do whatever you choose to do with your life. And if you choose not to help yourself or not to help others, that's fine. You can really do with your life what you want. It's not all about others. Maybe society will become less all about me and more about what can I do to help somebody else. I'm going to do what I can by volunteering or helping somebody.*

*- Linda*

When the students begin to realize that they have the capacity to act as civic leaders, it remains individualized and episodic. More significant notions of leadership for the common good appear to be a haphazard coincidence, rather than an intentional, mission-driven function of service learning as a civic pedagogy. There is a stark contrast between the microcosm of each student's positive experiences and their seeming inability to connect these activities with intention or clarity to a greater good.

Service Learning Community College promotes service learning as a strategy to advance students' content knowledge and civic learning to strengthen the community (Appendix A). However, it appears this institutional purpose is not consistently achieved based on my analysis of the students' experiences. The students' stories demonstrate an opportunity exists for service learning faculty, program coordinators and community college leaders to more intentionally connect service learning to the civic mission of the community college, as well as the larger democratic purpose of higher education. "[Colleges and] universities are under greater pressure than ever to emphasize pragmatic results – technological achievements and career-oriented skills. [However], there are voices calling for the reaffirmation of the classical role of education... so that individuals simultaneously become more fully developed people and citizens of a free society" (Bellah, et al., 1985, p. 293). The commitment to community service and civic engagement is a priority at Service Learning Community College; however, it appears SLCC students are not connecting their episodic service experiences to their capacity to create change that serves the common good.

### **Revisiting the Students' Perspectives**

As I completed the process of interviewing all seven participants, I struggled with how best to weave together the individual stories into a cohesive anthology. I decided to bring

together their individual stories and the emergent themes they contain by concluding my data collection with a focus group interview. Four students were able to participate in this group discussion exploring the broad themes that emerged across their diverse experiences. This dialogue amongst the students confirmed that my initial identification of common themes was consistent across their individual perspectives.

The overarching themes that emerged from my analysis of their stories were presented to the students for their response in a group dialogue. The students actively engaged in the conceptual framework that service learning was meaningful because it connected to their lived experiences. They built upon this framework by re-telling one another their most significant service learning reflections. They affirmed their individual perspectives about how service learning had created awareness of social concerns beyond the classroom, as well as how these experiences increased their confidence and capacity to contribute. They were enthusiastic in describing how service learning is an engaging pedagogy that helped them to learn course content and important lessons about themselves. However, the discussion stalled as I introduced the concept of service learning as a gateway to public service. My analysis of the individual stories and group interview demonstrated that service learning is a meaningful and effective teaching and learning process on multiple levels; however, it may not yet be reaching the fullest potential as a civic pedagogy that yields leadership for the common good in our communities.

### **Conclusion**

In Chapter Five I presented my synthesis of the individual stories introduced in Chapter Four. I utilized my research questions to frame my analysis guided by the organizing structures that emerged from the students' stories. The integration of the student's voices with my research perspective shaped my analysis. This interpretation is certainly only one way to understand the

data. Other readers may identify alternate interpretations; however, I believe my synthesis honors the students' voices and weaves together their stories with my own. The conceptualization, structure, and analysis of my research are consistent with Dewey's beliefs about education and experience. "Education is a social process; education is growth; education is not preparation for life but life itself" (Dewey, 1916, p. 16). In the next chapter I will conclude my dissertation by reviewing the implications of my analysis for service learning program coordinators, teaching faculty, and administrators; and identifying areas for further research.

## CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION

The purpose of my research was to understand how community college students experience academic service learning by exploring the content and context of their stories in relationship to their civic engagement and leadership skills. Seven students who had participated in academic service learning assignments at a comprehensive community college in the United States shared their personal stories, service learning experiences, and reflections on these experiences with me. Narrative inquiry was the qualitative approach I selected to explore the students' stories. The global impressions I presented in Chapter Four were created through holistic content analysis of the robust narrative interview data I gathered. The themes and fundamental lessons that emerged from the students' stories were synthesized and integrated with my research perspective in Chapter Five. This collective re-telling of the students' stories resulted in the lessons learned from my exploration of service learning as a civic pedagogy.

Service learning expanded the students' self-awareness and increased their confidence. This development of self efficacy is an essential foundation required to realize the transformative potential of service learning. Through thoughtful reflection students developed awareness of others and replaced individualistic perspectives with a shared responsibility to serve the common good. Encountering complexity and social injustice in their communities provided students with opportunities to make important contributions to others in need. Serving others increased the students' capacity both academically and personally. The students' service learning experiences were transformational. I believe my research provides new insights into the lives and experiences of service learners and honors their stories, experiences, and lessons learned.

In this chapter I conclude my dissertation by reflecting on my own journey exploring

service learning as a civic pedagogy. First, I review the trustworthiness and authenticity of my research and describe the unintended results that emerged. Next, the implications of my research for service learning program coordinators, teaching faculty, and community college leaders are described. The results and implications of my study also suggest areas for further research. Finally, I look back on how the process of completing this study has transformed my values and beliefs about experience, knowledge, research, education and service.

### **Authenticity of the Research**

Qualitative researchers should conduct research that is trustworthy and authentic (Creswell, 1998; Shank, 2006). To establish trust in my research, I provided a transparent description of the research design and implementation. I included thick descriptions of the narrative interview data to allow others to discover the important lessons, meaning, and significance these stories contain. Trustworthiness is the degree to which readers can depend on the lessons that emerge (Shank, 2006). Transparency in the data collection described in Chapter Three and presented in Chapter Four creates trust in the lessons learned.

Authenticity ensures that others can make meaning of the research findings in an appropriate and contextual way (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I used Lincoln and Guba's (2000) five lenses to establish authenticity in my research. I analyzed the interview data using a balanced approach that integrated multiple points of view. I included the students' perspectives and voices to provide genuine, holistic insights into their experiences. I worked diligently to create accurate re-tellings of the students' stories, and provided opportunities for the participants to check my interpretations both individually and collectively. I presented the data analysis transparently to provide readers the opportunity to understand how the lessons emerged from the students' stories, and to think critically about the lessons I uncovered.

As I entered into the narrative inquiry space I remained constantly aware of ethical considerations inherent to the narrative research process. Throughout my inquiry I worked conscientiously to create an authentic re-telling of the students' stories. As I proceeded with my analysis I honored the stories and experiences of the students who participated so that this narrative would answer my research questions and inform service learning practice. Narrative inquiry reveals a deep understanding of complex lived experiences such as service learning (Lieblich, et al., 1998). Fully understanding how service experiences impact the lives of students improves their learning and personal development. While the findings of my research are not intended to be generalizable, the lessons learned can inform the effective implementation of service learning and serve as a foundation for further research. I believe my findings will also help community college leaders achieve the civic mission and democratic ideals of higher education.

### **Implications for Service Learning Practice**

Curriculum and pedagogy have the capacity to “either limit or expand the hopes and aspirations of community college students” (Shaw, et al., 1999, p. 6). “Active and collaborative learning take on additional meaning when students – as a part of their academic requirements – apply what they are learning to the community” (Kuh, et al., 2005, p. 200). Service learning is a pedagogy that engages students in learning content knowledge and transforms students' self-esteem and capacity. My study gives voice to students whose lives have been transformed through service learning. Additionally, my findings and analyses suggest several implications for faculty, service learning practitioners, and community college leaders.

Critical reflection provides opportunity for service learners to make meaning of their experiences, link their service experiences with content knowledge, and connect their learning to

their life stories. (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; Howard, 2001). Throughout our interviews the students repeatedly commented that they had not fully considered the deeper meanings and broader implications of their service experiences. All had participated in some form of written or verbal reflection about the assignment. Several students shared their academic reflection assignments with me as part of our initial interview. These documents tended to be superficial summaries and were not particularly useful in telling the full stories of their experiences.

To capitalize on the transformational power of service learning faculty need to provide more intentional and thought provoking reflection assignments. Dewey (1902) suggested that for education to be effective academic content must be presented in a way that allows students to connect the information to prior experiences. Better pre-service and post-service reflection assignments that link service experiences to students' lives in meaningful ways will strengthen and enhance student learning. Service learning pedagogy that focuses on content knowledge separate from students' lived experiences remains in the technical framework rather than achieving the transformational potential that results when knowledge and experience are integrated. To effectively leverage the power of service learning as a civic pedagogy and engage students as citizens in their communities faculty need to set higher expectations for more rigorous and meaningful reflection.

The reflection assignments students submitted summarized their experiences with a technical focus on the academic content. Service learning faculty need to structure reflection assignments that intentionally reinforce the connections between the service experience and students' lives and values. Additionally, effective service learning reflection assignments should engage students in identifying their individual capacity and civic responsibility to create change for the common good (Prentice, 2011). My research confirmed that students have the ability to

connect their academic service experiences with their lives as citizens and community leaders; however, it appears that they are not intentionally or strategically being asked to do so. To fully achieve the general education outcomes associated with the civic mission, service learning faculty need to engage students beyond the boundaries of technical course content and cursory reflection models.

The ladder interview technique utilized in my interview guide is one model for creating more rigorous reflection. It begins with technical questions and then proceeds deeper into the experience (Price, 2002). Reflection questions that connect the service experience to students' lives then analyze and explore the experience in multiple dimensions provide richer learning opportunities. Effective reflection questions should challenge students to integrate academic knowledge with the complex societal needs or injustices they encounter. Transformative learning invites students to make meaning of their lives through action and reflection (Baumgartner, 2001). Civic skills and contributions result when students are encouraged to move from awareness through action to activism and advocacy in their service experiences and reflection assignments. My research clearly demonstrates students are capable of this deeper level of critical thinking about their educational experiences.

Faculty members who use service learning may need additional training and resources to provide meaningful, intentional, and rigorous reflection. Baxter Magolda (2002) provided a framework for facilitating self-authorship in the lives of students. Although her research focused on the experiences of traditional aged students at a four year university, the framework she identified is a useful model for service learning instructors working to provide more rigorous reflection assignments. Baxter Magolda described three characteristics that parallel the conditions for transformative learning my research identified. These characteristics are also

consistent with effective service learning practice. First, she proposed that “knowledge is complex and socially constructed” (p. 5). In service learning projects students encounter multiple interpretations of shared experiences, ambiguity, and the need to negotiate what to believe in relationships with others. This social construction of knowledge gives rise to the second characteristic: a sense of “self is central to knowledge construction” (p. 5). The integration of the self into the learning process increases student engagement. Students need encouragement to bring their own knowledge, perspectives, and experiences into their learning and relationships. Finally, Baxter Magolda (2002) indicated that “authority and expertise are shared in the mutual construction of knowledge among peers” (p. 6). Service learning experiences that encourage students’ awareness of self and develop their capacity to construct knowledge facilitate the processes of active citizenship and leadership for the common good.

Educational practices that empower and engage students as full participants challenge them to solve the complexities of our modern world (Franco, 2005). Effective service learning creates academic environments where students are invited to share their experience, integrate their diverse perspectives with the instructor’s content expertise, and construct knowledge both individually and collectively. Educational strategies that promote self authorship create institutional cultures that support the civic mission and engage students in the democratic life of their communities.

Baxter Magolda (2002) also suggested three principles of good practice that encourage educators to “join learners at their current developmental place in the journey and promote movement toward self-authorship” (p. 6). These principles build on the three characteristics just described and provide a structure for rigorous service learning reflection. First, rigorous reflection validates service learners’ capacity to know. This validation invites students into the

knowledge construction process, conveys their ideas are welcome, and boosts their confidence in themselves (p. 6). Next, rigorous reflection situates learning in the service learners' experiences. Building on students' existing knowledge and experiences demonstrates respect, enhances learning, and engages students in the educational process. Finally, rigorous reflection connects students' knowledge with the expertise and experience of instructors in a mutual process that facilitates more complex learning and developmental outcomes.

These three principles for creating self authorship provide a guide for implementing effective rigorous service learning reflection. Service learning instructors should establish challenging reflection activities that integrate students' knowledge of self with the application of content knowledge in the context and complexity of civic action for the common good. Instructors should guide students through this reflection process, intervening only when necessary by offering but not imposing the wisdom of their expertise and experiences (Baxter Magolda, 2002). Instructors should challenge students to accept responsibility for their own learning as they explore both their experiences and their relationships with others through this process. Rigorous reflection assignments that challenge students to explore this deeper learning in the context of community action promote civic engagement in addition to technical content knowledge. Baxter Magolda acknowledged that students may not achieve a fully developed sense of themselves as citizens and leaders until long after graduation. However, by joining with students in the mutual process of constructing knowledge and transforming lives through rigorous reflection, service learning instructors can teach students the active civic habits Dewey proposed.

Service learning instructors and staff can also strengthen student learning by linking service learning reflection across the curriculum. Recognizing that students may participate in

service learning activities in multiple courses or co-curricular roles provides another opportunity to enhance learning and development. By connecting individual episodic service learning experiences across the curriculum students are more likely to understand and appreciate how their individual and collective public service improves local communities and strengthens our democracy.

Dewey (1902) argued education is not simply the rote learning of academic facts; it is also the process of learning how to live a fulfilled life and contribute in the work of our democracy as citizens and leaders. This perspective requires faculty to see service learning beyond the boundaries of their course or academic discipline. Service learning faculty across the curriculum must intentionally include civic learning outcomes in addition to content knowledge attainment as course objectives (Prentice, 2011). To achieve the civic mission and democratic purpose, community college faculty need to resist curriculum overspecialization and embrace a more holistic educational approach (Sax, 2000). The purpose of education is not limited to the completion of course specific, faculty defined learning objectives; rather it is the realization of students' full potential, and the ability to use both content knowledge and general education skills for the greater good (Rhoads, 2000). To achieve this purpose community college leaders need to prioritize academic, civic, and transformative learning simultaneously.

My findings and analysis demonstrate service learning has the potential to achieve the civic mission and democratic purpose of higher education; yet this potential is largely unrealized. To achieve this potential additional faculty development, leadership, and coordination beyond the classroom is required. Community college administrators need to recognize this need and provide the leadership, support, and direction required to achieve this mission; not just the administrative oversight or technical assistance faculty may need to implement individual,

episodic service learning assignments. Integrating specific academic content learning with broader general education outcomes such as civic engagement and empowering students as citizens and leaders is critical to achieve the democratic ideals of higher education.

My findings confirm that service learning is a powerful teaching and learning strategy that helps students learn course content and increases awareness of community needs. The stories students shared with me are consistent with Boyte and Kari's (2000) communitarian frame of civic engagement. The students' stories demonstrate that service learning inculcates a commitment to serving others and community involvement. While this shift in students' attitudes is a noteworthy outcome, it does not fully realize the vision for higher education's larger democratic purpose. Boyte and Kari suggested democracy is the collective work of citizens for the common good. In the commonwealth frame civically engaged leaders recognize community problems and work individually and collectively for social change. The public work of higher education is to graduate leaders with the civic knowledge, skills, and abilities to address the barriers that interfere with full participation in our democracy. Rhoads (2000) suggested that community colleges must do more than focus on technically proficient employees who have the skills to succeed in the workforce. An educated citizenry must also have the public imagination to solve social problems and increase the capacity of all members.

To achieve the civic mission and democratic purposes of higher education community colleges must embrace the responsibility to improve social welfare by providing learning experiences that engage and empower all students as citizens and leaders. (Boyte and Hollander, 1999). When community colleges define learning in narrow terms that focus only on academic content or technical expertise, they ignore or negate students' lived experiences. Additionally, this approach to education increases the likelihood students will not have the desire or the ability

to persist (Shaw, 1999). Service learning is a pedagogy that increases students' capacity and belief in themselves. "Given that community college serve the most marginalized of college student populations, [an] exclusionary college culture threatens to alienate that portion of the population for whom education is most critical" (p. 169). Community college leaders need to embrace participatory educational pedagogies such as service learning that increase students' capacity and motivation to be involved in their own learning and in the larger democratic work of our society. "Institutions that acknowledge and address the full compliment of student identities – regardless of where they originate from intrinsic characteristics, social or cultural characteristics, or human agency – have the best chance for helping students integrate identity and the educational process" (p. 169). By fully embracing the open access mission and creating inclusive educational opportunities through engaged pedagogies like service learning, community colleges are fulfilling the democratic vision Dewey proposed.

Dewey (1902) believed that students succeed in an educational environment where they actively take part in their own learning: engaging with the curriculum in an interactive and transformative process. Both students and faculty need to intentionally connect their service learning journeys to their lives as leaders and citizens in order to achieve the full potential of service learning as a civic pedagogy. This connection will move students and faculty from a technical perspective that focuses solely on academic content knowledge to a more emergent view that recognizes service learning is a transformative pedagogy that fulfills the democratic purpose of higher education. Service learning practitioners and community college leaders must address the content and context of student learning, the open access and the civic missions of the comprehensive community college, and higher education's larger democratic purpose at multiple levels simultaneously (Wheatley, 1999). In embracing these ideals community college leaders

can welcome and empower students from the borders into full participation in our educational communities. My research reveals that intentional and rigorous service learning practice can effectively facilitate the achievement of content knowledge attainment, general education goals such as civic engagement, and broader institutional missions and purpose.

### **Areas for Further Research**

As I conclude my research, I am reminded of the many unanswered questions that remain. Several areas of further research emerge from my findings and analyses. How would the stories of a different sample population such as first generation students or students at four year institutions compliment the lessons learned in my study? Do the lessons learned vary by geographic regions or other institutional archetypes, such as public research, private liberal arts, or religiously affiliated colleges and universities? These findings could also be expanded upon through the development of a survey that would allow for more detailed analysis and comparison by age, gender, race, program of study, or similar demographic constructs. Further research exploring the intersection of the lived experiences of service learning participants and the quantitative results described in the literature would also be insightful. A longitudinal inquiry that investigates how the immediate civic lessons that emerged in this study are carried forward post-graduation would provide additional insights into the long term effects of service learning as a civic pedagogy. I am also curious to know if students' experiences and learning outcomes in completing service learning are linked or related to instructors' goals and motivation to teach with service learning. Case study analysis that compares student and faculty experiences in intentional, well-established, mission driven service learning programs with those in more episodic, disjointed, or haphazardly organized programs would further expand the lessons introduced in this study. Other studies could explore the similarities and differences between

student and faculty perspectives or between academic and co-curricular service learning activities. Finally, a more intentional inquiry investigating the development of self-authorship among service learners would enhance the conceptual perspective shared in the previous section.

While I have focused on the technical and emergent lenses, Halford (2007) also identified the feminist and social justice perspectives in faculty motivation to incorporate service learning in their teaching. Further research investigating the students' experiences from the feminist or social justice perspective would be informative. How do service learning participants move from being unaware of social needs and inequity to challenging the assumptions that create inequity? Further, how do participants build on this awareness by advocating for change and taking action to make such change a reality? Finally, additional research exploring the Awareness - Action - Activism and Advocacy continuum would determine if this model is a useful construct that is more generalizable to other service learning programs or civic engagement settings. Other readers may have their own ideas for how to use this research to expand the knowledge base on effective teaching and learning, the transformative power of service learning, and civic engagement for the common good.

### **Unintended Results**

When I began my research, I did not know what I would ultimately discover about students, about service learning, or about myself. Narrative inquiry provides insight into the lived experiences of others and prompts the researcher to think beyond the surface of the data and discover the lessons that are within (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I originally sought to discover new insights and understanding by exploring the intersection of service learning and students' leadership capacities. I soon discovered the influence of John Dewey on the content and process of both service learning and narrative research. I entered the research process with excitement

and anticipation of the journey ahead. Now as I reflect on my research I am perhaps most proud to have given a voice to the lives and stories of community college students. Exploring the service learning stories of community college students was the focus of my research; however, I did not realize these stories would provide such rich and meaningful examples of the open access mission of today's comprehensive community college. I expected to find that service learning encourages students to become active community leaders. I did not expect to discover that service learning creates capacity by helping students, particularly those on the margins, to see themselves as full and active participants in a transformational learning experience.

As I began the research, blinded by my own experiences and expertise, I thought I understood the lives of students. I was confident I could tell the stories of students because I understood their perspectives; as a community college leader I advocated for their full participation in the educational process. The students of Service Learning Community College reminded me that every student has stories to tell and the power to teach profound lessons. These lessons brilliantly illuminate the impact of the open access community college mission on the lives of students and communities. These stories demonstrate all students have the ability to serve their communities by engaging in meaningful, empowering experiences that build their capacity to construct knowledge, provide leadership for the common good, and live fulfilled lives.

By providing educational opportunities that empower and transform students' lives, community colleges build cultural capital, increase human potential in local communities, and promote the civic habits of an inclusive democratic society (Shaw, et al., 1999). Throughout their stories students shared intimate and emotional examples of their personal resiliency and success. They repeatedly described how service learning increased their self efficacy and personal

commitment to improve both their lives and their communities. These stories illuminate far more than service learning as a civic pedagogy; they exemplify the power that community colleges have to transform the lives of students, particularly those from the margins of society.

### **Transformation**

From the genesis of my initial questions throughout the entire dissertation process, my research agenda aspired to lofty philosophical ideals and grand intentions: the democratic purpose of higher education, the civic mission of the comprehensive community college, and service learning as civic pedagogy. As I complete my dissertation I believe I have contributed new ideas and knowledge through the exploration and analysis of my research questions. I am proud of the lessons I learned in listening to the voices and re-telling the stories of students. I am confident that sharing these stories and lessons will strengthen the scholarship about service learning and civic engagement.

I believe the work of our democracy requires the ability to reflect on our varied experiences, engage in dialogue about the unmet needs of the people in our communities, and respond to the privileges and civic responsibilities educational attainment implies. The work of democracy requires we continue to move from awareness to action, activism, and advocacy for social change to achieve the common good. This is particularly true for our students as service learners, and it is most certainly true for teaching faculty, service learning program coordinators, community partners, and community college leaders.

Throughout my dissertation John Dewey's philosophy of education and experience has provided a unifying theme. Dewey asserted that a primary role of the education should be to develop the habits of an active civic life (1916, 1922). Dewey (1939) also claimed that learning is a socially constructed, community based process. Dewey (1902) proposed teachers should not

stand at the front of the classroom providing knowledge to passive students, a transactional model of education later criticized by Freire (2000). Alternatively, teachers should serve as facilitators or partners in the educational process, guiding students to independently discover meaning and learn content knowledge (Dewey, 1902; Flynn, 2005). Dewey's philosophy of learning emphasized the importance of experience throughout the learning process (McKewen, 1996). Transformative education is fundamental to helping students realize their potential and in creating social change.

Building on the work of Dewey, community colleges have been identified as democracy colleges because their cultures and educational practices are aimed at transforming students into active citizens and empowered participants in the educational and democratic processes (Shaw, et al., 1999). Rhoads (1999) asserted that education and identity are linked, and urged community colleges leaders to embrace a wide range of experiences and identities through caring and authentic relationships with students. "Faculty and staff contribute to the construction of student identities through the interactions they have with students" (p. 103-104). As I reflect on my research and the intimacy of the narrative inquiry research process, I know with certainty that the educational experiences, interactions, and relationships students encountered along their service learning journeys were transformational.

Everyone has a story to tell. Cynthia's resilience and recovery demonstrated that self-efficacy is an essential capacity required to realize the transformative potential of serving others. Adam made sense of the complexities of his military service, motorcycle accident, and family responsibilities through thoughtful reflection that helped him connect with others and understand his ability to engage in public service. Brenda discovered a sense of confidence in the authentic caring relationships that emerged as she served others, and realized that her life was lacking

because she was not connected to her community. Jeff leveraged his awareness of the needs of others and his concern for their well-being to expand his public service as a role model and leader. Kennedy confronted the shadows in her childhood by embracing her passion for serving others, and started questioning the social injustices she encountered. Mark demonstrated that a strong connection to the local community results in an inherent and natural commitment to serve others. Linda showed that small, individual efforts helping others can and does change the world. Collectively, these stories reveal that serving their communities transformed the students' lives.

The students thrived having someone listen and value their experiences. The realization their experiences and examples could teach others contributed to their transformation. Authentic relationships and shared experiences amplify the connections to others and strengthen the circle of community life (Jaworski, 1996; Bolman & Deal, 2001). Service learning helped the students to be successful learners, community members, and leaders. Effective educational practices such as service learning strengthen students, institutions, and communities. My research demonstrated that every student is capable of succeeding, and through effective educational practice and rigorous reflection all faculty and staff are able to inspire leadership and action in the lives of students.

As I complete my own dissertation journey I have renewed confidence in my own story and perspective. I believe in the social co-construction of knowledge and value looking at experience and education narratively. I also believe that we all have the power to learn from one another, as well as the capacity to serve our communities as leaders. I bring this perspective with me to every educational interaction I have with students and colleagues. It is a part of who I am. Through my relationships I engage others in the construction of meaning and empower students

and colleagues through the learning process to create change for the common good (Baxter Magolda, 2002; Jarvis et al., 2003).

As a result of my experiences I now have a much more intimate understanding of how life experiences and sociocultural perspectives are central to the social construction of knowledge (Alfred, 2002). My experience and perspective have been transformed by a more immediate and intimate understanding of how access and education increase cultural capital for those with border knowledge (Rhodes & Valadez, 1996). I am continuously reminded that students' lives and experiences reveal powerful lessons. As community college leaders, we need to honor the voices of students and learn from the examples of their success and resiliency. These perspectives, values, and beliefs culminate in my profound commitment to help all students succeed.

I have set aside my time, my relationships with others, and my commitment to serving my community so that I might complete this study. Through this experience I too have been transformed. Now as I finish this journey I am prepared and ready to re-engage in the personal and public work of serving the unmet needs in my community - as an educator, as a leader, as a parent, and as partner. Social injustice demands thoughtful democratic action. Education is my calling to serve this demand. The next chapter of my story is ready to be discovered.

“Arriving at one goal is the starting point to another.”

John Dewey

## REFERENCES

- Alfred, M. V. (2002). The promise of sociocultural theory in democratizing adult education. In M.V. Alfred (Ed.), *Learning and sociocultural contexts: Implications for adults, community, and workplace education* (pp. 3-14). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- American Association of Higher Education. (2002). Powerful partnerships: A shared responsibility for learning. In L. R. Lattuca, J. G. Haworth & C. F. Conrad (Eds.), *College and University Curriculum: Developing and cultivating programs of study that enhance student learning* (pp. 424-437). Boston: Pearson.
- Ash, S. L. & Clayton P. H. (2004). The articulated learning: An approach to guided reflection and assessment. *Innovative Higher Education*, 29 (2). 137-151.  
doi:10.1023/B:IHIE0000048795.84634.4a
- Ash, S. L., Clayton, P. H. & Atkinson, M. P. (2005). Integrating reflection and assessment to capture and improve student learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service learning*, 11(2). 49-60.
- Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2010). Civic Education VALUE Rubric *VALUE: Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education*. Retrieved from the American Association of Colleges and Universities website:  
<http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/civicengagement.cfm>
- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student Involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25, 297-308.
- Astin, A. W. (2000). The civic challenge of educating the underprepared student. In T. Ehrlich (Ed.), *Civic responsibility and higher education* (pp. 124-146). Phoenix: Oryx Press.
- Astin, A. W. & Sax, L. J. (1998). How undergraduates are affected by service participation. *Journal of college student development*, 39 (3). 362-263.
- Astin, A. W., Vogelgesang, L. J., Ikeda, E. K., & Yee, J. A. (2000). *How service learning affects students*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute.
- Battistoni, R. M. (1997). Service learning and democratic citizenship. *Theory into practice*, 36(3). 150-156.
- Baumgartner, L. M. (2001). An update on transformational learning. In S. B. Merriam (Ed.), *The new update on adult learning theory* (pp. 15-24). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (1992). *Knowing and reasoning in college: Gender-related patterns in students' intellectual development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2002). Helping students make their way to adulthood: Good company for the journey. *About Campus, January-February*. 2-9.
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberg, N. R. & Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A. & Tipton, S. M. (1985). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Benson, L., Harkavy, I. & Puckett, J. (2007). *Dewey's Dream: Universities and democracies in an age of education reform: Civic society, public schools, and democratic citizenship*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Bickford, D. M. & Reynolds, N. (2002). Activism and service learning: Reframing volunteerism as acts of dissent. *Pedagogy: Critical approaches to teaching literature, language, composition and culture*, 2 (2), pp. 229-252. doi:10.1215/1531420-2-5-229
- Bolman, L. G. & Deal, T. E. (2001). *Leading with soul: An uncommon journey of spirit*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Boyte, H. C. (2008). Against the current: Developing civic agency of students. *Change, May/June*, 8-15. doi:10.3200/CHNG.40.3.8-15
- Boyte, H. & Hollander, E. (1999). *Wingspread declaration on renewing the civic mission of the American research university*. Wingspread Special Report, Racine, WI: The Johnson Foundation.
- Boyte, H. C. & Kari, N. N. (2000). Renewing the democratic spirit in American colleges and universities: Higher education as public work. In T. Ehrlich (Ed.), *Civic responsibility and higher education* (pp. 37-59). Phoenix: Oryx Press.
- Bringle, R. G. & Hatcher, J. A. (1999). Reflection in service learning: Making meaning of experience. *Educational Horizons*, 77(4), 179-185.
- Bringle, R. G. & Hatcher, J. A. (2009). Innovative practices in service learning and extracurricular engagement. *Institutionalizing community engagement in higher education: the first wave of Carnegie classified institutions. New Directions for Higher Education*, 147, 37-49. doi:10.1002/he.356
- Brint, S. & Karabel, J. (1989). *The diverted dream: Community colleges and the promise of educational opportunity in America, 1900-1985*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Butler, J. E. (2000). Democracy, diversity and civic engagement. *Academe*, 86 (4), 52-55. doi:10.2307/40251899

- Butin, D. W. (2007). Focusing our aim: Strengthening faculty commitment to community engagement. *Change, November/December*, 34-39. doi:10.3200/CHNG.39.6.34-39
- Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching & Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). (2006). *Higher education: Civic mission & civic effects*. Retrieved from [http://www.civicyouth.org/popups/higher\\_ed\\_civic\\_mission\\_and\\_civic\\_effects.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/popups/higher_ed_civic_mission_and_civic_effects.pdf)
- Chase, S. E. (2003). Learning to listen: Narrative principles in a qualitative research methods course. In R. Josselson, A. Lieblich & D. P. Adams (Eds.), *Up close and personal: The teaching and learning of narrative research* (pp. 79-100). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Chickering, A. W. (1967). *Education and identity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Chickering, A. W. & Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Chickering, A.W. (2008). Strengthening democracy and personal development through community engagement. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 118, 87-95. doi:10.1002/ace.298
- Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cohen, A. M. & Brawer, F. B. (2008). *The American community college* (5th Ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Colby, A. Ehrlich, T., Beaumont, E., Rosner, J. & Stephens, J. (2000). Higher education and the development of civic responsibility. In T. Ehrlich (Ed.), *Civic responsibility and higher education* (pp. xxi – xliii). Phoenix: Oryx Press.
- Colby, A., Ehrlich, T., Beaumont, E., & Stephens, J. (2003). Educating undergraduates for responsible citizenship. *Change, November/December*, 40-48. doi:10.1080/00091380309604127
- Coughlan, N. (1975). *Young John Dewey: an essay in American intellectual history*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Delve, C. I., Mintz, S. D. & Stewart, G. M. (1990). Promoting values development through community service: A design. In C.I. Delve, S. D. Mintz & G. M. Stewart (eds.), *New Directions for Student Services: Volume 50. Community service as values education*, 7-29. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. doi:10.1002/ss.37119905003

- Dewey, J. (1902). *The child and the curriculum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Dewey, J. (1922). *Human nature and conduct; an introduction to social psychology*. New York: Holt.
- Dewey, J. (1927). *The public and its problems*. New York: Holt.
- Dewey, J. (1939). *Freedom and culture*. New York: Putnam.
- Dote, L, Cramer, K., Dietz, N. & Grimm R. (2006). *College students helping America*. Washington, DC: Corporation for National and Community Service.
- England, Y. A. & Marcinkowski, T. (2007). Environmental service learning programs in Florida high schools and colleges: Nature, status, and effects as determined by a statewide program census. *Journal of Environmental Education*, 38(4), 51-60. doi:10.3200/JOEE.38.4.51-60
- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S. & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1998). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Exley, R. J. (1996). Commitment to community service learning at Miami-Dade Community College. In M. H. Parsons & C. D. Lisman (Eds.), *Promoting community renewal through civic literacy and service learning. New Directions for Community Colleges*, 93, 35-42. doi:10.1002/cc.36819969306
- Eyler, J. S. (2002). Reflection: Linking service and communities – linking students and communities. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 517-534. doi:10.1111/1540-4560.00274
- Eyler J. S. & Giles, D. E. (1999). *Where's the learning in service learning?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Eyler, J. S., Giles, D. E., Stenson, C. M. & Gray, C. J. (2001). *At a glance: What we know about the effects of service learning on college students, faculty, institutions, and communities, 1993-2000* (3rd ed.) Washington, DC: Learn and Serve America, Corporation for National and Community Service.
- Flynn, W. J. (2005). The search for the learning-centered college. In C. J. McPhail (Ed.), *Establishing and sustaining learning-centered community colleges* (pp. 1-12). Washington, DC: Community College Press.
- Franco, R. W. (2005). The civic role of community colleges: Preparing students for the work of democracy. *The Journal of Public Affairs*. 119-138.

- Fredericksen, P. J. (2000). Does service learning make a difference in student performance? *Journal of Experiential Education*, 23(2), 64-74.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Garcia, R. M. & Robinson, G. (2005). *Transcending disciplines, reinforcing curricula: Why faculty teach with service learning*. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.
- Giroux, H. A. (1992). *Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education*. New York: Routledge.
- Gottlieb, K & Robinson, G. (Eds.) (2006). *A practical guide to integrating civic responsibility into the curriculum (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.
- Halford, S. (2007). *Teaching who I am: Faculty perspectives and practices of academic service learning*. (unpublished doctoral dissertation) Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO.
- Hatcher, J. A., Bringle, R. G. & Muthiah, R. (2004). Designing effective reflection: What matters to service learning? *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Fall 2004. 38-46.
- Hodge, G., Lewis, T., Kramer, K. & Hughes, R. (2001). Collaboration for excellence: Engaged scholarship at Collin County Community College. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 25(9), 675-690. doi:10.1080/106689201753199607
- Holland, B. & Robinson, G. (2008). Community based learning with adults: Bridging efforts in multiple sectors. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 118, 17-30. doi:10.1002/ace.292
- Honnet, E.P. & Paulsen, S. J. (1989). *Principles of good practice for combining service and learning*. Wingspread Special Report, Racine, WI: The Johnson Foundation.
- Howard, J. (2001). *Service learning course design workbook*. Ann Arbor, MI: Edward Ginsberg Center for Community Service, The University of Michigan.
- Jarvis, P., Holford, J. & Griffin, C. (2003). *The theory and practice of learning (2nd Ed.)*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Jaworski, J. (1996). *Synchronicity: The inner path of leadership*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Kahne, J. & Westheimer, J. (1999). In the service of what? The politics of service learning. In J. Claus & D. Ogden (Eds.), *Service learning for youth empowerment and social change* (pp. 25-42). New York: Peter Lang.

- Knefelkamp, L. L. (2008). Civic Identity: Locating self in community. *Diversity and Democracy*, 11(2), 1-3.
- Kolb, D. A. (1981). Learning styles and disciplinary differences. In A.W. Chickering (Ed.), *The modern American college*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning*. Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Komives, S. R., Lucas, N. & McMahon, T. (1998). *Exploring leadership for college students who want to make a difference*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Kozeracki, C. A. (2000). Service learning in the community college. *Community College Review*, 27 (4), 54-70. doi:10.1077/00915521002700405
- Kuh, G. (1995). The other curriculum: Out-of-class experiences associated with student learning and personal development. *Journal of Higher Education*, 6, 123-155. doi:10.2307/2943909
- Kuh, G., Schuh, J., Whitt, E. & Associates (1991). *Involving Colleges*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Leeds, J. (1999). Rationales for service learning: A critical examination. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 6, 112-122.
- Levin, J. S. (2000). The revised institution: The community college mission at the end of the twentieth century. *Community College Review* 28(2), 1-25. doi:10.1177/009155210002800201
- Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R. & Zilber, T. (1998). *Narrative research: Reading, analysis, and interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba E. G. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed., pp. 163-188). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McKenna, M. W. & Rizzo, E. (1999). Outside the classroom: Student perceptions of the benefits of service learning. *Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community*, 18, 111-123.
- McKewen, M.K. (1996). Enhancing student learning and development through service learning. In B. Jacoby (Ed.), *Service learning in higher education* (pp. 53-91). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2001). Andragogy and self-directed learning: Pillars of adult learning theory. In S. B. Merriam (Ed.), *The new update on adult learning theory* (pp. 3-14). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. doi:10.1002/ace.3

- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Moely, B E., Furco, A. & Reed, J. (2008). Charity and social change: The impact of individual preferences on service learning outcomes. *Michigan Journal of Community Service learning*, Fall, 2008. 37-48.
- Morton, K. (1995). The irony of service: Charity, project and social change in service learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 2, 19-33.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. (2004). *Learning Reconsidered*. Washington, DC: NASPA.
- National Campus Compact. (2005). Indicators of engagement project; Revised for community colleges. Retrieved from the National Campus Compact website: <http://www.compact.org/indicators/indicators.html>
- National Campus Compact. (2007). Presidents' declaration on the civic responsibility of higher education. Retrieved from the National Campus Compact website: <http://www.compact.org/resources/declaration.html>.
- Ouellette, S.C. (2003). Painting lessons. In R. Josselson, A. Lieblich, & D.P. Adams (Eds.), *Up close and personal: The teaching and learning of narrative research* (pp. 13-28). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Perry, W. G., Jr. (1968). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years: A scheme*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Perry, W. G., Jr. (1981). Cognitive and ethical growth: The making of meaning. In A. W. Chickering & Associates, *The modern American college: Responding to the new realities of diverse students and a changing society* (pp. 76-116). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Prentice, M. & Garcia, R. M. (2000). Service learning: The next generation in education. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 24. 19-26.
- Prentice, M. & Robinson, G. (2007). *Linking service learning and civic engagement in community college students*. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.
- Prentice, M. (2011). Civic engagement among community college students through service learning. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 35. 842-854. doi:10.1080/10668920802205014
- Price, B. (2002). Laddered questions and qualitative data research interviews. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 37(3), 273-281. doi:10.1046/j.1365-2648.2002.02086.x

- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Reissman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rhoads, R. A. (1997). *Community service and higher learning: Explorations of the caring self*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Rhoads, R. A. (1999). The politics of culture and identity: contrasting images of multiculturalism and monoculturalism. In K. M Shaw, J. R. Valadez & R. A. Rhoads (Eds.) *Community colleges as cultural texts: Qualitative explorations of organizational and student culture* (pp. 103-124). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Rhoads, R. A. & Valadez, J. R. (1996). *Democracy, multiculturalism, and the community college*. Garland: New York.
- Richards, L. (2005). *Handling qualitative data: A practical guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Robinson, G. (2000). Creating sustainable service learning programs: Lessons learned from the Horizons project, 1997-2000. Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.
- Rogers, A. G. (2003). Qualitative research in psychology: Teaching an interpretive process. In R. Josselson, A. Lieblich & D. P. Adams (Eds.), *Up close and personal: The teaching and learning of narrative research* (pp. 49-60). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Saltmarsh, J. (2007). Review. *Michigan Journal of Community Service learning, Fall*, 65-70.
- Sandman, L. R. & Plater, W. M. (2009). Leading the engaged institution. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 147. 13-24. doi:10.1002/he.354
- Sandford, N. (1967). *Where colleges fail: A study of the student as a person*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Sax, L. J. (2000). Citizenship development and the American college student. In T, Ehrlich (Ed.), *Civic responsibility and higher education* (pp. 3-18). Phoenix: Oryx Press.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1989). Marginality and mattering: Key issues in building community. In D. C. Roberts (Ed.), *Designing campus activates to foster a sense of community* (New Directions for Students Services, No. 48, pp. 5-15). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. doi:10.1002/ss.37119894803
- Schmidt, M. E., Marks, J. L. & Derrico, L. (2004). What a difference mentoring makes: Service learning and engagement for college students. *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 12 (2). 205-217. doi:10.1080/1361126042000239947

- Schram, T. H. (2003). *Conceptualizing qualitative inquiry: Mindwork for fieldwork in education and the social sciences*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Schram, T. H. (2006). *Conceptualizing and proposing qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle Ridge, NJ: Pearson.
- Shank, G. D. (2006). *Qualitative research: A personal skills approach*. Upper Saddle Ridge, NJ: Pearson.
- Shaw, K. M. (1999). Defining the self: Constructions of identity in community college students. In K. M. Shaw, J. R. Valadez & R. A. Rhoads, (Eds.), *Community colleges as cultural texts: Qualitative explorations of organizational and student culture* (pp. 153-171). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Shaw, K. M., Valadez, J. R. & Rhoads, R. A. (1999). *Community colleges as cultural texts: Qualitative explorations of organizational and student culture*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Speck, B. W. (2001). Why service-learning? *New Directions for Higher Education*, 114. 3-13. doi:10.1002/he.8.abs
- Strage, A. A. (2000). Service learning: Enhancing learning outcomes in a college level lecture course. *Michigan Journal of Community Service learning*, 7, 5-13.
- Tinto, V. (1995). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vella, J. (1994). *Learning to listen, learning to teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Vogelgesang, L. J. & Astin, A. W. (2000). Comparing the effects of community service and service learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service learning*, 7, 25-34.
- Wang, Y. & Jackson, G. (2005). Forms and dimensions of civic involvement. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Spring, 2005. 39-48.
- Wang, Y. & Rodgers, R. (2006). Impact of service learning and social justice education on college students' cognitive development. *NASPA Journal*, 43(2). 316-337.
- Westheimer, J. & Kahne, J. (2003a). What kind of citizen: Political choices and educational goals. *Campus Compact Reader: Service learning and civic education*. Winter. 1-13.
- Westheimer, J. & Kahne, J. (2003b). Reconnecting education to democracy: Democratic dialogues. *Phi Delta Kappan*, September. 9-14.
- Wheatley, M. J. (1999). *Leadership and the new science: Learning about organizations from an orderly universe* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Winkler, A. (1994). Communitarianism. *Utne Reader*. November/December. 105-108.

## **APPENDIX A - Service Learning Community College: Organizational Context**

Service Learning Community College (SLCC) is the pseudonym I selected for my research site. I chose SLCC because it had a well-established, institutionalized service learning program. Service learning was effectively utilized as a teaching strategy across a broad range of curricular programs. Additionally, service learning was increasingly being promoted in a variety of co-curricular areas. Service Learning Community College also had an established network of community agencies and partners representing a diverse variety of service options for student engagement. This context provided a comprehensive community college well suited to my research questions investigating service learning as a civic pedagogy.

The information in this appendix was gathered by reviewing various public documents, publications and resources located on the institution's web site. I have chosen not to provide specific citations for this information to protect the anonymity of my research site and the students who participated. Readers can use this information to contextualize the stories, analysis and finding I have presented to evaluate how my results may inform similar service learning programs and student experiences in other institutional contexts.

Service Learning Community College is comprehensive, multi-campus community college with open access admissions. The main campus is situated in a suburb of a major urban area in the United States. SLCC is a member of the American Association of Community Colleges and is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. SLCC was founded in mid-1960's. SLCC offers 84 programs of study in both the vocational and technical careers, arts and sciences, applied sciences, and transfer programs. SLCC offers GED instruction, adult basic education and developmental course in support of its open access admissions policy. SLCC also offers on-line instruction and degree programs as part of its comprehensive curriculum.

In 2009-2010 SLCC enrolled just over 8,100 students representing a full time equivalent of approximately 6,600. Specific enrollment demographics data is summarized in Table Three. SLCC awarded 776 degrees and certificates in 2010, and the three year success rate for the 2007 cohort was 52.5%. Additionally, the 2010 GED enrollment at SLCC was 863, and the 2010 non-credit enrollment was 38,200.

**Table Three - SLCC 2009-2010 Enrollment Demographics**

| <b>2009-2010 Total Enrollment = 8101 (FTE: 6591)</b> |                             |  |                 |                       |
|--|-----------------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Residence:</b>                                    |                             |  |                 |                       |
| 76.4%: in state                                      | 21.8%: out of state         | 1.8%: international  |                 |                       |
| <b>Age:</b>  |                             |  |                 |                       |
| 9.5%: under age 18                                   | 56.9%: age 18-22            | 18.2%: age 23-30   | 8.8%: age 31-39 | 6.6%: Over age 40     |
| <b>Gender:</b>                                       |                             |  |                 |                       |
| 56.2%: female  | 43.8%: male                 |  |                 |                       |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity:</b>                               |                             |  |                 |                       |
| 82.3%: White   | 6.6%: Black                 | 2.9%: Hispanic   | 0.8%: Asian     | 0.7%: American Indian |
| 0.7%: Two or more Races                              |                             | 8.8%: No Response  |                 |                       |
| <b>Enrollment Status:</b>                            |                             |  |                 |                       |
| 58.6%: full time                                     | 41.4%: part time            | <i>(2010 Average number of credit hours per student = 10.78)</i> |                 |                       |
| <b>Program of Study:</b>                             |                             |  |                 |                       |
| 69.8%: Arts and Sciences                             | 20.2%: Career and Technical | 10%: Developmental   |                 |                       |

The college district encompasses a seven county region with a total population of 168,874. The adjacent metro area population totals 728, 963. The region is a mixture of rural and bedroom communities with a diverse economic base. The college has a main campus located on 282 acres at the Eastern edge of the metro suburbs. The college also has a second campus on 8 acres in a nearby community, and three outreach centers. SLCC generated \$30,778,488 total operating revenue in the 2010 fiscal year. Full time tuition and fees at SLCC in 2009-2010 totaled \$3, 168 per semester, yielding tuition and fee revenue of \$18,279,735 in fiscal year 2010. SLCC received \$8,688,653 in state appropriations, and \$1,360,563 in federal funding; as well as \$1,028,700 in other funding. SLCC employs 1213 individuals to operate its comprehensive programs and services across the two campuses and three outreach centers.

Service Learning Community College is committed to serving the educational and economic development needs of its district. This commitment is evident in the institution's mission and core values.

***SLCC MISSION:*** *Service Learning Community College is a learning community committed to excellence in meeting educational needs and improving the quality of life through programs, partnerships and community involvement.*

***SLCC CORE VALUES:***

*"We believe creating an environment where people treat each other with a sense of dignity and self-worth and where people convey genuine concern for helping others to achieve their goals will add value to the learning experience."*

*"We believe acting with purpose, vigor, and passion and merging of our personal and work values will enable us to fulfill our pledge to provide opportunities which encourage students to reach their full potential."*

*"We believe in articulating and promoting academic and personal standards focused on raising self-expectations in striving for excellence will provide an environment that leads to success."*

The mission and core values of SLCC promote a culture of serving the community through programs and educational opportunities that value human potential and create capacity for active civic life by students, faculty and staff. Service learning and civic engagement are included in SLCC's current strategic priorities, and have been included prominently in the institution's goals for several years.

***SLCC 2011 Strategic Plan – Goal #6:***

*"SLCC faculty, staff, and students will remain engaged in partnerships reflecting our shared commitment to both civic engagement with community service and the needs of our diverse global society."*

The metrics used to evaluate the achievement of this goal include the number of students active in service learning activities, the number of faculty incorporating service learning in their course curriculum; and number of extracurricular volunteer hours provided by the thirty campus student organizations and 16 athletic teams on campus.

For the past several years, SLCC has been named to Presidential Honor Roll for Community Service which recognizes exemplary service efforts and service to America's communities. The commitment to service learning and community engagement begins with president of SLCC, who is an active member of Campus Compact regionally and nationally. This commitment is clearly articulated and publicly demonstrated by the SLCC president.

*Our faculty and professional staff had taken a leadership role to provide opportunities for our students to be involved in community volunteer efforts and civic engagement. We hope that this spirit of giving will become a part of our students' lives permanently and will be reflected in those career paths they choose in the future.*

*SLCC President Statement*

The service learning program at SLCC is institutionalized throughout the curriculum and across all disciplines. SLCC employs a full time Service Learning Coordinator who reports to the Vice President of Instruction. The various academic and co-curricular service learning initiatives sponsored by SLCC are designed with two main goals:

- *Meeting community needs, which helps strengthen the community; and*
- *Advancing students' understanding of specific course content and related civic learning objectives.*

In the past year, SLCC assigned approximately 800 students in various placements with over 100 community partner agencies. SLCC is a past participant in the American Association of Community Colleges' *Broadening Horizons through Service Learning* grant program.

Prior to selecting SLCC as the research site for my study, I interviewed the SLCC President, Vice President of Instruction, and Service Learning Coordinator. After securing approval from the President to partner with SLCC as my research site Judy Sloan, the Service Learning Coordinator, agreed to serve as the gatekeeper for my research study. Judy facilitated communication with the service learning instructors who nominated students to participate based on their academic reflection assignments and assisted in scheduling the student interviews.

## History and Evolution of the Service Learning Program at SLCC

Judy Sloan also provided a contextual overview of the history and evolution of the service learning program at SLCC. She began by describing the creation and evolution of the service learning program through grant funding.

*There was a faculty person in our construction technology department, the program chair, who had a strong partnership and served on the board of Habitat for Humanity. That kind of started the process, "My students need lab time. Habitat for Humanity is building houses and supplying the materials." It was a great opportunity for the construction technology department and students in that program to get the experience by partnering with Habitat for Humanity here in the city. And as far as I know that's the longest service learning project that the college currently has. That faculty person isn't here anymore; however, that department still is one of the biggest supporters of service learning. Their students do great work. But a problem was his knowledge was limited to Habitat, the agency he was familiar with. So they applied for a Horizons grant through AACC and service learning progressed from just being in the construction department. Then they applied for and received a Title 3 grant. The Title 3 grant was for a number of things including service learning. My position was fully funded as a Title 3/Service Learning coordinator the first year. Then over the course of five years, it became the responsibility of the institution. I honestly believe the Title 3 grant contributed directly to service learning being one of the key goals on our strategic plan for the college. And it's been one of the college's strategic goals since 2003.*

Next, Judy described how her position and the service learning program moved from grant funding to institutional funding, and from reporting through student services to the current structure reporting to academic instruction. She also described the impact of administrative support on the growth and sustainability of the program.

*The first year I started, which was the summer of 2006, my position was still partially funded by the Title 3 grant. And when the grant ended my position and my budget was completely funded by the college. My position was originally on the student services affairs side of the institution. But in order to get faculty to buy in they moved the position over to the academic side when I started; which I think was a good decision. I think a large part of switching it to the academic side had to do our academic vice president at the time. He was hard core about service learning; however, that kind of turned some people away. It was almost that he was so pro service learning that faculty felt intimidated to take part in it. And so when he left they dropped off because they felt forced into doing it. They felt they had to do it rather than sincerely wanting to do it, which was unfortunate. Now it seems like each semester we'll have another class adding it on. It's kind of like one class at a time. An instructor might say, "Let me try it in this*

*section.” And then it goes well, so they’ll put it in all their sections, and those go well. Then another teacher in a different section with that same course will be like, “You’ve already done all the work. Let me see your syllabus.” Then they’ll add it. It’s kind of like a very slow moving domino across campus. It’s progressed from one program doing it to having it go across several different departments. The majority of our service learning is set up in our programs. It seems easier for faculty to incorporate into their program. Vet tech works with the local shelter, construction tech with Habitat, business management and marketing does it, and human services is a good fit. The majority of our service learning is in programs; that’s just how it started.*

Despite the unintentional challenges created by the strong-arm support of the former Vice President of instruction, Judy was very clear that administrative support have been the key to the programs visibility and success.

*The administration has been really supportive. A couple of years ago I did a huge presentation for our staff development day for everybody on campus: faculty, staff, and everybody. I showed videos of students in projects and some of their verbal journals, and I showed some pictures. I also showed examples of what current faculty were doing, and things that were lighthearted and funny so I could tell if they were paying attention if they’d laugh at the right times. Being given the opportunity to have access to everybody is a big thing.*

*On the academic side, when faculty are going for promotions and for their reviews, they can include service learning in their portfolios and it’s part of the whole process. So it is definitely a benefit for faculty promotion-wise. Administration has been supportive on campus and that’s played a huge role in our success. [The SLCC President] is very supportive through involvement with Campus Compact. Anytime we do an event that’s open to the public, he makes an appearance. He gives quotes to the newspaper. He’ll be one of the first to come and talk and give his thank you’s and his support. I think it is good for the community members and agencies and the faculty that are there to see that. So he’s been extremely supportive visually and verbally for service on campus, and that’s always good. That trickles down to the vice presidents and the deans and program chairs.*

Judy spoke very highly of the support of the SLCC president, as well as other academic leaders and the faculty in creating an institutional culture that supports service learning.

Judy also shared her perspective on the development of the service learning program. She shared stories of training new faculty based on their interests and motivation for including service learning in the curriculum. She also talked about creating collaborative partnerships with students, faculty, and community agencies to provide meaningful academic service learning

experiences.

*I get to work a lot with students, but the majority of service learning we do on our campus is academic based. So my role is to link students with opportunities in the community and kind of be that liaison. I help community agencies understand what their role is and what service learning is; and how it's different than "community service" which often times has the connotation of court ordered. A big part of what I try to do is provide is technical support to faculty and staff to as far as what service learning is, how to best integrate it, and best practices then linking them with training opportunities like conferences or webinars or the library of Campus Compact books that I have in my office. I try to assist faculty with what their needs are for their course. I also work with staff on campus such as our athletic teams so that they can be involved in the community, but it's not necessarily academic based. It's the same with our international programs, too. They're looking for more of the cultural experience.*

Judy's efforts as the service learning coordinator support faculty no matter what their motivation to use service learning. Her various descriptions of the diverse curricular programs and service learning initiatives reflect her commitment to serving the community in any capacity where there is need.

*I think part of our success is the collaboration piece where projects can match with a need. Recently SLCC applied for a grant because an agency came to me with a need. There are five different agencies on this one block area downtown. It's really kind of neat, like they're all on the same campus. This shelter (it's like Boys and Girls Club and a homeless shelter) had some open green space. They said, "You know our shelter is desperate for fresh produce. We have to provide meals for the kids at the club and we have no fresh produce. Our budgets are zero. What can we do?" So I said, "Well, there's this grant..."*

In applying for the grant for the grant to facilitate this partnership, Judy creates connections between faculty and community partners, and between students and various learning opportunities. Through these partnerships, service learning opportunities and civic engagement are enhanced.

*This semester our marketing class partner is partnering with the American Cancer Society to do Daffodil Days fundraiser. And for the last 4-5 years, our students have been the top sellers in the county. That's \$5000 every spring just from our campus, actually just from a class of 30 students. I like to use that example when I'm working with agencies saying, "Our students aren't fundraisers for you; however, we're open to project ideas that have a huge impact because our students are capable." Once I can*

*convince an agency that our students are capable of participating in high impact projects, that's where we start to see the big results. Once the agency decides that that they're willing to allow that kind of participation from community college students, then we see some of our best projects. So that's just one of them. Last May our construction technology program students completed two full, two story houses from scratch from beginning to end. That was a huge project that we did over the course of the year.*

Judy's belief in the capacity of students as service learners emerges from the intersection of her roles as a service learner while she was a community college student, as the director of a community agency, and as the SLCC service learning coordinator. Her passion and commitment are an integral factor in the continued growth and success of service learning across the entire institution.

*I have been involved with service learning as a student, and I've been involved with service learning as an agency person in my previous experiences; but I have not yet been involved with service learning as a faculty person. Our program started out bare bones in the beginning, so it's definitely been a progression up to this point. The administration and deans and program chairs have been very supportive of service learning on campus. I'm lucky in that regard 'cause I know there are other institutions that struggle with that or don't have a service learning office just a faculty member doing it on the side. I feel fortunate that we have an office, a full time coordinator, student workers, and AmeriCorps volunteers. All of these things wouldn't be possible without support from higher administration. What's been helpful is Service Learning Community College is a member of Campus Compact. And our president is currently involved. For the four years that I've been here, we've always been members. And I believe that for the two years previous to when I was here, as I worked with that coordinator as a community agency. So we've been members of Campus Compact for several years. Partnering and making sure we meet actual needs is beneficial for everyone: the community, and the recipients or clients of that agency, and students are involved so the whole thing's reciprocated. Everybody involved benefits from that. We do have a number of students that commute from as far as an hour or more. There are certain activities, programs, or athletics that draw students here. Students are willing to travel to come here, and so we try to keep that in mind when we're placing them with service learning projects. We want them to be active in their hometown. There is that civic engagement component. We want students to be active in their communities. Even those who aren't from here can take that knowledge and experience back with them wherever they go after college, and be active in the community where they decide to live. I also try to monitor what goes on so that I can make sure that that all those activities and all of those projects and everything that students are doing in the community are highlighted in a positive sense.*

Judy understands the connections between service learning and civic engagement. She concluded

our interview by talking about the future direction and growth she envisions for SLCC in the coming years.

*It would be nice to see the program grow so much as to actually have a center. Right now we have an office which is great. And where it was just me, now I do have two work studies student workers and we have three or four AmeriCorps volunteers on campus. We also were selected to pilot AmeriCorps recruiter program where that person was specifically their role was to recruit students to join AmeriCorps anywhere and everywhere for the whole community and for the state. And there are still areas we're working on like noting service learning on transcripts. We've had several meetings about seeing how we could do that.*

The history, growth, and long term success of the service learning efforts at SLCC across the entire curriculum combined with the variety of service experiences and community partnerships available to students provided an excellent context for my research exploring service learning as civic pedagogy. This context was enhanced by SLCC's mission as a comprehensive community college with an institutional culture of community engagement.

## **APPENDIX B: Participant Selection Documents**

### **E-mail to SLCC Faculty soliciting student nominations**

My name is Keith Robinder and I am a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership Program at Colorado State University. To complete my dissertation, I am researching the civic experiences of community college service learning participants. The attached summary provides additional information on my research proposal. This research is has been approved by the Colorado State University IRB and is supported by SLCC President Jensen.

My qualitative research will focus on students' stories of their service learning experiences, focusing on their participation as community members and leaders. My research questions explore the civic themes that emerge from students' stories of participating in service learning with an emphasis on citizenship for the common good.

As a faculty member who teaches using service learning, you have a unique opportunity to nominate students to participate in my research. Specifically, I am seeking nominations of current SLCC students who you believe have had particularly meaningful service learning experiences, as revealed in their service learning reflection assignments. I need your assistance to identify these students. I will then contact these students directly and invite them to participate. Participation is voluntary, and all the information students choose to share with me will remain private and kept confidential.

Participating in this study will give students an opportunity to further reflect on their experiences through a narrative research interview that will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Students will also participate in at least one follow-up interview that will last an additional 30-45 minutes. These interviews will take place in a meeting room at the Student Center at the SLCC main campus (or a suitable alternate location). Students who agree to participate in the study will also be asked to provide a duplicate copy of a service learning reflection assignment previously submitted as part of your course.

The potential benefits of participating include an opportunity for students to further reflect upon their service learning experiences as active community members and leaders. Students who participate will also contribute to the growing qualitative knowledge base about service learning and civic engagement, particularly at a comprehensive community college. Upon the completion of the study, I will be presenting the findings of my research at a future SLCC service learning faculty development session.

If students currently or recently enrolled in your classes have described particularly meaningful service learning experiences in their reflection assignments, please consider nominating them to participate in this study. If you would like to nominate students, please respond to this message by 5:00pm on Monday, November 1, 2010 and include each nominee's name and any additional contact information you want to provide. There is no limit to the number of students you can nominate.

Judy Sloan, the SLCC Service Learning Coordinator, will be assisting me in contacting the nominated students and inviting them to participate. She has agreed to serve as a point of contact for students and faculty who have questions or concerns about this project. If you have any questions or would like additional information, you may also contact me directly at [KeithRobinder@aol.com](mailto:KeithRobinder@aol.com) or by calling me (515) 520-7824.

I hope you will consider nominating students to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Keith Robinder

Doctoral Student in Community College Leadership at Colorado State University, and Assistant Dean of Students at Iowa State University

### **E-mail to SLCC students inviting them to participate**

You have been identified as a potential participant for a research study about community college students who have participated in Service Learning. I am a doctoral student in the Community College Leadership Program at Colorado State University. I am researching the civic experiences of service learning participants.

My study will give you an opportunity to reflect on your experiences as a student and community member in an interview that will last between 60 and 90 minutes. I will also ask you to participate in at least one follow-up interview that will last 30-45 minutes. These interviews will take place in a meeting room at the Student Center at the SLCC main campus (or a suitable alternate location). You will also be asked to submit a duplicate copy of service learning reflection assignment, previously submitted as part of your academic course work.

I look forward to the opportunity to work with you and learn from your experiences. If you have any questions or would like to participate, please contact me by responding to this e-mail [KeithRobinder@aol.com](mailto:KeithRobinder@aol.com) or calling (515) 520-7824.

Sincerely,

Keith Robinder

Doctoral Student in Community College Leadership at Colorado State University, and Assistant Dean of Students at Iowa State University

## Participant Profile Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions about yourself. If you have questions about the information requested, please ask for clarification. You may leave any questions blank if you don't know or prefer not to provide the information requested.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please print legibly. Thanks!*

e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

May I contact you by e-mail?

Yes No

Telephone #: \_\_\_\_\_

May I contact you by phone?

Yes No

### Academic Information

Major: \_\_\_\_\_

Year in school: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of credits completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle one option: Full Time Student Part Time Student

### Demographic Information

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: Female Male

Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

### Choice of Pseudonym

To maintain confidentiality, all participants will be described in the study using an assumed name/identity. If you have a preference on the name used as your research pseudonym, please provide your suggestion.

Fictitious Research Identity: \_\_\_\_\_

*First Name*

*Last Name*

Thank you for Participating!

## Participant Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study  
Colorado State University

Title of Study: Service Learning as Civic Pedagogy:  
A Narrative Inquiry Exploring the Student Experience.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Timothy Davies; Professor, School of Education,  
Colorado State University; School of Education, Room 208  
Fort Collins, CO 80523-1588  
970-491-5199 or [Timothy.Davies@ColoState.edu](mailto:Timothy.Davies@ColoState.edu)

Co-Principal Investigator: Keith Robinder; PhD Candidate, School of Education,  
Iowa State University; 1010 Student Services Building  
Ames, IA 50011-2222  
515-520-1521 or [KeithRobinder@aol.com](mailto:KeithRobinder@aol.com)

You are invited to be in a research study of community college service learning participants. Keith Robinder, a PhD student at Colorado State University is conducting the research under the guidance of Dr. Timothy Davies. You were invited to participate because you have participated in academic service learning as a part of your educational coursework. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to be in this study, I, Keith Robinder, the researcher, will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in one 60-90 minute interview which will be conducted in person in a meeting room at the Student Center at the SLCC [main] campus.
- Submit a duplicate copy of a service learning reflection assignment previously submitted as a part of your coursework.
- Participate in one 30-45 minute follow-up interview which will be conducted in person in a meeting room at the Student Center at the [main] campus. During this interview we will review the summary of the initial interview.
- Participate in any mutually agreed upon additional interviews needed to adequately tell the story of your service learning experience.

What are the benefits of taking part in the research?

The indirect benefits of your participation are that you will be given the opportunity to reflect on your experiences as a service learner and community member and to contribute to the growing knowledge base about civic engagement and service learning. There are no direct benefits.

Page 1 of 2 - Participant's Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

There are no known risks associated with participating in this study. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

Do I have to take part in the study?

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

What else do I need to know?

All records for this study will be confidential. Any published report will not include identifying information for any participant, your institution, or community. The interviews will be digitally recorded. The audio files will be deleted after they are transcribed. Only the researcher will have access to these electronic research records. A summary of the initial interview will be sent to you for review at an e-mail address of your choice or via postal mail if you choose, prior to the follow up interview.

You may ask any questions now or in the future by contacting me, Keith Robinder, at (515) 520-7824 or [KeithRobinder@aol.com](mailto:KeithRobinder@aol.com). You can also address questions about my research partnership with Service Learning Community College or contact me indirectly through Judy Sloan, SLCC Service-Learning Coordinator.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study that you would like to address with someone other than the researcher, contact my faculty advisor and principal investigator, Dr. Tim Davies, at (970) 491-5199 or [Timothy.Davies@ColoState.edu](mailto:Timothy.Davies@ColoState.edu) or Janell Barker, Colorado State University Human Research Administrator at (970) 491-1655 or [Janell.Barker@colostate.edu](mailto:Janell.Barker@colostate.edu).

You will be given a copy of this form for your records. This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects in research on December 1, 2010.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated above and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing two pages.

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Page 2 of 2 Participant's Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C - Interview Guide

Tell me about your life.

How did you grow up?

Describe a typical day for you.

Tell me about your early memories of service or volunteering.

Describe the connections between these experiences and your life today.

Share with me the story of your academic service learning experiences.

What were your initial thoughts when project was assigned?

What was the most fun, challenging, surprising part of the experience?

What was your role? / How did you contribute?

Tell me what these experiences have meant for you.

How have you changed based on your service learning experiences?

What have you learned about yourself through your service or volunteer experiences?

Tell me about some of the most memorable moments from your service experiences.

Why do these moments stand out for you?

How did your service learning efforts benefit others in your community?

What did you learn about your community through your service experiences?

How did participating in service learning change your thinking about your community?

How has your thinking about being a part a community changed over time?

How would you describe the relationship between your service learning experiences and your roles as a community member?

Describe how your thinking about service and giving back to your community has changed over time?

What are your core values?

Tell me where these values come from in your life and why they are important to you.

Describe the skills you have that benefit others. Tell me how you developed these skills.

How do your experiences serving your community connect back to your life's story:

your childhood, your family, your community, your values, your various roles and responsibilities?

Tell me about how these experiences shape your future goals/plans.

What other stories or experiences would you like to share?

**Follow up, probing questions:**

Describe was the experience was like.

Tell me why that particular moment stands out for you.

How did this experience change your perspective?

What made you start thinking about this?

Is there another way of seeing this?

What do you think this means?

How would you describe/evaluate this experience?

How would others describe/evaluate this experience?

Why did you choose to focus on that particular experience?