

El Salvador and a Vacation Program for Vulnerable Children:

A Guided Thesis Project

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## Proposal for a Vacation Program at a Foster Transition Home in El Salvador<sup>1</sup>

Last year I had the opportunity to visit El Salvador twice to conduct my fieldwork. El Salvador is a country that is close to home for me given that my biological father was originally from El Salvador. Because of this background, I desired to use my fieldwork to find out more about the foster care system in El Salvador, foster transition homes and the children's experiences in these. During my first trip I was able to visit a home for disabled children, volunteer at a foster transition home, visit the central offices of the Salvadorian Institute for the Integral Development of Children and Adolescents (ISNA) and conduct various interviews to members of these organizations. My second trip was solely spent at Agape, the foster transition home I had volunteered during my first visit.

In this guided thesis there are two sections: a proposal for a project and essays that explain the theoretical foundation for this vacation program. The first section includes my proposal and focuses on my experience, observations, and interviews at the Foster Transition Home Agape. Part two includes three essays on Contextualization, Qualitative Inquiry, and International Community Development (ICD) values. The first essay on Contextualization, will tell about the macro and micro cultural environment where this program will be implemented. The second essay on Qualitative Inquiry will expose the use of Qualitative methods as it related to my fieldwork and my future work in Community Development. Finally, the third essay is on International Community Development values and will state my values and theology of service, how the ICD program has transformed who I am and how my fieldwork site re-inspired and infused my desire to continue to serve vulnerable Salvadorian children.

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<sup>1</sup> Author's Notes: Portions of this paper were written for the following classes: Community Development and Culture Studies in a Global Context. Some names of individuals and organizations have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

## 1. Causes of Child Vulnerability in El Salvador

### 1.1 Poverty

The two leading causes of poverty in El Salvador include the economy and crime. The stagnation of the economy is tied to poverty. This is especially harmful to the youth who are now struggling to find work (Matsangou, World Finance). El Salvador's economy is also highly reliant on the United States. According to the World Bank, El Salvador sent more than 44 percent of all exports to the US in 2017. The unemployment rate was over seven percent in 2017 and is over fourteen percent for youth sixteen to twenty-two (trading economics, El Salvador Unemployment). This does not include underemployment statistics which would make both statistics higher.

The youth of El Salvador comprise of over twenty percent of the population. According to Segovia, this population faces various challenges that include: "low levels of education and vocational training, a lack of prior work experience and inflexible labor laws are all barriers to youth employment" (Segovia, Bringing Youth in labor markets). Over 25 percent of children below the age of 5 experience extreme poverty in El Salvador and 36 percent of the rural population live in poverty.

El Salvador has a population of approximately 6.5 million, however it is also estimated that 60,000 are gang members and another 600,000 are "believed to be in the groups' extended networks, including family members of free and imprisoned gang members who live off the money extorted by the gangs" (Kinosian, El Salvador's Gang Violence). According to a study by the Central Bank of El Salvador the cost that gangs incurred on the economy in 2014 was "approximately four billion dollars – equivalent to... 16 percent of its GDP" (France24). El Salvador needs new alternative economic models to reduce poverty and give gang members and

their families other means of financial support. This could also alleviate the chronic violence that is currently afflicting El Salvador.

Poverty is therefore a significant factor that impedes many parents from being present in their children's lives. In 2016, the CIA reported that more than 30% of the Salvadorian population lived under the poverty line. This statistic might be even higher now. This means that many children have to grow up with very little parental presence. The parents usually have to work long hours and sometimes take various buses to get to their workplace. The children spend most of the day with other family members or unsupervised. Additionally, many parents have also left for the United States in search of a better economic future. This migration leaves children vulnerable to the environmental forces currently at play in El Salvador. Godofredo Aguillón, a sociology faculty member at the Universidad El Salvador, has even said that "the abandonment of children due to the parents' migration has destroyed the Salvadorian social structure" (El Mundo). This structure has traditionally been heavily dependent on the family system as El Salvador is a collectivist society. Therefore, the impact has been noticeable.

## 1.2 Physical Abandonment

In the documentary titled *La Vida Loca (the crazy life)* Ana Egriselda Arevalo alias "La Chucky" is a member of the Mara 18 gang (Eighteen Street Gang). In the film, you can see her participating in different gang-related activities as well as other typical day to day life activities like going to get an identification card. During some of these activities, she is carrying a little two-year-old girl while being pregnant with her second child. Ana seems to be about nineteen years old. As the documentary continues, we find out that Ana was abandoned by her mother when she was a baby. She seems to have a lot of anger and hate towards her biological mother for this. During the film, you can see her adoptive mother telling her that her mother gave her

away because she would say that the baby's father was a robber and she did not want to have the daughter of a robber. During a phone call with her biological sister, Ana shares that at some point while growing up she was at ISNA, at the Aldeas Infantiles (another foster transition home), at Rosa Virginia (another home) and even imprisoned at the women's jail. At some point in the film, Ana even goes to meet her biological mother. The biological mother would not talk to her or come out of her house (Poveda).

Closer towards the end of the film, La Chucky gets arrested with other female members of the gang accused of stealing different appliances. As the police were arresting her, La Chucky kept shouting to other members of the neighborhood asking to take the baby and to go to ISNA the next day because the police would most likely take away her older child (Poveda). This is how many children in El Salvador end up at ISNA and eventually in a foster transition home like the one I visited. Unfortunately for La Chucky, she had also been in one of these homes, and now her children might also end in one of these homes due to the lifestyle she has chosen.

### 1.3 Emotional Abandonment

Additionally, children often leave school to return to their neighborhoods. Some children at the foster transition home reported that they hated being at home. "Lorenzo shared with me that he hated being at home, he said his house was tiny but that he also did not like his mother. Instead, he would spend his time outside chatting with the "bichos" (a reference to gang members in Salvadorian slang) (Lorenzo, Personal Interview)." This is the case for many children. When I asked him if he was afraid of the "bichos" he told me that if you do not involve yourself with them, they do not do anything to you. Later, however, it did sound like he liked or was getting emotionally involved with the sister of a gang member during his visits home. I felt sad that he could be choosing to go down this route (Lorenzo, Personal Interview).

In a documentary titled *La Vida Loca (the crazy life)*, an adolescent goes to juvenile jail. The judge sets different obligations on which family needs to follow through. The adolescent's name is Erick; he has no father in the picture, and the only one showing for his court dates are his mother and, sometimes, his aunt. What was surprising to me is that the mother was not doing what the judge had asked her to do. For example, to enroll him in a school again or to find schools that would accept him, so Erick kept getting three more months of jail again and again. Finally, even Erick told his mom: "I told you, I told you what needed to be done, I also told my aunt, but you guys have not done anything. You guys don't want me out" (Poveda). I was surprised that Erick seemed to be taking a parental role in all of this as he was a child.

Adolfo Vidal, the coordinator of a program called *Plan* in El Salvador, has explained how "there is an abandonment that is less visible, and it is the emotional abandonment" (El Mundo). He explains how "I can have my son or daughter at home but not interact with them. I can have a house built and ready for children, but if I do not care for them, they will not develop a sense of belonging to the family" (El Mundo). This is what is happening to many children like Erick and the adolescent I spoke to at the orphanage: they have not developed a sense of belonging to a family.

#### 1.4 Gang Violence

Gang life in El Salvador is a major cause for the number of children currently in the foster system. Unfortunately, the levels of homicidal in El Salvador are also a major factor impacting the physical abandonment of children. The following figure (figure 1) shows the homicidal rates per municipality in El Salvador. San Salvador, the capital, has higher rates per 100,000 people. This is the reality that many children in El Salvador are witnessing day in and day out.



Figure 1: State of Fear

Source: Motlagh, Jason. "Inside El Salvador's battle with violence, poverty, and U.S. policy."

National Geographic, Mar 2019, pp. 88 and 89.

El Salvador had many children left orphaned during the civil war. Unfortunately, El Salvador continues to be one of the deadliest places in the Americas long after its civil war ended. This map shows homicidal rates by municipality. Every dot represents a homicide.

### 1.5 Summary of Community Impacts

According to the local newspaper *El Mundo*, 38.5% of Salvadorian children suffer physical or emotional abandonment (*El Mundo*) in El Salvador; this statistic was reported in 2015. This issue is also what is keeping "high indices of criminal activity in El Salvador" (*El*

Mundo). The newspaper also reported that it is common for boys, girls, and adolescents to live with only one parent, a close family member, or even a neighbor. The results of the last Multiple Purpose Home survey handed out by the Ministry of Economy in 2013, reflected a population of 2,201,807 for children and adolescents between birth age to seventeen. This number represented 35% of the total Salvadorian population. Of the 2,201,807 children and adolescents, 610,569 live without one of their parents due to abandonment or parent separation, 148,564 live without their parents because those parents have migrated, and 88,032 minors live without one of their parents due to death.

In the newspaper article from El Mundo, Godofredo Aguillón, a faculty member of the Sociology department in the El Salvador University, asserts how the family is the primary source of socialization for a child and references school as the second most important source. According to Aguillón, living without a mother or a father does not provide children with the optimum psychosocial development they need. I can say that I observed this gap at the foster transition home I visited. Though the home is doing everything in its power to provide a holistic home, the reality is that the children do not have the social interaction, guidance, and love that they would find in a healthy smaller family.

Concerning education, many children have dropped out of school due to violence. Centeno, a writer for UNICEF, described how “Bryan, 14, and Jaime, 16, have been out of school for four years now.” She then went on to explain that they are not alone because, according to reports by the Ministry of Education (Centeno, “Stolen childhood: Gang violence in El Salvador”) “over 15,000 students dropped out of school in 2015 due to violence.” If this trend continues, it may significantly impact the opportunities and income these children will have when they become adults. Furthermore, if school is the second source of socialization as



Aguillón explained, then children and adolescents in El Salvador are growing up with a significant deficiency in healthy socialization. Aguillón added that “growing up without a family nucleus reduces the possibilities that the minor will get the chance of having values and behaviors modeled that will help him or her to not get involved in delinquent acts” (El Mundo). School, therefore, could be another source of modeling and instilling values.

According to one of the major newspapers in El Salvador, a child is abandoned by their family in El Salvador every sixteen hours (Hernandez, Cada 16 horas). In recent years, El Salvador has undertaken critical stepping stones to defend the rights of children and adolescents in El Salvador. In 2009, the law for the Integral Protection for Children and Adolescents (abbreviated to LEPINA in Spanish) was approved, followed by its implementation in 2010 (UNICEF, Informe de Situacion de la Niñez). There have also been other initiatives: The National Policy for the Integral Protection for Children and Adolescents (abbreviated to PNPNA in Spanish) created in 2013, and the creation of fifteen departmental boards for the protection of children and adolescents (UNICEF, Informe de Situacion de la Niñez). The four causes of the high number of children in foster care are: poverty, physical and emotional abandonment and gang violence. In the next section I will discuss a foster care home I visited during my fieldwork in El Salvador highlighting its background, model, and what I witnessed on my visit.

## 2. The Agape Foundation

The Agape Foundation is a Christian non-profit organization located in El Salvador. Its purpose is to restore the lives of children who have experienced abandonment. Agape does this through a holistic model, providing the children with physical care, emotional care, education, and spiritual support. Throughout its 23 years of operation, Fundacion Agape has mainly relied on local and US donors to fund their activities and operations.

During its early years, Agape started in a small rental house that accommodated only boys. Soon after, Agape was able to rent another house where they accommodated girls. Then, a few years later Agape was blessed with the donation of twenty-two acres of land not too far from the city. This donation allowed Agape to move the children to a more extensive property where they can now be all together, have more room to play and explore and are also surrounded by nature.

At this time, Agape has about forty children under its care. The age of the children ranges between four and eighteen years old. Some of the children under their care are parentless; others have been brought to the home by the police following severe neglect and abuse. According to Agape, many times the parents of the children are living risky lifestyles that include substance abuse, prostitution, and gang affiliation. Many of the parents are also serving jail time. These lifestyles expose the children to abuse, neglect and the possibility of abandonment.

During my time at Agape, I was able to witness this reality. Some of the children do not know if they have parents. There was, for example, a set of five siblings who had been abandoned in the middle of a storm. The sub-director told me that they have more siblings, but the oldest siblings had fled during the storm. Leaving the little ones behind and vulnerable. None of the children look very much alike. According to the sub-director, their mother is a prostitute. One of the older girls at home has an IQ deficiency. They presume that their mother was probably on drugs during the pregnancy (Carolina, Personal Interview).

### 3. Proposed Intervention and Project

#### 3.1 Inspiration from a holiday celebration

My second visit to the Agape Foundation was during the children's school break, which in El Salvador goes between mid to end October to mid-January. I visited in December between

26 and January 3<sup>rd</sup>. During this time I witnessed how the children were bored and frustrated. The “tias” or caregivers would tell me how the younger boys had been waiting for me to arrive so we could go play. For New Years, most of El Salvador set fireworks off. During midnight one can usually hear fireworks going off everywhere. During the time my wife and I were there, the children kept asking us what we were all going to do for New Year’s Eve. We did not know we were going to celebrate with them when we arrived. The girls’ favorite caregiver who in the past has had the initiative and creativity to create special moments for special dates like these was leaving for vacation. The caregiver also asked us if we could do something. She shared that before she arrived, the children would sometimes have no celebration during New Year’s or Christmas. This for me was sad to hear.

On New Year’s Day, we started preparations early. Together with the children we cleaned up their tabernacle (where the service is usually held), put up decorations from past events that we could find and created a fake red carpet so that everyone could take individual or group pictures. My wife and I would be taking the pictures on our phone.

We also created color mustaches and little signs to carry while the pictures were being taken like you would at a wedding or picture booth. The children dressed up had dinner, and they also had the idea of exchanging gifts. The gifts were things they already had or that had been donated to them; they exchange them for the sake of a good moment. It was amazing to see the creativity and spontaneity of the children and how they all worked as a team to have a good New Year’s celebration. These are the events that inspired me to design and develop a vacation program for the children.

#### 4.2 Need for Programming during School Holidays

Exhaustion is one of the complaints made by some of the caregivers. During my second time visiting Agape, caregivers would sometimes thank me for taking the children out to play. I visited while the children were on school break. A vacation program could help by giving the home caregivers a break during the times when there are activities. This break could ultimately benefit the children as the caregivers might be more rested and act more patiently if they eventually misbehave.

Some initiatives I would like to include in this project are training opportunities for the caregivers. I would like to hear what they might like to learn more about that could benefit their work and maybe be able to bring some workshops for them while the children have their activities. This could help the site by motivating employees and boosting morale as well as benefit the target population, the children.

Down the line, I would also like to include programs or workshops that include leadership skills and training for the older children that will be working or attending college soon. Some ideas I have for these workshops are for example things to help them transition into independent living like cooking skills or other skills they would like to learn or hear more.

### 3.2 Learning Outcomes of the Vacation Program

Some of the values I would like to institute into this program is the idea of fostering social innovators. Two key areas I would like to guide the program are the encouragement of creativity and problem-solving (Bornstein and Davis 81) through fun activities. Below is a description of how these two areas can be beneficial in the development of skills and resiliency for the children.

#### 3.2.1 Creativity

Creativity is an essential skill to advance knowledge societies. According to Dr. Ken Robinson creativity is defined as: “the process of having original ideas that have value [and] ... comes about through the interaction of different disciplinary ways of seeing things” (Ken Robinson, *Do Schools Kill Creativity?*). In his book *The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*, Ken Robinson discusses how natural capacities are limiting, and creativity can help expand these. He explains that in his work with organizations and people he has found that often people think that intelligence is completely unrelated to creativity, because of this a lot of his work with organizations has been to show that these are actually “blood relatives.” Robinson believes that a person cannot be creative without being intelligent. Robinson argues that “the highest form of intelligence is thinking creatively” and that a person cannot find their element or passion if they do not understand the “real nature of creativity and... how it relates to intelligence” (Robinson 56). Robinson has become one of the biggest advocates for re-thinking intelligence and for schools to change previous mindsets related to intelligence and creativity.

Bornstein and Davis also support this push for creativity saying that in order for more students to become changemakers schools should help students believe that: “1-their ideas are valuable; 2-that it is good to ask questions and take the initiative; 3-that it is fun to collaborate with others; and 4-that it is far better to make mistakes than not try at all” (84). Creating changemakers involves nurturing creative people who are not afraid to try new solutions or to think outside the box.

### 3.2.2 Problem-Solving

Problem-solving is also an important skill that needs to be nurtured for children to become social innovators. Claire Lerner, a licensed, certified social worker with Lerner Child Development, discusses that nurturing this quality in a child does not entail solving all the child's

problems but rather watching them fail and try (Lerner, *To Nurture Your Child's*). Lerner explains that when parents or teachers protect children from failure, they are sending the message that the child is not capable of “mastering the challenges they face and that only adults can solve their problems” (Lerner, *To Nurture Your Child's*). In Lerner’s opinion, it also teaches that “failure is to be feared, or something to be ashamed of when it is, in fact, a critical component of the learning process” (Lerner, *To Nurture Your Child's*). Failure is therefore, a critical part of the learning process as it teaches determination, a crucial skill to continue to use creativity in problem-solving and to not give up.

Bornstein and Davis offer two solutions that schools can incorporate to nurture problem-solving skills. One of them is to expose students to serious issues and then challenge the students to “imagine and construct solutions, offering structured assistance to help them form organizations, raise funds, overcome bureaucratic hurdles, and evaluate their own work” (85). Another solution Bornstein and Davis present are to broaden the range of behaviors that are encouraged and rewarded in the school environment. For example, to celebrate youth-initiated social problem solving through “award programs, conferences, and storytelling” (85).

### 3.3 Social Outcomes of the Day Camp

Education and mental sustainability are critical in sustainability for a population under incredible amounts of trauma. Myers inserts: “Releasing people’s capacity to learn is also a critical element of mental and educational sustainability” (Myers 195). Helping people learn that they can study without shame can help them make sense of the world and empower them to strive for “more.” Myers adds that education can also be critical and help in different ways, such as:

They [children] can identify their [strengths,] capabilities and vulnerabilities, and that they can plan based on what they learn is part of a mental transformation that changes the people inside. Teaching people how to evaluate their efforts and to codify their experience is an empowering experience that sustains continuing transformation. Helping people learn how to learn is the key to increasing human agency—one of the most important parts in transformation. (Myers 195)

As Myers alluded to, education has been said to be the silver bullet in how to empower people by giving children life skills to live an inspiring life. For children who are becoming teens, I would like to provide opportunities for them to know their strengths, gifts, and talents and to encourage them to employ them in some way.

### 3.4 Required Resources

The organization already has the facilities to set a program like this in action, but some of the challenges for this program would be resources, funding, recruitment, and following any laws that pertain to the children. Another challenge would be to have safety processes in place for management and program development. One of the main concepts encouraging this project is the added need for socialization and healthy structure that builds a safe environment in these children's lives. A great benefit to this project is that many college students in El Salvador have a vacation around the same time that the students of the home would be off school. The period the children are on break from school is approximately from mid or end of October (depending on the school) to the beginning of January. The university students could help watch, set-up and do specific activities with the children. This would help the children learn to socialize and emotionally grow while being exposed to new members of the community.

Nevertheless, to start the program I would need the agreement and approval of the site first of all. To gain the approval I would need to develop a schedule of activities, develop a budget based on the materials needed for such activities according to Salvadorian prices and see how many volunteers we might need for each activity or group that will run at different times. I envision something like a vacation camp, where the children can have times to play, learn, devotional and connection. To start, the program would be one week.

The fieldwork site already has a connection with a local church, which happens to be the same church my wife attended while growing up and the same one her parents continue to attend. This could make it easier to recruit volunteers to come help us out before the program begins for preparation and during the program. In the future, I also envision perhaps including students from the Christian University in El Salvador to come and share or also to apply their learning while volunteering. Perhaps by providing them with some social hours while they volunteer.

I would also like to see if my church would also be interested in having a short-term trip there with some volunteers to help out. I know that in the past my wife's church in El Salvador has had volunteers pair with the US volunteers to help translate. This could be valuable help if available. Also, depending on the pool of individuals, maybe they could share their experiences, testimonies or share wisdom on some specific knowledge area with some of the older students. This could be very helpful for the children to continue to learn that life in the US is not perfect and rosy as they might think (Carolina, Personal Interview), while also being able to learn of different volunteers' experiences. The program would take place once every year, and it would be in November.



### 3.5 Assessing and Evaluation

#### 3.5.1 Describe the Program

The “describing the program” section is a crucial part necessary to both program evaluation and a vacation project such as this one. Describing the program begins by stating the “what.” This involves knowing the communities’ needs that the project is serving as well as the target market. It involves knowing how the program will benefit both the community and the children. In my opinion, the “logic model” in program evaluation would be an excellent exercise to do to gain this understanding. The logic model would present shared relationships among resources, activities, outputs and outcomes/impacts for this program (cdc.gov). This depicts associations between the program’s activities and effects in an ‘if-then’ relationship with the project.

An example of the logic model in action is, for instance, evaluating: “If I do this activity, then I expect x outcome” (cdc.gov). This model can help clarify between ‘what’ of the program and the ‘so what.’ The ‘so what’ can also be defined as the changes intended from the implementation of the “what.” In the case that the outcome is positive, the outcome should contribute sustainability. Bornstein and Davis argue that “once a program is rolled out, with a budget and a constituency to defend that budget; it will remain there almost regardless of its effectiveness” (Bornstein and Davis 35). The logic model can, therefore, assure that effective programs are the ones being rolled out.

In the case of the program I am proposing, an example of a logic model to evaluate the inputs to outcomes is as follows:

Table 1: Logic Model Table for Proposed Vacation Program

<b>Example Logic Model for Vacation Program</b>				
<b>Inputs or Resources Needed</b>	<b>Activities / Process (What we do)</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Outputs (results from activities)</b>	<b>Outcomes (Results)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The agreement of the site and its board members</li> <li>▪ Program Director</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Meeting(s) and continued communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Agreement for site use and approval of the program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Program established</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Grant</li> <li>▪ Fundraising activities both in El Salvador and maybe in the US</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Meeting proposed needs for budget</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Supplies expenses covered</li> <li>▪ Assistance to volunteer with traveling costs- both local and international volunteers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Program sustainability</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Program Director</li> <li>▪ Volunteers</li> <li>▪ Supplies</li> <li>▪ Directions for activities and crafts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Meetings with volunteers prior to start of program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Survey</li> <li>▪ Interviews</li> <li>▪ Focus group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children learn: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Communication skills</li> <li>○ Fine motor skills</li> <li>○ Creativity</li> <li>○ Cultural knowledge</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children will make Arts and crafts</li> <li>▪ Leaders and caregivers get a necessary break</li> <li>▪ Volunteers and children will bond together and have a fun memorable experience</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Volunteers</li> <li>▪ Supplies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Games</li> <li>▪ Activities</li> <li>▪ Independent Life Skills Workshops for older children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Survey</li> <li>▪ Post-program interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children learn emotional, self-regulation and problem solving skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children get to learn as they are playing</li> <li>▪ Older children will learn life skills like cooking, self-advocacy, social skills or pitching in</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Volunteers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Speakers sharing about their careers to older children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Surveys</li> <li>▪ Pre and Post-program interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Real life vocational understanding to inform their motivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accurate Career Interest</li> </ul>

### 3.5.2 Focus Evaluation Design

The logic model can also assist me in focusing the evaluation of this project by the purpose or by other measuring factors like how to implement, assessment, accountability,

continuous improvement for better community satisfaction and continually developing knowledge of the community or group (cdc.gov). The process of focusing on the evaluation design is essential for the users of the evaluation or members of an organization. This can contribute a sense of direction to this project and focus priorities in terms of how this project's effectiveness is to be evaluated.

### 3.6 Implementation

The timeline for implementation and execution for this project will be two to three months of preparation and a week of the event itself. The goal is to increase the longevity of the program to a maximum of a week and a half by the third year.

Some of the challenges of this program will be the age groups as the children vary in age. Another challenge will be to coordinate other site activities into the program. Co-ordination and working together with the members of the site will be essential.

Another challenge might be the transportation and other costs for volunteers. The site is outside the city, and this could impact the availability of volunteers. I will have to research transportation, food and lodging costs in El Salvador and account accordingly in the budget. It may be possible to research a grant that may alleviate or even cut the financial costs of coming and volunteering.

Though the planning time for the actual event is two months, the budgeting and funding efforts of the program will need to start at least five months prior. I would also have to see if the children would be allowed to also make funding efforts that could be a learning opportunity for them at their local church, perhaps by selling brownies or other items (Anderson, Gracia, Personal Interview). For this to happen, I would once again need the appropriate permission from the site and the church.

Finally, as the event progresses, I would also like to bring local professionals to share their experiences with the children, their journeys or even their testimonies. I would like for this to be an opportunity for the children to know they are not alone but also to gain insight into what the real world out there, in their context.

#### 4. Conclusion

In Conclusion, the purpose of this project is to create learning and positive activities for the children at Agape during a week to a week and a half of their school break. It is meant to become something they can look forward to every year while also being an opportunity for caregivers to receive specialized training. Though this program is small compared to many of the challenges these children face and probably will face in the future, the hope is that through these activities the children will develop resiliency and get to know God's love for them. My hope is that they know that God sees them as valuable and will never forsake them (Hebrews 13:5).

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## 1. Contextualization

### El Salvador and Contextualization in My Future Work<sup>2</sup>

Contextualization is a critical aspect of many fields. However, contextualization takes particular relevance when applied to work that is meant to improve the lives of others who might live in a different context with different values and customs than the worker. Contextualization is adapting solutions and processes to the natural environment, culture, and way of doing things of a set or group of people. Contextualization requires knowing the history of that group of people, how they communicate and interact, their way of doing things and how they interpret the meaning of themselves and their surroundings (Hays and Singh, 7). It means coming alongside them and getting to know them, who they are, where they come, how they got where they are today and their ways of thinking to know what is acceptable to them.

Community development work is about improving the living standards of a group of people and empowering them with skills, abilities or what they need to solve their problems. Because of this, community development work has a strong humanitarian aspect. If solutions are not contextualized to the population's framework, these will most likely fail or be short lasting. Moreover, ignoring the context could be detrimental to the relationship between the development worker and the population being served. This is especially true in countries or communities that have suffered marginalization and abuses of power from other nations in the form of colonization.

In the case of El Salvador, Salvadorians have suffered various injustices throughout the years. An example of these injustices is the Spanish Colonization of El Salvador and the

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<sup>2</sup> Author's Notes: Portions of this paper were written for the following classes: Cultural Studies in a Global Context, Fieldwork and Community Development. Some names of individuals have been changed for confidentiality purposes

involvement of the US in their recent civil war. These are critical aspects of history to know before conducting research or community development work in El Salvador. Especially in my case, that though I consider myself half Salvadorian through my biological father, the truth is that I was raised in the US and by my appearance, I am judged as a “gringo” (Salvadorians use this word to refer to Americans) down there. The reason I think these historical aspects are crucial is that they influence the way Salvadorians perceive you and make meaning of you. In my case, something that has been tremendously helpful is that my wife was born and raised in El Salvador, so I have been able to better inform my biases or assumptions through her cultural and familial knowledge. Her knowledge and insight into her culture will continue to be a valuable asset that I carry with me in my community development work.

## 1. Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions and El Salvador

Geert Hofstede, a social psychologist and cross-cultural researcher from the Netherlands developed a model to facilitate cross-cultural communication and understanding. The model consists of six indices that include: Individual vs. Collectivism, Power Distance, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation and Indulgence vs. Restraint.

### 1.1 Individual vs. Collectivism

The Individual vs. Collectivism Index measures “the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members” ([geert-hofstede.com/el-salvador.html](http://geert-hofstede.com/el-salvador.html)). It relates to how people relate to society. In individualistic societies, people are concerned about themselves and their families while in Collectivist cultures, people value the sense of belonging to a more significant group rather than just themselves and their own immediate family.

El Salvador scores 19 on the Individualistic measure, meaning that El Salvador is highly Collectivist in the way society relates to one another. This is of utter importance for me to know given that I only have an Individualistic background. The US by comparison, for example, scores 91 on this scale, which means that the US is highly individualistic. It is crucial for me to know the differences between these two ways and how it looks in actuality since it will impact the work I do and how successful I can be. Given the program I would like to develop, I need to know how to relate well to children and adults in this culture. If I do not have an understanding of how this looks like in context, I will most likely not be able to communicate well, or I could misunderstand issue that could impact the success of the project.

Moreover, social justice work might also eventually require for me to know how to reach those who are in a position of power, for example, to advocate for policy change or restructuring of the systems in place. To do this, I need to know how to relate to people in their context. For example, I have heard stories of how some staff members at a different site than the one I visited for fieldwork, would sometimes get offended by the direct nature of communication that some American volunteers would use. The volunteers probably had no idea that their way of communication was offending some of the locals. Likewise, the locals had no idea that this is just the standard way of communication for many Americans. Though it seems minimal, even things like this can start dividing the workforce and impacting the work.

## 1.2 Power Distance

The next Index that shed some light about the context I want to work in is Power Distance Index. Power distance, according to Hofstede-insights.com, refers to “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede-insights.com). This is an essential measure

for me to understand and see it in context because though it might be hard for me to accept, I might have to deal with many around thinking that it is impossible to reach higher or to get connected to somebody who could benefit the site. It is also important as it might also impact the way the culture treats bosses, co-workers and subordinates, and how they see one another.

In a transition foster home setting, it is also important to know this so that children are taught values that will ensure empowerment within their context. Furthermore, since this index is high for El Salvador with a score of 66, people working in development work may have to do more advocacy and connecting to resources work because the people being served might not have the necessary access.

### 1.3 Masculinity vs. Femininity

The Masculinity index refers to “what motivates people” (Hofstede-insights.com), in a society with a high Masculinity index motivation comes from competition, achievement and success. In other words, a desire to be the best. On the other hand, a society that has a low score reflects a dominant value of caring for others and quality of life (Hofstede-insights.com). El Salvador has a score of 40 in this dimension. This makes it a “Feminine country” according to Hofstede-insights.com. This means that Salvadorians value things like hard work, diligence and are more likely to let the results speak for themselves rather than boasting about them. From what I have observed during my trips to El Salvador, my engagement with my Salvadorian wife and her family, and the culture itself, I would say this is true. I have observed and heard that Salvadorians are well known for being hard workers. They also value the quality of life. I see this a strength of this culture, and it helps to know what motivates this culture compared to perhaps people in the US. This could be very beneficial when working with others in the community.

#### 1.4 Uncertainty Avoidance

El Salvador scores very high on the Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI). The UAI refers to “The extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these” (Hofstede-Insights.com). In the case of El Salvador, it has a very high UAI score, with 94. The way Salvadorians tend to deal with uncertainty or to avoid it is by having rules, an elaborate legal system that can bring a sense of structure to life (Hofstede-insights.com). Some of these rules and regulations create bureaucracy and work that perhaps other societies might deem unnecessary. Salvadorians are in this way conservatives since they do not always like change or to embrace new ideas. This can sometimes be difficult if organizations are trying to change the way they have been operating or if they are trying to bring forth change. This is important for me to know as it might be normal to experience resistance from some locals involved in the project if things are changed or new things instituted.

Moreover, children that come from difficult backgrounds already have a hard time with change. This is also something for me to have in mind to learn of ways to institute change in ways that are not as impactful to the children or that keeps in mind the children’s possible change in behavior due to this.

#### 1.5 Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation

El Salvador has a low long-term orientation score. According to Hofstede-insights.com, this dimension describes: “how every society has to maintain some links with its past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future.” In the case of El Salvador, since it has a low score on this dimension, it would be considered a “normative society.” This means that El Salvador as a society prefers long-held traditions and norms, and at the same time prefer short-

term results. In my opinion, this is a significant factor to be aware of when doing relief, development and social justice work. This might mean having to remind staff members of our calling and long-term goals. It will also be essential to have proper accountability and inventory systems that ensure the children receive what is theirs. It will also be important to teach the children self-control and motivate them to have long-term aspirations without undermining short-term ones.

### 1.6 Indulgence vs. Restraint

According to Hofstede-insights.com, this dimension is defined as “the extent to which people try to control their desires and impulses, based on the way they were raised.” Societies that have an overall low score are considered to have more restraint than those with higher scores (Hofstede-insights.com). El Salvador has a high score of 89 for this dimension. This makes Salvadorian society an indulgent society. This means that Salvadorians demonstrate a willingness to fulfill their impulses and desires regarding enjoying life and having fun. Societies with an indulgent score also value leisure, spending money and acting as they please (Hofstede-insights.com). Though according to Hofstede-insights.com, societies with similar scores often have an optimistic view of life, in my view indulgence could also get in the way of children’s goals for the future. This tells me that the children I come in contact with could benefit from activities that are meant to encourage self-control or thinking before acting. Training that reminds the staff of long-term goals could also be beneficial. I also think it will be important to encourage children to have dreams and to work towards them as this could also help them strengthen their sense of restraint in their future decisions.

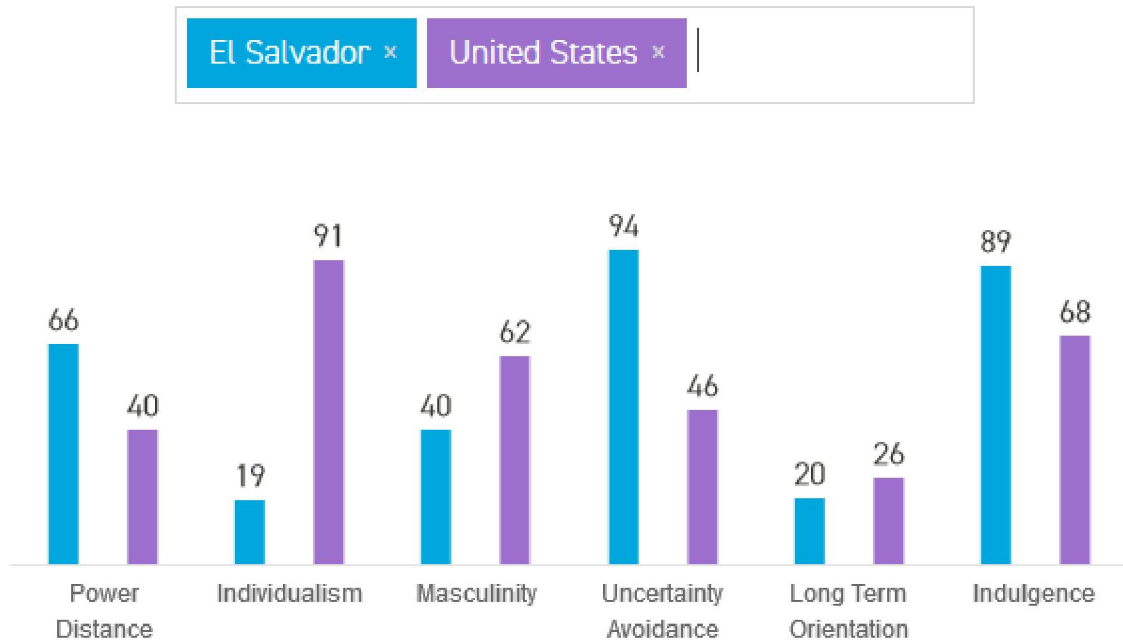


Figure 1: Hofstede-Insights Compare Countries: El Salvador and United States

Source: Hofstede, Geert. Hofstede Insights Compare Countries: El Salvador and United States, Hofstede Insights, 2019, <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>. Accessed on 21 Apr 2019.

## 2. Contextualization at my Field Work Site

Last December, I was able to go back to my fieldwork site in El Salvador and help watch the children as the “Tias” (Spanish meaning aunts), or caregivers did other work. For the children, this period is equivalent to summer vacation in the US. During this time, I got the idea for my guided thesis project to create a vacation program that would help the caregivers and the children at the site to learn helpful things, have fun, get to know each other and benefit from fun guided activities.

Through my fieldwork experience, I continued developing the connections I had established on my first trip to the site both with the children and the co-director. I was able to interview the co-director of the site. I was able to ask her questions about financial health, hiring



workers and LEAN while trying to answer the overarching question of whether these principles and practices apply to nonprofit organizations as well. Below is what she helped me to understand the site and the conclusion I was able to reach regarding the transferability of these principles and practices to the non-profit sector in El Salvador.

### 2.1. Financial Health

The most critical area of any organization is in its financial health. If it is poor, employee morale suffers, and stress dominates. Through my fieldwork, I learned that the site was not doing well financially. I heard and saw various changes from the first time I had been there three months prior. Various employees had been laid off, some full-time employees are now part-time, and there are stricter measures around chickens or other items that the employees buy from the organization. Some employees expressed discontent and a sense of unknown of where the organization is headed. I also learned that various children had left the organization, and this meant a significant decrease in funding.

For my interview, I decided to ask the co-director how the site ensures financial literacies for the management team. She explained that they have a full-time accountant as part of their workforce. However, vital financial decisions are made by the founder, director, co-director and accountant. They are all financially literate to some degree. I then proceeded to ask what sustainability means for the site. The co-director shared that for them sustainability consists of several social enterprises. Some of these enterprises are already operating like farming and selling chickens and a greenhouse to grow vegetables to be commercialized. However, they would also like to have a bakery and add another greenhouse. Sustainability for them is also asking the grown-up kids who now work to contribute financially to the organization. Additionally, they are also starting to employ in-house so that some of these children get some

experience. Finally, she concluded that sustainability for them is reducing costs in a way that is beneficial for the longevity of the organization (Co-Director Interview, Personal Interview).

## 2.2 Hiring

For this section, I asked what makes the site competitive to prospective employees compared to other non-profits in El Salvador. The co-director explained that they do try to have competitive salaries as much as they are able; they also offer vacation and benefits. Many of their employees are Christian, and she feels like this is part of what differentiates the organization to others. They strive to have a positive working environment among employees and to be supportive of their workforce. They encourage communication and try to have activities that enhance the team's cohesion (Co-Director Interview, Personal Interview).

## 2.3 LEAN

I chose to ask a question around the LEAN values and eliminating waste. I asked how this site eliminates waste on operations to gain mission leverage. In my experience, while I was at the site, I observed significant areas to improve concerning leaning waste. I was curious about the answer to my question. The co-director answered that it is an area that they are continually working on. She is aware that this is still a challenge for them. She mentioned that part of the struggle has to do with the continuous supervision of supplies and how they are being used. She expressed that not every employee is invested entirely in the organization's mission, unfortunately. This is also a personal struggle for her being the co-director and head of fundraising; thus, she wants to make sure that everything is maximized. This is also why they have implemented stricter policies around what is taken out of the organization. The security guards are for example told to inspect every employee that leaves the premises. I learned this while I was on site. In the end, I also decided to ask her how important she considered the items

we discussed in the operating of a non-profit or social enterprise. She replied saying that in her experience these principles are crucial to the survival of a non-profit or the social enterprises that support it. She mentioned how for them financial health, sustainability, leaning waste and whom they hire remain of utmost importance to reach their mission and does not see that as something that will change.

### 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the answers to my interview confirm that the principles and practices offered in the Mission, Inc apply to non-profit organizations and social enterprises. Without these guidelines, I can only see chaos and the eventual end of an organization. Some of the answers the co-director provided in areas like leaning waste, hiring and financial health demonstrate that these are all guidelines essential for the healthy survival of non-profits like the organization I visited. In this case, it is also interesting how this co-director is trying to apply some of these principles even though the non-profit is in El Salvador. It was interesting for me to observe the complexities that the culture adds to applying these principles in the field and the response of employees to the added structure or guiding principles.

### 4. Unique Local Assets and Capacities Engaged

Though I did not know it at the time, something very helpful in connecting with the specific context of my fieldwork site and the foster children that I met there was my own story as well as my work on issues like anxiety. The time I have spent in working on my own story, understanding my feelings and gaining insights helped me be able to understand the children that I came in contact with. Something that caregivers pointed out as well as my character and my patience. They were amazed and thankful that I was there, for the children would be out playing

with me when they might have otherwise been in the houses. This gave the caregivers a break to do other things they needed to do while the children were having fun.

Sometimes we do not know the gifts we possess until others point them out. My wife also observed how patient I was with the children. She explained to me, given her knowledge of trauma, which for the children to be able to take me wherever they wanted was probably very empowering and helpful. Within the compound they would take me to the soccer field, then to some mandarin trees, then another would suggest something else, and we would all go. Of course, this was easy for me to do given that I was only there for a few days and I did not see all the behaviors that they probably bring up to their caregivers.

I would say another strength I had with me was my wife, who is a cultural insider and added to that knows trauma, children, and psychology overall. This helped me tremendously as there were times where she would tell me that I needed to establish a boundary or to be aware of something perhaps I had not considered like the fact that many girls there might be especially vulnerable since some of their needs have not been met. Therefore, it was for the best that I kept consistent healthy boundaries that could not create any confusion. This was very helpful.

Finally, something that was also helpful during my second trip to the site was that my wife was able to translate for me a lot more than her father had been able to the first time. Many children and staff members commented on how helpful that had been as they wanted to communicate and connect to me before but could not. It was neat to see their desire to connect with me and to make me feel part of the community.

##### 5. The importance of Contextualization

Being a contextually informed community development worker means being informed about the culture, the local culture, and the specific population that one will be working with.

Being a contextually informed worker means looking for opportunities to learn about the culture, perhaps getting into situations that might be uncomfortable that will yield a lesson on the culture or specific context. It requires an innovative mind in that we need to be open to change, to learning, to understanding that my norms and beliefs might be challenged or transformed. It is a process that also requires creativity in being observant and in being a malleable being to adapt to the needs and context of the population. In my case, specifically, creativity is a must since I am working with children and yet I am also learning so much from them, their interactions and their ways of being.

In my future vocational work, I intend to use the values and practices of contextualization by continuing to seek ways to understand the children's world, what could help them, what programs could be helpful to them and also continuing to consult with the sub-director of the site to see if she has any ideas. I also plan to continue to use my wife's knowledge of the culture whenever I have doubts or questions about how perhaps something has not interpreted the way I thought it would be or did not go according to plan. However, most importantly I want to be a continuous learner. I want to remain open to continuous learning, to challenging my previous thoughts and possible biases and to finding new insights and understanding.

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## 2. Qualitative Inquiry

### Fieldwork, Research and Program Evaluation in El Salvador<sup>3</sup>

As a researcher, one must be inspired and dedicated to the subject being studied. For me, learning more of my story or context and how I can use it to help people is a start. Zora Neale Hurston, a civil rights activist and novelist, describes research as a “formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.” My purpose is to use my story to help people.

#### 1. Qualitative Methods

When considering methods for my fieldwork, I concluded that Qualitative methods had many aspects that could benefit my results. Hays and Singh define Qualitative Research as “the study of a phenomenon or research topic in context” (4). I knew I wanted to go to El Salvador and research my topic in context. Therefore, Qualitative made sense.

Other aspects I considered when leaning towards Qualitative methods, is that my population is particularly vulnerable. I was interested in a research method that would allow me to hear children’s stories, what caregivers and other entities involved in the process had to say. I was interested in the *how* and *what* of my research topic (Hays and Singh 4). I also desired to interact with the children and with other members of the community that could provide information on the topic.

Because Qualitative research studies a topic in context, it can also yield information on the culture, the environment, the experiences of the people and their interpretations of these (Hays and Singh 7). Merriam and Tisdell explain that Qualitative research is about “understanding the meaning people have constructed; how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (9). Given that I was not born in El Salvador, but I have

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<sup>3</sup> Author’s Notes: Portions of this paper were written for the following classes: Research for Social Change, Fieldwork and Program Evaluation. Some names of individuals have been changed for confidentiality purposes.



a deep connection to this country through my biological father, this was something I liked about Qualitative methods. I considered that this could help me understand a part of me better as I understood more the population I was studying. This is also something that the ICD values encourage, understanding others in context. To come alongside anyone and work towards copowerment, we need to understand their world first.

### 1.1 Ethnographic Research

Ethnographic research is “the art and science of describing the human group, its institutions, interpersonal behaviors, material productions and beliefs” (Angrossino 14). Merriam and Tisdell also define it as the process that takes place in comprehending the interactions of people and individuals within the culture they reside in (Merriam and Tisdell 24). By conducting interviews and through the ethnographic research at my fieldwork site, Agape, I was better able to understand the Salvadorian people’s construction around care for vulnerable children. At the same time, I was able to observe first-hand how the children experienced this care and how they made sense of it.

In ethnography, being engaged with the participant’s environment as a participant observer is a primary method of data collection. In the book *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* Holmes explains how it is vital for one to become immersed in the everyday lives of the people you are seeking to understand (Holmes 3). Hays and Singh define this as having a “direct experience” with the context in a study (4). This direct connection or immersion is what I was hoping I could experience during my fieldwork in El Salvador, though I knew that this was going to be a challenge given the vulnerable population I was studying. After having many doors closed, I was able to make contact with a foster transition home that opened the doors to me. During my second visit to the site, I was able to stay at one of their social enterprises, a small hotel. Though

the hotel is separate from where the children reside, it allowed me to be closer to the premises and to become more fully immersed in their world and the organization's world.

## 1.2 Appreciative Inquiry

According to Cooperrider and Whitney, the verb to appreciate means:

1. valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems 2. to increase in value, e.g., the economy has appreciated in value. Synonyms: VALUING, PRIZING, ESTEEMING, and HONORING. (Cooperrider & Whitney A Positive Revolution in Change)

While the verb inquiring means:

1. The act of exploration and discovery. 2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities. Synonyms: DISCOVERY, SEARCH, and SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION, STUDY. (Cooperrider & Whitney A Positive Revolution in Change)

So, what is Appreciative Inquiry? It starts with the following questions: What problems are you having? What is working around here? and when situations are not going your way, what do you do? The traditional approach in answering these questions according to Hammond is to “look for the problem, make a diagnosis, and find a solution with the primary focus on what is wrong or broken” (1). Hammond believes that because we often look for problems, we tend to find problems (1). Appreciative Inquiry offers a different approach.

David Cooperrider and his colleagues at Case Western Reserve University challenged the conventional approach by introducing Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Hammond explains that “David's wife Nancy, who is an artist, brought the ‘appreciative eye’ perspective to David's attention. The keen eye assumes that in every piece of art there is a beauty. Art then is a beautiful

idea translated into a concrete form” (Hammond 1). Cooperrider then applied this to organizations, explaining that “to the appreciative eye organizations are viewed as organic, which means that the whole defines all parts; thus, you cannot take an organization apart to study pieces” (Hammond 1). AI, therefore, suggests that we must look for what works in an organization.

The result of this process is statements that describe “where the organization wants to be, based on the high moments of where they have been. Because statements are grounded in real experience and history, people know how to repeat their success” (Hammond 1). According to David Cooperrider, AI is about:

the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives “life” to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. (Positive Revolution in Change: AI Cooperrider & Whitney)

The process of AI involves five steps:

#### 1.2.1 Define – What is the topic of Inquiry?

With my story I was looking to help those similar to myself, what I found was a population in great need as Hammond states: “What we look for we will find” (Hammond 22). I was looking for a fieldwork site that engaged my story. This process of choosing the topic is crucial because “what we focus on becomes our reality” (Hammond 22).

#### 1.2.2 Discovery – What it Is?

Next is a discovery or discovering what is best about the topic. This would be the opportunity to look at the inquiry with an appreciative eye. My fieldwork site in El Salvador not only helped me connect with vulnerable children but also reminded me where I came from as a historian. With this understanding, it was essential to be aware of and integrate my story so that I could connect with these children.

#### 1.2.3 Dream – What could be?

The goal of the dream stage is to find areas that were performed well. These findings are then used to imagine a future of what it could be like. For the children in El Salvador, achieving liberation from abandonment and poverty is the dream.

#### 1.2.4 Design—What it should be?

This phase is the decision-making phase. This is where a plan is made on how to achieve a future dream. With the example of Juliana and Tony, their story of poverty and abandonment was necessary for getting them out of the abusive situations; getting help was essential for their journey to become a more positive story.

#### 1.2.5 Deliver or Destiny – What it will be?

At the Boeing company, where I currently work delivery of the product is an important event. After extensive testing of the product to see if all requirements have been met and passed, the product can be rolled into production. This is also an essential concept with AI; what was learned throughout Define, Discovery, Dream and Design phases must be instilled in the delivered product. This is an example of what I learned at my current job that I can translate to my vocational work with children. The following story is of a sister and brother I was able to interview in September at my fieldwork site in El Salvador. This was a process Julianna and Tony went through in their story:

They used to live with their parents in an impoverished area out of the city. Their dad lost his sight and could not support them as he used to before. Their mom began going out a lot and one day left with another man. She left Juliana and Tony with their blind father. Since their mother was not with them anymore, Juliana did all the household activities and guided her dad wherever he went. Eventually, Tony and Juliana begged for money and food around the neighborhood and at the little town near their house. Someone alerted the police, they came to see what was happening, and they said that they were at risk and could not stay with their dad anymore. First, the authorities took them to a horrible place, and they prayed to God because they did not want to be there. Very soon, God answered their prayers and they were brought to Agape. They like living there. They are no longer hungry and do not have to go out and beg for money. They also like that they are attending school. They both miss their dad very much and they want to continue studying so they can help their father. Juliana is currently finishing high school while Tony is in eighth grade. They are both working hard to get ahead despite their circumstances. (Juliana and Tony, Personal Interview)

#### 1.2.6 Using AI in the future

Using AI can be beneficial in finding creative solutions to letting stakeholders feel appreciated and supported as part of their community. According to Holmes: “Modern positivist science in which human, social, and historical contexts are considered irrelevant” (115) is what modern businesses use to make money. The bottom line of share price and profit is what many businesses are about. The real bottom line in my experience at the Boeing Company is that without the employees the airplanes cannot be designed, built, delivered and serviced. Agape could use this in their efforts to help employees feel supported and part of the community.

## 2. Qualitative Methods and Community Development

Qualitative methods can be a valuable source of data in community development work. Hays and Singh for example, point out the importance of direct quality experience when it comes to studying a topic. They emphasize the importance of observing and engaging directly with the people impacted by an issue to understand a situation well (Hays and Singh 4). In my case, I consider qualitative methods a critical way to receive feedback about a process that has been implemented. Also, it can be a great way to assess how things are working and how staff members might be feeling about changes being made. Qualitative methods can also aid in the process of improving already established processes, finding out how they can become more streamlined or effective and how these can meet the needs of the specific community.

Another value that Qualitative methods bring to the community development field is that it allows for relationships to be established. Given the collectivist nature of El Salvador, relationships are essential to receiving data and being considered part of the community. Using Qualitative methods in my future work can prove very beneficial both in the collection of data as well as in the assessment portion of my work.

Finally, qualitative methods can help me get to know the context I work in better. I can get meaningful information regarding the culture; the way people relate to one another through these methods. This is something crucial for my community development work to be effective and contextually accurate.

## 3. Qualitative Methods in Action

### 3.1 Juliana and Tony's Story

During my time at a foster transition home, Juliana and her brother allowed me an interview. During the interview, I was able to hear their story and how they got to the home where they currently live. Following is the interview:

Nick: What was your family like?

Juliana: Our mother and father were not married. Our mother abandoned us, (she is not responsible with children) when my father got blind. He got blind around the time I was born. Our father allowed my mother to stay if she cared for him.

N: What did he do for work?

J: He was an Ice Cream Salesman.

N: How did your father get blind?

J: He believes a woman did witchcraft on him, so he lost his sight. He believes in witchcraft.

N: Do you ever go to visit him? Alternatively, is he allowed to visit you guys here?

J: No, he is not allowed to come to visit us here, but we do visit him every December. We are allowed to stay with a cousin for a couple of days who lives close, and we visit.

N: Does anyone monitor the visits?

J: Yes. (Somewhat awkward so I did not want to push for more information)

(Juliana and Tony, Personal Interview)

Though this was a short interview, it interested me because it reflected the difficulties Juliana and her brother have been through, how they perceived their situations and how they are coping. Juliana is currently working outside of the foster transition home as she is over 18 years old. She only comes to the foster transition home during weekends. Her brother, on the other hand, is younger and still in school. He lives full time at the home. Both Juliana and her brother are very

intelligent. Her brother does not like to talk too much about what he has been through. However, he was the one that came and hugged me with a silent nod after I shared my testimony. This showed me that he has been through some painful things and though, perhaps given the culture in which men are not supposed to be “weak,” he hides his pain. That moment showed me that he has gone through some hard things and he understands pain.

### 3.2 ISNA - Salvadorian Institute for the Development of Children and Adolescents

Using Qualitative methods, I was able to interview an administrative technician who works in overlooking two of ISNA’s programs. During the interview, I learned about ISNA’s services to vulnerable children and processes. This was very helpful in understanding who the overlooking government agencies involved in the child welfare process are and what that process looks like.

ISNA has two main programs. One of their programs provides attention to the children and adolescents at the “reception centers” (as they call them), and the other program provides attention to children and adolescents with their families - in other words, children who have not been removed from their family nucleus and who are in the program. Through the interview I found that the goal of ISNA is to provide three main areas of attention:

1. Make sure that children and adolescents’ rights are guaranteed;
2. Provide oversight and promotion of the rights to prevent them from being abused.  
Spread article 180- LEPINA law, so everybody is aware of it;
3. Social insertion of adolescents who have committed a crime.

Therefore, the role of ISNA in the protection of the Salvadorian children and youth is to articulate the public and private entities for children and adolescents’ rights to be guaranteed. As ISNA cannot do everything, they have to work and coordinate with other entities.



Through my interview with Lorena, I also learned about the process for gaining official welfare protection and how a child might eventually come to a site like the foster transition home I visited later in my fieldwork.

The process, unfortunately, begins with a neighbor or concerned citizen witnessing a child suffering some form of abuse, neglect and/or abandonment. These concerned citizens then call the police to make a complaint about the situation witnessed. The police then investigate the allegations. If these are found to be accurate, the police will then pick up the child and take him or her to ISNA, where the process continues. The court has to give an order before ISNA can start their process. Once the court gives the order, ISNA conducts a psychological and a social assessment. This is done to identify areas that might need attention. The following interview yields more information on how a child considered to be at-risk is transferred to ISNA and later a to a foster transition home:

Nick: Who notifies ISNA when there is a child at risk?

Lorena: We are no longer the principal rector agent; the main rector agent now is the CONNA (National Council for Childhood and Adolescence). This changed with the LEPINA law. The population that comes into a reception center to a family program is through an official document that is created by the protection boards and the courts that are specialized in childhood and adolescence. An official document is an order that is given.

N: How does ISNA learn about this?

L: With the official document that has been issued by the judge and courts, they then proceed to pick up the child that has been assisted by the police and a case file is created. The child receives a medical check-up by a team that consists of a psychologist, social

worker and legal. Then, they have to try to find information regarding vaccines, birth certificate, and other documents (at the foster transition home I visited, I found out that children do not always come with all the records mentioned here).

N: What does ISNA expect from the foster care programs?

L: They hope that the population in these programs have their rights guaranteed and that they can go back to their families or to a family member who guarantees their rights.

N: Does ISNA also overview adoption laws?

L: Until a few years ago they did, but now another entity that is overviewed by the General Office of the Republic oversees this. This office is OPA- the Office for Adoptions. It is also OPA who determines if the child will be removed from their family.

(Lorena, Personal Interview)

This interview was instrumental for my understanding of what happens to vulnerable children in El Salvador. As I am adopted, I also was drawn to ask about that process as well.

OPA is the office that overlooks the whole adoption process. ISNA collaborates with the office by caring for the child until it is given to its adoptive family members. Since 2010, the authority has shifted so the system would work like the US. The courts, meaning a judge, decide what to do with the child and where the child will go; ISNA plays a secondary role to support and implement these decisions.

Agape is another organization that is part of the adoption system. Created in 1996, Agape is one of the many organizations where a judge can send a child. According to the person I interviewed at ISNA, different organizations have different guidelines, and the judge sends a child to an organization based on those provided guidelines. I did not have access to what those guidelines are but here is an example: another site I visited specialized in children who are

disabled, while Agape does not; thus, a judge would send a handicapped child to the former site, not to Agape. With this information, I was able to understand better the bigger picture of the context and processes that vulnerable children in El Salvador must go through to get to safety.

### 3.2 Agape - A Foster Transition Home

At Agape, the foster transition home I visited and where I spent most of my time, I observed some areas that could use attention through qualitative methods. For example, in talking to some of the caregivers, they complained that sometimes when they would bring grievances about how a child was behaving with them, the management and sometimes even the counselor on site would disregard or minimize their complaints. This made the caregivers feel alone in receiving the support they needed (Luisa, Personal Interview). On the other hand, management, probably like me, usually sees the best side of these children, so it is understandable that they might not always want to believe a complaint. This, however, affects the caregivers' morale and motivation. It would probably be better for the management team to investigate all complaints equally and make a decision on how to proceed from there. This might make the caregivers feel more supported, and children might also be more careful in acting out to their caregivers.

Another area that I found out more information is needed at Agape is in educating the children about their own culture and preparing them for living in the real world eventually. I heard about a teen girl (sixteen years old) who had been asked by a male employee who is no longer with the organization if another girl's period had already arrived. The teen girl did not think anything of it and replied to the question. Thankfully, later she told a caregiver about this in conversation. The caregiver knew that a male employee had no business in asking for this. The caregiver decided to start talking to the girls in an honest way about how some men in the culture

might not have the best intentions (Lolita, Personal Interview). In the culture, a saying that is very prevalent is “the man goes as far as the woman allows it.” This portrays a picture of how male and female interactions can be in this culture. Women have a heavy burden of responsibility as compared to men. This example was concerning to me, to think that some of these girls can leave the home and become easy prey of unscrupulous men. More needs to be done to educate both boys and girls in the home about the realities of the culture outside the safety of the home.

During the time at my fieldwork, I also observed the power of the collectivism aspect. I observed how my wife was able to connect with many of the caregivers in a meaningful way. I also observed how they would share with her things that they did not share with me. This was very helpful in my research. The sub-director had shared quite a few things with me, but the rest of the caregivers had not. Perhaps in part because they do not speak as much English or maybe because I am a male.

It was also interesting to see how the collectivist aspect impacted how the caregivers and children related to one another and even the staff at the site. The staff seemed to be friendlier to one another than perhaps in a US organization. However, there seemed always to be a background of gossip going on. Some people seemed afraid to talk to me or to my wife about issues going on. Like when one lady was telling us how her hours had been cut, her friend did not seem comfortable at all saying anything. It seemed she did not want to get in trouble (Teresa, Personal Interview). These were all interesting things I observed. I also heard from another person say that the children were always first there and that if there was any issue reported by the children, the employee could be fired very easily because the children were first. Though this employee only works with the organization in an as needed basis, it seemed like there was some

resent around this issue. What was also surprising to me is that she was making this statement after linking it to a male employee that was let go on complaints of sexually harassing one of the girls. All of this yielded some light on how the culture perceives the protection of children's rights, that though the government has done a great deal to implement laws people still seem to question this practice.

Another story I was told was that when management took action against the male employee who was accused of sexual harassment by the teen girl, the other girls that lived in the same house as she retaliated. According to a caregiver, this was a particularly charming employee who would sometimes offer the girls certain things. So, all the other girls felt that he was wronged. The rest of the girls in that house were retaliating; they were ousting the girl that made the accusations and ignoring her. The caregiver acted by educating the rest of the girls about this issue and trying to cultivate empathy for the victim (Lolita, Personal Interview).

#### 4. Integrating Qualitative Elements for an Effective Evaluation

There are various ways of conducting an effective evaluation. One of these ways is through a logic model. Logic models can assist in the evaluation of a program by focusing on purpose or on other measuring factors, such as how to implement and assess the program; how to increase accountability; how to ensure continuous improvement for better community satisfaction; and how to continually develop knowledge of the community or group (cdc.gov). The process of focusing on the evaluation design is essential for the users of the evaluation or members of an organization. This can contribute a sense of direction to the project and focus priorities in terms of how the program's effectiveness is to be evaluated.

The next critical step in the focus evaluation design is how the evaluation results are used and whether these result in modifications to the program, development of new goals, and

continued decisions regarding sustainability. This is an example of “keeping the user's needs at the heart” of the solution, which every development worker needs to employ (Kelley and Kelley 157). How this translates to the community development field is that the community’s needs, or in my case, the needs of the children will be the most important to keep in mind. With this model, it is hoped that the children’s lives will be impacted for the better as we continue to make improvements to the program in response to the feedback received.

#### 4.1 Gathering Credible Evidence

Gathering credible evidence or gathering information that the stakeholders see as dependable is critical for answering the community’s, customer’s, or clients’ requirements (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov)). The role of gathering credible evidence is to enhance the accuracy of the evaluation or logic model. This is crucial to the success of any program. Furthermore, the evaluation questions from the customer must be meaningfully addressed, or the model could be irrelevant.

Describing a program, focusing on the evaluation design, and gathering credible evidence are all essential portions of the program evaluation process. These are also essential to the assessment of social entrepreneurial programs. Many times, non-profits do not master the assessment portion and end up getting lost in the process or maintaining an unsustainable program as Bornstein and Davis objected. Additionally, general business knowledge that can be integrated into the evaluation can be beneficial to an organization. Assessing whether a social enterprise is profitable and thus benefitting the community as it is meant to, is essential. In describing the “what,” non-tangible benefits - like the community getting to know about the organization - can also be assessed. I observed this gap at Agape, and they did not seem to consider this benefit when I mentioned it. If well managed and assessed, this evaluation method can also yield more funding

in the future. Furthermore, thoroughly developing the description of a program, making sure to have an evaluation design that keeps the project on track, and ensuring credible evidence, are foundational to a successful evaluation process.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Qualitative methods proved to be a valuable source of information during my fieldwork research. As I left for El Salvador the first time, I had no idea what I was going to find or whether a site would allow me in. All of this was part of the process. Finally, Agape opened its doors to me. Through that experience, I was able to learn so much about how this organization has grown, how the children have and continue to experience the home and the ongoing issues that the organization has to deal with. The interview provided by ISNA allowed me to understand the process of how children get to a home like Agape and the problems with the current process. All of this information has helped me become a more informed agent of social change. I have better ideas of the realities and what can be done despite those realities. Though the development of a vacation program seems minimal when compared to all the situations a foster child in El Salvador faces and Agape goes through every day, being an agent of social change is starting with what we have and where we can to make an impact. This does not mean that down the line the vacation program could transform to become something more impactful. I hope to continue to use Qualitative elements in the development, implementation, and assessment of my future program with children in El Salvador.

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### 3. ICD

#### ICD Values and My Story<sup>4</sup>

##### 1. My Story

I will start this section with the testimony I shared at my fieldwork site this past December. I wrote it down and shared it with the children and caregivers that were present that Sunday during church. This is what I said word for word:

I was born in Everett, Washington, United States. I was adopted. According to a letter that my biological mother left me, she mentioned that she could not keep me because my father was not present, my father was out of the picture, and I did not have a father. I since have been able to get my birth certificate, but my father's name is blank. I grew up with my adoptive parents. I had many issues in school growing up. My parents did not understand me growing up. Sometimes I did not feel like I belonged. I liked different things than what they liked. They did not understand my interests or support them. This was hard because I wanted to be me, but it seemed that I was not allowed to like what I liked. My adoptive parents divorced when I was thirteen. This was a surprise to me as they did not tell me why. Around this time, I found out I was adopted not because my parents told me but because I was put in a class for minorities because my biological father was Salvadorian. This was hard because I started to question everything I knew. It was around this time that I became depressed, angry and anxious. I would sometimes get annoyed, throw things, and shout at my mom and later even my wife. One time when I was younger, I made a hole in the wall. I had difficulties in school, especially with

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<sup>4</sup> Author's Notes:

Portions of this paper were written for the following classes: Spirituality, Leadership, Social and Environmental Justice, and Social Entrepreneurship. Some names of individuals and organizations have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

examinations. I was told by a tutor to see a psychologist as I was having difficulties focusing on my coursework and she said in her report that my potential was not to graduate from high school. This only made me more determined to do well and show people that I could do it. I have since graduated from university and am currently working on my masters.

I want to share this story to you all because I know that everyone in this room has or is facing or will face difficulties in life. Also, people will sometimes say very hurtful things that will question your potential and who you are. I encourage you all not to give up, to have faith, because even though it sometimes does not feel like it, deep down I know God does not create people that are not good in his sight. In my anger bursts, I have sometimes hurt others with my words and actions. We need to own up to it, say our “I’m sorry’s” or apologies and continue to heal to be better human beings. Through my pain, I also try to not to say things that will bring others down or that will make them question themselves. I hope this testimony tells that God is good even when we sometimes think He is not good. It is always better to face things with God on our side than without.

Thank you. (Anderson, Nicholas, Personal Testimony)

I shared this testimony at my fieldwork site for various reasons. I wanted the children to know they were not alone in whatever they are going or have gone through. I wanted them to know that there is hope even in the midst of pain and that God is powerful to redeem. Moreover, the co-director of the site had mentioned that many children at the site think that everything in the US is great and that people do not have problems. After sharing with the co-director some parts of my story, she thought it would be powerful to share some of my struggles with the

children. I agreed and hoped it would help them to understand that life is not perfect in the US either and that people go through hardships here as well.

An example of this is that children who have gone through the US foster system are five times more likely to suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) once they grow up in comparison to the rest of the population. This, according to a survey conducted by Harvard University and the Casey Family Programs (Pecora et al., 2005; Gray, 19). Deborah Gray, a leader in the field of adoption, has also observed through her experience how “the compounding effect of early neglect with other types of maltreatment seems to be potent in reducing resiliency in children” (Gray 19). Because of all this, I also wanted to show the children that even with PTSD and early neglect we can do things beyond our potential with faith and God’s help. I also hoped to develop a connection with them through the sharing of my story and that they would feel that they were not alone in dealing with the hard thing’s life has given them at such an early age. Like me, many of them have anger issues, or they are on medication for hyperactivity, anxiety or other conditions. I felt like I could relate to them. Some of them can no longer attend school because of behavioral issues. It was interesting that some of my strongest bonds were made, according to the co-director and other caregivers that worked there, with children that have the hardest time connecting to others.

I gave this testimony early on in my second stay, and I did feel that relationships with the children were strengthened through this. I will never forget one of them coming and hugging me afterward. I felt like he was telling me “thank you for sharing; I get it.” This was a powerful silent moment. There was also another girl who shared that she would come crying every time she would get homework related to family history as she and her sister were abandoned by her mother. I also felt we were able to relate more after sharing.

Another surprising thing that happened after sharing my testimony is that one of the caregivers who has worked there for years and had never shared her testimony also opened her heart and shared with them her troubled teen years. It was great to see that even though it is hard for me to share because of my anxiety, it motivated someone else also to share how God has worked in her life.

Moving forward, I hope to continue to use my story to let children know they are not alone and that we can do this together. That trauma in early life does cause hardship and pain, but it does not have to have the last word.

## 2. Social Justice

My single greatest passion is orphan care for the vulnerable, fatherless, motherless and parentless child. The Bible has many verses instructing Christians to care for orphans. This, of course, is part of my reason to do so; however, my story and my calling also connect me to caring for vulnerable and orphan children, who like me, were fatherless. I desire to create a supportive program that can be implemented at a foster care foundation during the end of school year holidays. The purpose of the program is to teach the children and caregivers tools that can empower them, keep them focused on something positive during the holidays, motivate them to explore new areas and explore their interests. My purpose is also to give the children tools to channel their energy into something positive that helps them build a future.

My motivation has influenced my social justice philosophy significantly. My motivation developed out of my story. I was born to a Swedish mother and Salvadorian father who could not care for me, and consequently, I was given up for adoption. This is how my “why” developed. I want other children to be cared and looked after like I was. I want for others to have opportunities as I have had. My why also matters to the greater community because children are

the future of our community, lives, and countries. We need to invest in our future generations if we are to foster healthier and more inclusive communities.

The purpose of this project is to build bridges between the community, the foundation and the children under their care. The purpose is also to invest in children during their school break. This is important as it also sends the children the message that they matter and that they have not been forgotten during their holidays. This message can help the children develop a healthier relationship with the community at large.

### 3. Strengths and Copowerment

Finding my strengths was an empowering and liberating process for me. I was able to understand how to guide my energy better to be more productive and effective in my future community development work. My five strengths as evaluated by the StrengthsFinder Assessment were context, connectedness, belief, responsibility, and intellection. Below I expand on each one of these strengths and explain how building upon these will be helpful in the development of my project.

#### 3.1 Context

My first and greatest strength is context. As a historian, I value the past in informing my present and future decisions. I have found that it is difficult to understand life without context. Context is perspective. As defined by Gallup it is also: “the ability to use what I have learned from the past to make choices that lead to better outcomes” (Gallup Strengths Center). Plus, context-based work can be beneficial when it comes to development work. It is not only important to learn from experiences, but also to understand the context, the nature and culture of the people we are working with. This strength will be essential in the development of this project. It will help me be a more knowledgeable and accepting development worker due to my

desire to know and understand others' context and perspectives. This strength can therefore also assist me in guiding my work to meet the needs of the community.

### 3.2 Connectedness

In a Strengths Finder video on connectedness, Winseman, one of the co-authors of the book *Living your Strengths*, expresses: "I believe everything happens for a reason and that we are all interconnected, we are all part of a bigger picture" (Gallup Strengths Center). Winseman then goes into how he finds working with disadvantaged kids meaningful. He explains how he has been able to help children find meaning amidst the uncertainty, doubt, and turbulence they are facing in their lives. Winseman desires to give these children a sense of purpose, meaning, confidence and hope for their future. This is what I intend to create in my development work. I want to strengthen children's voices so they too can find their meaning and connection with themselves and thus with others. Connectedness is also what has helped me find purpose, meaning and my calling.

### 3.3 Belief

According to Winseman, belief is about doing things the right way according to one's core values (76). As a Christian and follower of Jesus, this is a crucial aspect of my life. During my fieldwork, I was grateful to find an organization that matched my values and convictions. It allowed me to feel safer to be vulnerable and this vulnerability leads to connection. From my fieldwork experience, I have been able to see this strength as an asset that I can carry with me. It has also stressed the importance of forming part of an organization whose values match my own for my potential to be in full use. I can also see this strength as a helpful tool in building on children's strengths by letting them know that their beliefs impact the way they live and giving them opportunities to get to know themselves and live true to their values.

### 3.4 Responsibility

Responsibility is a significant strength that I will bring to the project. Things do not happen if we are not committed and responsible. This will also be an essential strength to model to the children. Responsibility can also be helpful in that it can create predictability. A lot of the children I came in contact with during my fieldwork have lacked predictability in their lives. Predictability and consistency give children a sense of security (Gray, 130). This strength can, therefore, be precious in my future work with vulnerable children.

### 3.5 Intellection

My last strength is Intellection. I like to take time to think and act with confidence. I also like to consider and reflect on how I have acted in the past or how things can impact people. During my fieldwork, I was able to see how my introspection could benefit the children. The sub-director was very encouraging in praising how I have worked and investigated some of my issues. She saw this as something that could also be shared and encourage the children there. I also consider that in the long run, this could also be a positive role modeling for the children. Many of the children I met have difficulties with impulse control and self-regulation. This strength could allow me to teach them the importance of reflection and thinking before we act. Another area that impacts this ability for the children is that some might have intense needs that might make them more vulnerable to fall into something dangerous or unhealthy to try to gain someone's approval or love. It is therefore critical to teach the children to analyze others' intentions once they leave the safety of the foundation.

To summarize, I hope to use my strengths to come alongside the children I will be working with to empower them, to make them feel understood and understood. I hope that as the



project continues to develop, I can also use my strengths and abilities to come alongside locals and help them facilitate the program more and more.

#### 4. Introvert Leadership

I am an introvert. In fact, according to the Myers-Briggs Personality Types, I am considered an Introvert, Intuitive, Feeler and Judging (INFJ) type. This is important for me to know because it impacts the type of leadership I provide. It is vital that I know myself well and to know both my strengths as areas of improvement, for they will all play a part in my development work.

In the book *Quiet*, Susan Cain, the author of the book, shares a compelling story that Mark Twain used to tell. The story is about a man that traveled the world in search of the greatest general who ever lived. The story goes as follows:

When the man was informed that the person he sought had already died and gone to heaven, he made a trip to the pearly gates to look for him. Saint Peter pointed at a regular Joe. ‘That is not the greatest of all generals,’ protested the man. ‘I knew that person when he lived on earth, and he was only a cobbler.’ ‘I know that,’ said Saint Peter, ‘but if he had been a general, he would have been the greatest of them all. (241).

In my future work, I want to look out for the cobblers who can too often be overlooked and not seen as possible “generals.” I want to advocate for this population and to let the children know that they have talents that El Salvador needs. I want to remind them that they are unique and that they have gifts and talents that can contribute good things to the Salvadorian society. I want to cultivate the marginalized’s strengths, listen to their stories and use my strengths and abilities to empower theirs while encouraging the Salvadorian society to stop, listen and also come alongside and encourage them.

## 5. Theology of Service and Ethical Framework

My values inform my ethical framework and my theology of service. Specifically, my values of empathy, compassion, integrity, and faith. Following I explain how each of these values informs my ethical framework and my theology of service.

### 5.1 Empathy

Matthew 7:12 says “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (The Bible, English Standard Translation). A considerable part of my ethics involves giving back to others the best I have received. James 1:17 says that every good gift is from above. I believe that this gift of being called to serve others or to pass on the mercy, compassion, love, empathy, and goodness that was given to me comes from the Lord. Empathy is an essential value to bring to my work. Many of the children I encountered have experienced different forms of abuse and very little empathy. Receiving empathy can be healing to them while also help them become more empathetic human beings. Additionally, Mary Gordon, the founder, and president of a Toronto organization that promotes the nurturing of empathy in grade and middle school children stresses how empathy is essential skill children need to be successful in the world today. Bornstein and Davis also explain how success is less dependent on what is known than on how “well you learn new things, spot patterns, take the initiative, and work with others” (82). Bornstein, Davis, and Gordon all agree that the development of empathy is critical in the development of learning process, especially in present times given the diversity of people around us and the diversity of values present in workplaces, schools and other environments (82).

Furthermore, according to Mary Gordon, the skill of empathy improves with practice. Through her program, Gordon has been able to demonstrate that this skill can be taught to grade

and middle schoolers. This is an important take away for me as I will be working with children of similar ages. It is significant that I know that this is a skill I can successfully teach the children. Moreover, empathy is a critical skill for social innovators to learn because as Bornstein and Davis explain: “democracies need citizens who can empathize and identify with others, recognize problems, and collaborate in building solution” (83). This is a critical skill that is genuinely needed in El Salvador, a country that has been divided politically and socially for a long time. This is a skill that could bring reconciliation, cooperation, peace and resolve. Educationally, empathy can also be beneficial. John Mighton in *The Myth of Ability* explains how educators “mistakenly prioritize cognitive over emotional aspects of learning” (84). Empathy is a skill that can be considered emotional rather than cognitive. Mighton also believes that another primary goal of educators should be to “build confidence because that leads to heightened attention and self-motivated effort” (84). Confidence can bring attitude changes and a motivating factor to do well. This is a crucial factor for me to nurture in the children. Some might already be confident in their skills, while others who are struggling might need to refocus their energy on their strengths or to know that they are good at something to motivate learning. Confidence combined with empathy can build up social innovators with a determination to do well while also being conscious of others’ needs. Building children with these skills in El Salvador can be impactful and revolutionary for society.

## 5.2 Compassion

Compassion is a value that is intertwined with empathy. It is difficult to have compassion for others if there is no empathy. Compassion and empathy are both aspects that can be healing both to the children as to the Salvadorian society which is still trying to heal from the consequences of the civil war. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1967, said that the true

meaning of compassion and nonviolence is: “when it helps us to see the enemy's point of view, to hear his questions, to know his assessment of ourselves. For from his view we may indeed see the basic weaknesses of our condition, and if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition” (American rhetoric, MLK).

Compassion can help us grow into better and more wholesome human beings.

Compassion is also a skill that could help children connect with others. Many times, children who have endured abuse have a deep necessity to connect and yet do not know how to. Compassion and empathy can be two critical skills that could help them feel more connected to others and like they belong. It could help them live more fulfilling lives and break the cycle of abuse in their own lives. Hosea 14:3 says: “For in You the fatherless find compassion” (The Bible, English Standard Translation). When we receive compassion from others, we are more likely to extend the same grace and compassion to others.

Finally, Eugene Peterson once said: “spiritual direction is the act of paying attention to God, calling attention to God, being attentive to God in a person or circumstance or situation” (Thompson 113). It is important to recognize that we need God and we need others. We cannot continue to give if we are not deceiving ourselves. My relationship and connection with God and others are critical in my future work with children, so I do not exhaust myself or lose focus.

### Integrity

Integrity is essential to being ethical and an effective servant. Without integrity and keeping your words and commitments, you cannot be an effective servant. Volf writes: “rather, the question is how to live with integrity and bring healing to a world of inescapable noninnocence that often parades as its opposite. The answer: in the name of the one truly innocent victim and what he stood for, the crucified Messiah, we should demask as inescapably

sinful the world constructed around exclusive moral polarities” (Volf, 84). To continue to be a servant of integrity, I need God, and I need to recognize myself as human and vulnerable. I need to be founded in Christ as it can be easy to get discouraged or hopeless when things do not go as planned. I also need God’s spiritual protection, for Him to guard my soul, my being and my desires. Finally, I also need to remind myself to bring captive to God anything I hear that could demotivate me or make me question what I am doing so I can continue to honor the desires God has put in my heart. This is in part what I appreciated of my fieldwork site. They have gone through many obstacles in the 22 years of operation, and yet they have not given up on their mission. They have also been betrayed, and they have been able to trust God and continue. I value and admire this about the organization and hope to continue this legacy in my work.

### 5.3 Faith

Without faith in God, nothing is possible. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says that “we walk by faith and not by sight” (The Bible, English Standard Translation). This verse has brought real encouragement to my life during times of trial. At times this has also been painful as without the trials I have experienced, my faith would not be where it is today. Volf also exposes that it is Jesus Christ who “made our cause, [and who] frees us from pursuing our interests only and creates in us the space for the interests of others” (Volf 215). In my case, ever since I went on a short mission trip to Costa Rica, I have had this desire in my heart to serve this population, and yet it has taken years of preparation and God moving me closer to fulfill that desire. There are still unknown at this point, but I believe that God has allowed my story for a purpose for He does not waste any pain and His thoughts and purposes are higher than mine (Isaiah 55:8-9). It is this faith that motivates my theology of service. I will need this faith in the future when things get rough, to continue believing God has a purpose and that this is His ministry, not mine. This faith

and commitment to God are also what motivates my need to have an ethical framework that represents Him in whatever I do.

In conclusion, having a clear theology of service and ethical framework is essential to the quality of development work I will do in the future. My theology of service is to extend to others what God has given me and to do this I need to be clear that I am human, vulnerable and that I will make mistakes. I need Christ, and I will need the help of others. I also want to be a servant that operates from an ethical framework that represents God and who He is in my life. For that, I need to be loyal to my values of empathy, compassion, respect, truth, and responsibility.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, clarifying my values regarding personal transformation, social justice, copowerment, a theology of service and ethical framework are all crucial aspects that I can carry with me to this project. There will be situations that will challenge me or will make me question. Having my values clear and where I can draw from in those moments assures the success and longevity of the project. Furthermore, though this is important work, the truth is that working with children who have undergone abuse is not easy. I need to have a clear vision of where the project is headed and what informs my leadership and capabilities. Knowing and understanding my story and how it influences my values is an asset. My values also will enrich the work that I will do. This is my higher calling. I choose to dwell on His promises, to seek understanding for God to be the one to fight the good fight for me (Exodus 14:14) and make way for the meaning He has set to bring in my life since my birth.

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