Celebrating 12 Years of leadership and engagement with diverse emerging leaders in Arizona.

Public Allies Arizona
2018 Presentations on Impact

“Creating a just and equitable society and the diverse leadership to sustain it”
Public Allies mission

May 23rd, 2018
ASU Downtown
Phoenix Campus
I will forever be grateful to Ms. Ashley Gonzales and Ms. Gaybrielle LeAnn Gant who introduced to me this brilliant opportunity and distinguished program. I remember it was exactly a year ago when I officially applied for the program. I had recently come back from the annual Model United Nations of the Far West. For me nonprofit organizations were new territory for me. I had not ever participated or worked in a nonprofit organization. Their ability to explain the program in simple terms and easy language made it easy for me to choose Public Allies, and it's by far one of the best decisions I have made in my young career. I remember that at first it was difficult for me to make the meetings because I had a health problem. Nevertheless, I communicated my circumstances to the program and they were really understanding. I remember the first time I came to one of the cohort meetings and I remember the joy I got from seeing a roomful of dedicated individuals who were going to change the world and the city of Phoenix. I was matched with Creighton Community Foundation - a local nonprofit dedicated to community-based partnerships to help the local Creighton School District implement excellent educational programs and services. When I began my term at the Foundation, I really fell in love with one of the mottos of the founder in which he states, "It takes a village to raise a kid and Creighton Community Foundation is in the business of investing in strong villages." I took this to heart every single day. I realized that I had been given an enormous amount of trust and faith to be placed with such a wonderful organization dedicated to the wellbeing and the institutional successes of their schools.

At the age of 9, coming from Somalia to the United States was a very intimidating thing for me. because i had supportive adults and remarkable role models who played a noteworthy role in my life at that very vulnerable time I could succeed and immerse myself with the American educational system. That's the difference I wanted to make to the kids who we as Public Allies have been given the important task of advocating for. Many of the children in our schools do not have any meals to go home to and for that reason we implemented a supper feeding program in partnership with the district's central kitchen. We were passing out 100+ meals. The relationships and friendships that we made in this program has been by far the most rewarding part of my service. Seeing the happiness on those kids faces was a really satisfying experience for me.
Beginning in November, we had grown to providing the supper feeding program at two schools. We were able to serve both Creighton Elementary and Excellencia Elementary. During these months we were also canvassing homes within the boundaries of the school. Prior to the feeding program, when we knocked on doors we usually didn’t receive any feedback. However, when we went back to the neighborhood, the children from the schools would recognize us and it made our work very easy for us. The trust of the neighborhood was clearly behind us.

In that same time, we began our POWOW program, otherwise known as Produce on Wheels Without Waste. I knew that we were making a difference in the community when I realized that these events were getting recognized by more community members and many people were coming. Furthermore, we were able to successfully carry out more than 5 service projects during my term here at Creighton Community Foundation. The POWOW program enabled us to provide food and vegetables to our constituents. I will forever cherish the moments where I tested my ability and drive to succeed.

In my time at Creighton, I have canvassed and created meaningful community connections with 550+ people, applied for and implemented a grant we received from the City of Phoenix to create a community project, put on multiple service days to clean our community of trash and bulk trash dumping, and supported multiple community meetings. All this, of course, with the great help and dedication of the entire team at Creighton Community Foundation. I will forever be grateful to the amazing people at Public Allies for entrusting me with this great responsibility. When I finish my term in June, I hope to create a Model UN program at the local schools. As I go into my 4+1 program at ASU to earn my Bachelors and Master’s degree at Arizona State University I will use many of the lessons I learned during my term here to succeed.

“Experience”

To most people, when you say the word, “Experience,” they think of either 1. What someone has experienced or 2. Qualifications. And, when I say qualifications, I’m implying something similar to that of a key to an imaginary door. The imaginary door, being our expectations for something. Now, qualifications for what, I ask? Well, that…is up for us to think about.

So, what determines qualification, what experience is needed? Most importantly… where does it start and end? If I’ve got the cog wheels turning then what I want to also ask is what experience or qualification does someone need to be a happy person; to be one with a mind, body, and soul.

Before I begin, let me provide you with some personal information about myself. My experiences from my life up until now has included multiple homes, public schools, government assistance, supportive safe houses, lots of sisters, multiple step-dads, a hard-working mother who was rarely home, addiction, abuse, some loving family members, and essentially some of the best and worst times.

From helping my grandma in the kitchen, to being neglected when I’d go home. From spending the night at a friend’s house and eating Takis for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, to chasing the ice cream man barefoot on burning hot asphalt. From buying groceries, and cooking food for my sisters, and mom, to getting my first bus pass at 13 and staying out until the library would close. From changing diapers to watching my mom do her makeup.

Eventually, after being sling-shot into adulthood at 17, I asked myself one day- “If I died today, what experiences would I have lived, and provided?” I didn’t like my answer. But I realized that despite my negative upbringings, with those experiences came opportunities to see what really mattered. And, those were opportunities of having some people in my life show me love, affection, gratitude, patience, happiness, and kindness.
In September 2017, I applied to be a Public Ally after first applying for a student worker position with the Public Allies staff. When I first applied for the student worker position, I did not really know what Public Allies was, I just knew they helped youth get involved in the community. After my interview, their director sent me an email suggesting that instead of taking the student worker position, I should apply to be a Public Ally because they had an organization that was looking for someone with my skill set. I was beyond ecstatic. During my interview, I learned that the program worked with young adults who wanted to make a change in their community with different nonprofits throughout Maricopa County. I had recently moved to Arizona from Michigan for graduate school and was so excited to learn more about the nonprofit community here in Phoenix. After being accepted into the program, I interviewed with Opportunities for Youth and was offered their Data Analyst Intern position. Opportunities for Youth, an initiative that had just recently moved to ASU from Maricopa County Education Service Agency (MCESA), is an organization whose mission is to "harness the power of cross-sector collaboration to create a comprehensive system of opportunity that reengages our Valley’s disconnected youth.” Through my service as a Public Ally at Opportunities for Youth I have helped build a just and equitable society within Maricopa County. I have demonstrated this by helping to secure funding, bringing attention to gaps in resources for youth with disabilities, creating synergy between their Reengagement Center Action Team, and streamlining their referral process.

I helped to secure funding by analyzing the data the Reengagement Centers shared with OFY. Charts I created showed that collectively the Reengagement Centers reengaged 10% of Opportunity Youth in employment and 90% of youth in education. The data collected broke down education into seven different categories: enrolled in a two-year college, enrolled in an adult education program, enrolled in vocational or technical education programs, enrolled in a four-year college/university, enrolled in an online high school, enrolled in alternative high school, and enrolled in traditional high school. This information was important to give to our funders because the numbers show that the centers are effectively helping youth become reengaged in society. By showing this effectiveness, we encourage the funders to continue giving to OFY, and we can use this information to go out and find new potential funders.

Kendelle Brown
Data Analyst Intern
Opportunities for Youth
During the Fall, it was brought to the OFY team’s attention that Maricopa County had a high population of opportunity youth living with a disability. While analyzing the data from the reengagement centers, I noticed that this was reflected in our own data but we only had one reengagement center that really focused on youth with disabilities. As a result of this finding, the team decided we should look for organizations in Maricopa County who work with youth with disabilities and ask them to be a part of the initiative.

When I first started with Opportunities for Youth it was apparent there was a slight disconnection between the OFY backbone staff and the Reengagement Center Action Team. Even though the backbone staff was supposed to be there to help lead the action team, this wasn’t happening. Due to many transitions that OFY was going through, this seemed to have fallen through the cracks. One of my main priorities was to help fix this. I helped to create synergy between the backbone staff and action team by assisting the action team chairs with their data from the 12 different reengagement centers. I also established an environment of collaboration. I let the reengagement centers know that I could share whatever resources and opportunities they knew of with our network to help benefit the youth in our community.

The fourth thing I did to help build a just and equitable society is that I streamlined the referral process between the twelve reengagement centers. Before the reengagement centers were cold calling each other trying to get their youth into different programs but because they all have busy caseloads, there wasn’t the necessary follow-up. In March, OFY brought on Youth Outreach Interns to help the reengagement centers with their outreach. To make sure the youth got the help they needed, I created an outreach form on google forms that automatically populates to a google sheet that marked to where the youth needed to be referred. The site supervisors were given a link to this google sheet so that they can check it on a daily basis and reach out to the youth that are referred to them.

Working as a Public Ally at OFY has opened my eyes as to what goes on in a nonprofit at the administrative level. Previously I had only worked in direct service so it is amazing to see how much of an impact can be made at the higher level as well. I have always known that I wanted to make a positive change in our society and I am so honored to have been given this opportunity.

Hanna Burris
College and Career Goal Communication and Volunteer Specialist
The Arizona Commission for Post-Secondary Education

I started public allies the summer of 2017, just after graduating high school. A close friend of mine was already participating in the program. I admired how she was taking control of her life and I wanted that to, so I applied.

After the interview process, I was placed at the Arizona Commission for Post-Secondary Education (ACPE), which ironically, was my least favorite match. The ACPE was my least favorite organization because it was out of my comfort zone. I prefer hands-on work; I did not want to work from a computer all day. But, I joined Public Allies to further develop my professional “real-world” skills; so inevitably, I was placed at the ACPE. My position at the Commission is the College and Career Goal Arizona Communications and Volunteer Specialist. My role includes supporting the College and Career Goal Arizona (C2GA) programs as well as assisting the other in-house programs.

The College and Career Goal Arizona campaign is three-fold in its approach of supporting the post-secondary experience. The first step in this initiative is the Arizona College Application Campaign (AzCAC) which focuses on ensuring that all eligible students complete and submit at least one postsecondary application during their High Schools College Application event. The second initiative is College Goal FAF$A (CGF), which supports students and families as they complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The third initiative is FAF$A Finish Line, which collects school-specific data on students’ FAFSA Application status.

The ACPE concentrates the C2GA campaign programs among title 1 high schools. Title 1 Schools are local educational agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families, which receive federal financial assistance to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. The idea is that most youth living in poverty will be first generation college students, need federal financial assistance, and/or are lacking the resources to start the post-secondary process. The C2GA programs are truly important because they provide students with tools, resources, and professional assistance when applying for post-secondary opportunities.

Working within these campaigns, assisting the youth of Arizona, and constant communication with post-secondary partners has lightened my view on public education. I have always understood the financial importance of attending a post-secondary institution, now I want to not only advocate for a college-going community, but show the youth how to make it a reality for themselves.
There are a couple of roles I have here at Creighton Community Foundation, and those are serving as a Community Engagement Ally and Volunteer Coordinator.

Let me share with you a snapshot of impact: throughout these past 8-9 months, I've had the privilege to get to know a few kids throughout the program— they're going to be freshmen in high school next year. A young fellow who I cannot name, had a very hard time at his school. Things were going so badly that he wanted to leave and not finish his eighth-grade year. He had a hard time with the assistant principal and some of his classmates who got him into nearly 2 months of in-school suspension. Every time I saw him, I kept him going by telling him to keep his work up to date. Last week he told me he was back in his classroom and is on the basketball team, Go #1!!

Being a Public Ally has taught me a lot about becoming a leader and I know that I will always be open to becoming an even better leader. I opened up more as a person to myself and others by meeting the community members when I went out canvassing or had community events that were hosted by us. I felt like I was a big part of Creighton Community Foundation. A big part for me was being able to speak and translate in Spanish or English when we were canvassing in the neighborhoods or translating documents. Another great part of my experience was knocking on doors in both the Excelencia & Gateway school areas. Being able to hear about different stories from the residents as they talked about the neighborhoods they grew up in as kids or having kids that are growing up in the same neighborhoods. I got to hear the struggles of others that I could relate to.

One example of the successful events that we hosted are the community cleanups where we had groups pick up trash in their neighborhood to create a better environment for their kids. Another time, we had an event at community church and where a lot of the Public Allies repainted a fence. We regularly fed 105 children and 14 faculty members at an afterschool feeding program. We installed a playground for a local kid's club that provides a safe space for local children in the Excelencia Neighborhood. We managed a group of more than 100 volunteers and 40 Phoenix Coyotes employees who built a playground from the ground up for local school. We helped our local Interact Club raised funds by selling nachos and snow cones at a Kinder Fair and got a pretty great sell out. We've gotten to partner with a local school to put murals and clay art tiles on walls and build a bench for kids to sit while they wait for their parents. We've held 8 Produce on Wheels without Waste Markets where we provided community members up to 60 pounds of fresh produce.

There were times where I felt like I shouldn't be part of this program because of how much change that happened throughout the program. A lot of my support left in the form of my program managers and some coworkers, as well as my supervisor at work. However, I believe we can overcome the struggles we are given every day. It's hot, we get doors slammed in our faces, some might not even open their doors to us. I'm almost done with my 10 month program and know I can truly finish strong!

I was a 19-year-old freshman in college who didn't know what I wanted to do in her future. I didn't know where she wanted to go to school so I went to start at Phoenix College to get classes out of the way. I had 4 part-time jobs where I worked a few shifts as a hostess, nannied for different families, worked as a full-time student and working with Promise Arizona under Neighborhood Ministries through November 6, 2016. I had the essays and math quizzes that were due every other Friday by 11:59 PM type of Fridays or I was doomed to fail and during the struggle of trying to get assignments done I found a way to stay at PC's library to finish her assignments by 12 AM. This was my life when my mother told me to apply to PUBLIC ALLIES, and in September I got placed at CCF AND THIS IS WHERE MY NEW PATH AND JOURNEY BEGAN.
Public Allies core value: Collaboration
We believe in the strength of the collective and we build consensus and empower each other to achieve common goals.

It takes a village to raise a child. As the Human Resource Staffing Coordinator for Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Scottsdale, and also the Volunteer Coordinator later, I realized that it really does take a village to raise a child. There is strength in the collective power of partnerships and teamwork. Above all, I learned that crisis, obstacles, and challenges are all areas of opportunity. All are blessings in disguise. It is what happens in times of crisis that leadership, collaboration and partnerships come together to create something magical and positive in the hearts of all those affected – in this case, the children of Arizona. In terms of Public Allies, everyone leads to help create a just and equitable society for each other. However, the children are the great futures that we must never allow to suffer alone. That is why it takes a village to raise a child/ren. We cannot do it alone.

During the Arizona Teachers Strike, my organization was hit hard. What seemed like a small walkout turned into a statewide political movement that trickled down into localities, especially those in youth development and education – of which Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Scottsdale is all about. The kids had nowhere to go during the walkout. What happened was beyond what I had imagined. It's one thing seeing the massive #RedforEd strikes on television and online every day, but it is another thing to actually be affected by the strike directly. Every day was tentative; schools were closed, some districts reversed information about school closings/openings in a matter of hours. The statewide teacher walkout lasted six days. However, those six days seemed like eternity. Everything stopped and/or was adjusted due to staffing shortages. The nine branches of BGCS had to be proactive regarding the uncertainty of the Arizona Teaches Strike. BGCS's mission, vision, and initiative is to provide a positive impact for the youth of Greater Scottsdale and Native American communities by helping each youth reach their ultimate potential – this clearly was the case during the strike. My organization was prepared with dealing with the impact and aftermath of the crisis as a whole. We delivered our promise to all families and kids and stayed consistent throughout the crisis. BGCS branches extended the usual after school hours; instead, the branches were opened from 7am-6pm each day of the strike and continued to provide seamless full-day services to the kids.

Everyone pitched in to be there for the kids. Branch directors worked especially hard on staffing plans, activities, and parent communications for their branches. Everyone in Support Services was called to help during the crisis. It felt like one of those scenes in a movie in which a ship is sinking and the first ones to get saved were the children (and women, of course). The leaders and crew stayed consistent with the rescue mission to get everyone to safety as efficiently as possible. That was what it felt like when I was called to action. It was all about saving the children. I was asked to go help out at the Charros Branch. They did not have enough staff coverage to help with the kids. Anastasia, my service dog, was also on board with the mission. After all, she's been my Junior HR Staffing Coordinator at my placement since day one. Everyone from the branches to the Support Services team all collaborated to build consensus and empower each other to reach common goals.

“From day one, leadership and administrative staff stepped in to assist Branch staff for an ‘all hands on deck’ effort during this unexpected time of need. We are all tied together with a common care, concern and passion for our kids. When they need us, we are there. That is what matters.” – BGCS President and CEO

This is my story. This is the moment in which I realize why I got placed at BGCS. This is what makes the “Human” to the “Resources”. I am proud to say that I was a part of this Teachers Strike in a huge way through my organization. I collaborated and led in a positive manner that is representative of what Public Allies is all about.
Safe Place: Someplace to Go…Someone to Help.

At 17 years old, a young girl is transitioning from a child to a young adult, living with her father and her mother lives out of state. In her discovery of her identity, independence, and values, she struggles to fully grow within the restrictions put in place by her father. She and her father get into arguments often—some which include threats to kick her out of the house. One day, she decides to leave.

This is a real story from a young lady who came into Safe Place. I’ve had the pleasure and honor to serve my second Public Allies term at UMOM New Day Centers as the Safe Place Outreach and Education Assistant. With a mission to prevent and end homelessness with innovative strategies and housing solutions that meet the unique needs of each family and individual, UMOM’s Safe Place program served 114 homeless and runaway youth in 2017.

My journey with UMOM originally began in my 2016 term when I was matched to serve in the Tumbleweed Center for Youth Development. Tumbleweed programs, including Safe Place, luckily transitioned under UMOM once Tumbleweed filed for bankruptcy. I ended my first Public Allies term at the beginning of the transition, and I began my second term during the ending of the transitioning period. Throughout the organization’s changes, I worked in three different programs, serving in three different positions and I learned that although change can be frustrating, upsetting, and uncomfortable, change is natural and necessary, especially within the nonprofit sector.

With my recent experience working in Tumbleweed, I believe I was the perfect Ally to be placed in the Safe Place program. There were organizational changes every week, but with my strengths in flexibility, patience, and ambition, I was able to onboard smoothly and dive into outreach facilitation within the first couple of weeks. I learned that outreach to spread awareness of Safe Place is highly important because with the absence of Tumbleweed, the community assumed that all previous Tumbleweed programs were no longer operating.

Once people learned that the youth programs, specifically Safe Place, were still in operation under UMOM, they were happy and relieved, but also had a sense of sadness telling me “I wish I would have known Safe Place was still running—I knew a kid who needed a place to stay.”

Safe Place’s impact is vital to the community. Safe Place provides immediate assistance and shelter to youth 12-17 years old experiencing homelessness, abuse, or have run away in Maricopa County. There is no wait time which is unique when compared to other homeless shelters in the area. Safe Place provides intervention and prevention for youth and families experiencing difficulties like abuse, homelessness and trafficking. Look into the Youth Experiences Survey (YES) report and you will learn of the risk factors of young folks living without shelter. The survey is of homeless runaway young adults 18-25 years old and the correlation with sex trafficking. 199 people were surveyed and some results were:

- 33.2% reported they have been sex trafficked
- 19% reported their family's home was an unsafe environment
- 51% reported being kicked out by their family; the reasonings being for sexual orientation (5.5%), gender identity (2%), poverty (16.1%), and family conflict (31.7%)
- 26.6% reported being sexually abused before the age of 18 years old

In 2017, 45.5% of Safe Place youth reported the source of their problem as family conflict and 11.4% reported their home being an unsafe environment. The existence of Safe Place not only fulfills youth’s basic needs, but helps prevent youth from the experiences of homeless young adults. They and their families receive a chance to reconcile their differences and work on their relationship just as the young lady I mentioned at the beginning did. I have fully enjoyed my work with UMOM and will always continue to educate adults and youth of Safe Place so that no teenager feels they need to struggle alone.
Anybody who has had the pleasure of knowing me since high school knows I have Gerontophobia: a fear of elderly people. To be more specific, I am the most anxious of elderly people in nursing homes. And if you have ever been in a nursing home, you know that behind a code-locked wall, there are the people affected by dementia and Alzheimer’s and any other memory deficient disease, and I am especially fearful of these people. I watch too many scary movies because whenever I think about nursing homes I imagine delusional, wide-eyed senior citizens who will snatch me up and harm me in some way. Now, you are either thinking one of two things - 1: “what kind of heartless person is this and how did she end up in AmeriCorps?”, or 2: “thank God somebody feels the same way!” Before you judge me too hard, let me explain...

It was my friend’s 9th birthday and I was looking forward to a great night filled with cake and ice cream. Where did we end up? A nursing home. I have no idea why the celebration was scheduled during her mom’s work hours, but we ended up helping with errands, which included dropping of mail. So when it came my turn to drop it off, I almost had a heart attack. I was so scared somebody was hiding behind a wall waiting to grab me that I prepped outside of the room; taking several deep breaths I ran as fast I could, threw the mail on the bed and ran out. Ever since then I have been nervous around the aging population.

Jump to a few years later in high school, when my school partnered with a volunteer program called Glamour Gals. This is where you go into nursing homes and give makeovers to anybody who shows up. How I ended up in this program is beyond me but there I was, my first day, going to Emeritus Assisted Living and I was crying and hyperventilating in the parking lot. Thanks to my classmates support, I successfully managed to give the residents manicures and I actually became comfortable. As long as I was not alone or entering any rooms, I was fine.

Jump even further into my life to 8-9 months ago. I was going to be delivering meals to homebound seniors and disabled people every Monday. My body tensed when I found this out. I was going to be delivering meals to seniors, BY MYSELF, and in some cases entering these homes of seniors, BY MYSELF. I went straight home and told my mom and best friend I had to get out of it. Neither of them even tried to talk me out of it because they knew how I felt. Each time I went into TCAA for an interview or a meeting, or just a regular workday, I planned to tell them I could not deliver meals. What did I end up doing? Delivering meals.

The first couple of times I shadowed somebody, so they were able to warm me up to the job. I began to become familiar with the routine. Eventually the time came for me to do this by myself. There is a protocol to follow that if there is no answer from the client, I am supposed to open the door and search throughout the house if possible. I have not yet been able to overcome my fears of this part, so instead I call them and pray for an answer. My mind kept going back to the scary movies, an innocent young girl opening the door of a deaf senior, scaring them and triggering them to scream and attack. Well, it has not happened. However, what I did not expect to happen was forming genuine relationships with the participants. Asking how Dawn is recovering from the death of her 14-year-old cat, being disappointed that I wasn’t able to tell Joe happy birthday after he had been telling me it was coming up for weeks, and feeling sad after I found out one of my favorite people had unfortunately had a stroke and was in the hospital. All of my regular clients are extremely nice and thankful. If I miss a Monday, they tell me they missed me and ask where I was. I hear stories about travelling in the Navy, how someone used to skydive every weekend, even how someone escaped a cult. When somebody cancels their meal on Mondays and is taken off the route, I find myself hoping they are okay and missing their dogs. It has definitely been a growing experience, but I am grateful for the opportunity to add a smiling face and a comforting conversation to their lives every Monday.
As my senior year of college approached, I became very aware of the fact that I would not have the stamina to continue pursuing my education immediately after completing my bachelors. College had been stressful and I felt that I wasn’t getting the experience I had expected. I wanted to learn more about people, society, and myself. Many people I met through my undergraduate program were competitive and seemed obsessed with putting their personal success above everything else. I did not see the value in what I was doing as a student, because what was important to me was to feel useful and like I could create a positive impact in the world. After graduation, I knew that something needed to change and I began researching opportunities that would allow me to experience the social service world. Public Allies stood out to me because of the commitment to directly impacting society that was clear in the mission statement: “To create a just and equitable society and the diverse leadership to sustain it.” The tagline, “Everyone Leads” also spoke to me because I had always questioned my capacity as a leader and what I could offer to other individuals.

My love for planning and research meant that by the time I was notified of my acceptance in Public Allies Arizona, I was completely prepared to move... at least on paper. All around me, there were people telling me I was brave and people worrying about my safety before I could even leave. I heard all of the questions, concerns, and comments, but for me it was a done deal. I had decided that this was the change I needed. Starting the program, like most beginnings, was exciting and overwhelming at the same time. There was so much information and so many people, I loved soaking it all in. To feel like I was surrounded by like-minded individuals gave me so much hope for the future. At my placement site, Lodestar Day Resource Center on the Human Services Campus, my faith in humanity was slowly restored as I witnessed staff, community members, and clients working together to end homelessness. The staff always managed to maintain a sense of humor and playfulness despite the stressful conditions. In my role as Volunteer/ Resource Coordinator I saw the community step up to meet the tangible and service needs of the campus, every week there seemed to be a new person expressing interest in helping out however they could. I met so many clients who were not letting their experience ruin their attitude about life. Many worked hard to improve their situations and some even would offer what they could to help others.

My placement supervisor, Gina, always listened to my suggestions and allowed me to ask questions, which gave me the confidence and freedom to develop my own solutions to problems I saw in addition to completing tasks as assigned. I was able to build capacity for the Human Services Campus by maintaining a system for keeping track of individual volunteers and volunteer group events, which allowed my partner organization to run events more smoothly. I also initiated a volunteer recognition program designed to show the volunteers that they are valued by the campus. The program is also aimed at increasing community awareness of the campus and ways in which to get involved. Creating awareness became a larger focus in my role in the second half of my term when I began working with social media and attending more meetings in the community. I organized the Human Services Campus’ first Savers FUNDrive with the hopes of getting new community partners involved with our campus. The FUNDrive involved creating donation bins, finding bin host sites, advertising the call for donations, and collecting/delivering the bins which were filled with clothing and household goods that Savers compensated us for by weight. The money raised from our FUNDrive were not bound by many specific restrictions so it was able to be used for obtaining client birth certificates, employee engagement activities, and last minute supplies. An unanticipated benefit of participating in the FUNDrive was an increase in the number of donations received on our campus, this has provided a steady stream of clothing which will allow Lodestar Day Resource Center to continually stock their clothing closet that is being established. In addition, the FUNDrive provided an environmentally responsible way to clear out many unused items from their program room, which can now be used more effectively. While I am not sure the Savers FUNDrive is something that my partner organization will participate in again, it was great to see an idea of mine implemented on a large scale, as well as the partnerships that developed in the process.

My time with Public Allies Arizona allowed me to realize the potential for positive growth in myself, others, and society, which has provided me with hope that will continue to inspire me to try to make a difference. It is this potential that makes me sure that everyone CAN and SHOULD lead, they should lead with their mind, body, and soul using their creativity, knowledge, and passion to move the world forward.
Before becoming a Public Ally, I somewhat understood the nonprofit sector, since the year before I had served as a City Year Corps Member in Chicago through AmeriCorps. I was knowledgeable enough about the fundamental role of specific nonprofits, but I never fully grasped the role of nonprofit agencies and their effect on social justice issues as a whole. Becoming a Public Ally enabled me to comprehend new perspectives, regarding the fair and just relations between the individual and society. Further, it has exposed me to worlds and circumstances I’d never seen and were often difficult to witness. As a result, I have gained a new perspective on the importance of breaking barriers for social mobility, the creation of safety nets, and economic justice. Consequently, my desire to play a role in transforming the world has truly been ignited.

Being a part of Public Allies in a state that was new to me challenged me to step out of my comfort zone and really immerse myself into every project put before me. I chose to see each project as a new opportunity. I told myself in the beginning of the program that, no matter what, I would always try to have an open mind and open heart. Through this program I have been able to gain knowledge not just about the social injustices that have been the undercurrent of society for many centuries but also acknowledging my own privilege and the roles I have played in, both unknowingly perpetuating these injustices, and desiring to level the playing field for those less fortunate in my own community. Additionally, the network of people I have been able to meet allowed me to be part of a collective bridge to creating sustainable changes, as well as relationships that will last a lifetime. I’ve gained a new level of respect for those individuals who play a lead role in efforts that lead to continuous collaboration and capacity building throughout the sector, as well as volunteers and staff who create the mass movement behind them.

In addition to continuous collaboration and capacity building throughout the sector, the American Lung Association (ALA) has broadened my skill set, enabling me to be a contender in the field. Through the American Lung Association I was placed in the Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease team (CLRD) where one of my main objectives was to logistically prepare for our Lung Force Expo; The LUNG FORCE Expo is a program designed for patients, caregivers and healthcare providers to learn more about the latest trends, resources and research surrounding lung cancer, COPD, asthma and other lung diseases. In addition to co-facilitating the Leadership Committee for this event, I was responsible for identifying speakers from a variety of fields that would present on current health management skills that have the most impact on those whose lives are touched by these diseases. I was also responsible for securing, for the provider track, state-of-the-art medical topic speakers, for healthcare professionals.

I truly believe that education is the antidote for ignorance, poverty, and war. The American Lung Association’s mission is to improve lung health and preventing lung disease through education, advocacy and research. We want to ensure our communities members and partners know the resources and educational opportunities we offer to live a healthier life. We are saving lives one breathe at a time. I am unbelievably grateful to be a part of the ALA family where we all pick each other up and work as a unit to accomplish success. In fact, by recognizing and utilizing the strengths and natural leadership of everyone on our team, we’re able to quickly build momentum for social change for the constituents we serve.
My story with Public Allies Arizona starts years before I even walked into a Job Fair and met my former Program Manager. For you to truly understand my impact with Public Allies, you must first allow me to introduce myself, my journey, and my obstacles. You must first understand how having a village of leaders, nurturers, friends, and loved ones all played a part in my journey to get this far. I was born the second oldest of six to a single mother on the North side of St. Louis, City. Where I lived, 16 family members in a three-bedroom home, mostly boys, you would think the house would be a rowdy environment. It was quite the opposite, the house was always full of love for each other, but outside the door was another story. I can still smell the lingering scent of a gun recently fired. I still feel the pains of not eating and not being sure of when a meal would come. I remember how hard my mom had to work to provide for the household, and all of this was before my 6th birthday.

When I joined Public Allies back in 2017, I didn’t exactly know what I was getting myself into. After meeting the strong men and women in my cohort I knew I was a part of something special. I started working with Creighton Community Foundation, for two reasons. First, I wanted to impact the lives of the next generation through education. Secondly, the founder Jeff Boles knows and lives the mission that my Godmother instilled in me, “it takes a village, to raise a child.” While working at Creighton, we worked heavily in the neighborhoods of the students who attended Gateway and Excelencia elementary. Initially, our new faces in the community were greeted with closed doors, “I don’t want what you are selling”, or no answer at all. Then we started working with the Creighton kitchen staff to assist with the after-school feeding program. On average, we were able to serve around 250+ students a day between the two schools. These meals went to kids who were probably unsure if there would be a meal waiting at home for them. I was once that kid during my kindergarten through third grade years. That experience eventually led me to become very close to my kitchen staff at my new school for the next three years.

Those kids started becoming more and more excited to see us walking the halls as well as their streets. Doors began opening up more and parents and community members started to come together. We would eventually be able to host monthly community meetings as well as seeing our families out at our produce market. We have been able to lend a hand in revitalizing a church exterior and removing tons of trash throughout the neighborhood by hosting clean-ups. These clean-ups would inspire my family to host one of our own back home in St. Louis, in honor of my cousin who died last year due to gun violence.

Public Allies has made my life come full circle. It has been ten months of reflection, ten months of separation, and ten months of elevation. I am now double-placed in two organizations. I am a community engagement worker with Creighton Community Foundation as well as a Youth Outreach Coordinator with Opportunities for Youth. I have earned a position that allows me to help those whose lives may have started off similar to mine. I earned a position that allows me to help those who need assistance overcoming their own obstacles. I earned my chance to finally be a leader, and create change. Public Allies, Creighton Community Foundation, Opportunities for Youth have helped me go from unemployed with no plan, to a pathway for educational and professional success.
Like Gandhi once said, “I will not let anyone walk through my mind with their dirty feet.” So why continue to allow negative influences or people muck our minds?

As time passes we are given two decisions …

1. Stay comfortable and sit back in our comfortability without changing ourselves; therefore, becoming a product of our surroundings that allows others to make choices for us. Or…

2. Be the force which does not necessarily enjoy un-comfortability but understands that it means growth. Meaning that you are not a product of your surroundings; however, the product that impacts others.

As for me, I found that I enjoy being uncomfortable. At the beginning of my second year, I faced an extreme loss of my father passing away. Mentally, I did not know that I was going to finish the program but through the support of cohort, I was able to perceive.

Like the seed of a flower, I was put into the earth’s soil to feed on what it offered me. Some days there was no rain and I craved water to grace me. Other days I drowned from the harsh rain but through it all, I push through the soil and was able to grow. From leadership actions to core values, the knowledge from this program gave me nutrients that added to my personal growth. Becoming an innovator in my community is just part of it. As a second-year Ally, I developed over 45 different activities for my partner organization, The Children's Museum of Phoenix, while engaging with several communities across the Valley. Inclusive of that, I developed a volunteer handbook and a communication guide that will help individuals’ professional developmental skills.

Luv Junious
Outreach Coordinator
Children’s Museum of Phoenix

Stepping onto a brand-new path is difficult, but not more difficult than remaining in a situation which is not nourishing to the whole woman.”

- Maya Angelou -

Coming into Public Allies, I wasn’t sure what to expect. All I thought I would do was learn about was nonprofit organizations, maybe do some volunteering, but mostly try to get my foot in the door of the nonprofit sector. After graduating from MCC, I was confused about what I wanted to do with this degree. I knew I was supposed to have all of these new opportunities open up for me, but I didn’t even know where to start looking. When you spend all your adult life doing a job that you hate because it provides the income that you need to support your family, you don’t really think about what you would do if you could anything else. I came across the Public Allies and it looked like a great program. It was like a paid internship where I get to learn about nonprofit organizations, plus I get an education award at the end? I was more than excited to apply.

“Great leaders can see the greatness in others when they can’t see it themselves and lead them to their highest potential they don’t even know.”

- Roy T. Bennett -

This past year I have learned a lot about myself. These valuable lessons have been, in most cases, more personal than professional. During out Gift Seat activity, I learned that my peers consider me a very good listener. At first it doesn’t sound that impressive, but after they explained that they feel like I am hearing what they have to say, responding constructively, and engaging, I took it as a great compliment. Professionally, I have become a representative of my organization in my community. My ability to listen to the concerns of others and consider the needs of everyone helps me to be a great leader in my position at TCAA.

“How do you serve the world, what do they need that your talent can provide?”

- Jim Carrey -

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In Public Allies we learn a lot about diversity. At first, we think of race, culture, and ethnicity without thinking about each other’s individual stories. We don’t think about all of things that make us who we are as a person; how we have dealt with our struggles and what we took from our triumphs are also contributors to the individuals we have become. Throughout the program, I have learned that I have many valuable skills that can help people, even if I’m just listening. Sometimes the things that we never bother to think about, the things that we do naturally, others see as our most valuable assets.

“Unity is strength…when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.”

-Mattie Stepanek-

When we have gone out into the community together to do outreach on our service days, or when I am collaborating with other organizations with TCAA, I have witnessed wonderful things happening when teamwork and collaboration is at the center of what we do. The Martin Luther King Jr. service day was a great example of us working together to provide resources, or even just some friendly conversation, to the homeless communities around the Valley. Some of our group members have never done outreach like that before so it was nice to see us all helping each get comfortable with the work and support each other.

“It is an absolute human certainty that no one can know his [their] own beauty or perceive a sense of his [their] own worth until it has been reflected back to him [them] in the mirror of another loving caring human being.”

-John Joseph Powell-

In my time as the Community Garden Coordinator at the Tempe Community Action Agency I have worked to help provide food security for low-income and homeless communities in Tempe. In the gardens we have been able to create a more productive planting calendar in order to better and more consistently provide food for the food pantry. I was also able to help create some educational activities for children in the garden, since we do have a wide age range of children that come to visit Escalante. By making a few changes to what we plant, I have also helped make the Escalante garden a sensory garden. This will make the garden more enjoyable for our older visitors and our visitors with autism and other cognitive disabilities. I have also collaborated with other local organizations to get the gardens more involved in the community. We have recently teamed up with the I Have a Name Project to help them with collecting donations for their summer outreach projects. We took food and supply donations for them and had them come visit the market, bringing in more foot traffic to the market and the garden.

Being a part of Public Allies has helped me to connect all these dots. It has helped me to see every need that I can help with, and if I can’t help, I can find someone who can. That’s the beauty of being a part of a group like Public Allies—our willingness to work together and try to find solutions to problems that are often ignored or overlooked. We are the example for those that will come after us.

“The effect you have on others is the most valuable currency there is.”

-Jim Carrey-

When we have gone out into the community to do outreach our service days, or when I am collaborating with other organizations with TCAA, I have witnessed wonderful things happening when teamwork and collaboration is at the center of what we do. The Martin Luther King Jr. service day was a great example of us working together to provide resources, or even just some friendly conversation, to the homeless communities around the Valley. Some of our group members have never done outreach like that before so it was nice to see us all helping each get comfortable with the work and support each other.

“It is an absolute human certainty that no one can know his [their] own beauty or perceive a sense of his [their] own worth until it has been reflected back to him [them] in the mirror of another loving caring human being.”

-John Joseph Powell-

Mr. Banzhaf was my high school senior Economics teacher. Not only did he teach me economics, he believed in me, which was uncommon throughout my Arizona public education. His belief in me made me confident that I could make a difference. Once I entered community college, I knew I had to get my act together. I graduated Mohave Community College Phi Theta, made dean’s list, and was chosen as our commencement speaker. I then continued my education at Arizona State University where I pursued my degree in engineering. One teacher’s belief in me made me realize how much I could truly accomplish.

My name is Beatriz Mendoza and I am a Technology Integration Specialist for Million Dollar Teacher Project. Million Dollar Teacher Project is a nonprofit that supports teachers. We focus on recognition, compensation, and support for teachers. Teaching is a largely underappreciated profession. A huge way that Million Dollar Teacher recognizes the work that teachers do is through the “Take a Teacher to Lunch” program. We provide a lunch to a school, invite all the teachers to join, and they win prizes through games. We want to thank them for the work they do. We understand that Arizona teachers do not earn enough money, so we want to raise the field of teaching to be competitive. Arizona teachers work an average of 65 hours per week and they are dropping like flies in the environment we are in. We want to create a support team to buy some of their time back from them. The support team consists of a student teacher, teaching assistant, and technology integration specialist. A three-person support team to help them with lesson plans, analyze data, seek new teaching material that could benefit the students, and so much more.

The first question I receive when I tell an individual about my engineering background and work for a nonprofit is always, “Why?” When I started to fully grasp the meaning of Million Dollar Teacher Project my response was natural. If I started to work in the industry straight out of college, I would have worked for forty years and have a 401k to show for it. Working for a nonprofit that supports the teaching profession directly in the classroom, I now have over forty future success stories tied to my name and that beats any 401k. The students in public education right now are the individuals that are going to determine our future.

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When I started at Million Dollar Teacher Project I did not realize that it was still a start-up. It was so brand new that I was the first official employee for the organization. I stepped into that classroom and that is when I built the foundation for the Classroom Support Team. I work in both a 3rd grade general education classroom at Granada Primary and also a combined of 5th and 6th grade special education classroom at Granada East. During my time with Million Dollar Teacher Project, I have created several tools that the teachers have used during this current academic year. I have created spreadsheets that analyze the student's data in both macro and micro levels. I have also completely redeveloped one of the teachers English-Language Arts curriculum from start to finish. Currently, we are building a data tool for the school that automatically analyzes the data for them instead having to manually figure out the difference.

Public Allies has developed me into a professional with skills that I did not have before. With my degree in engineering I wanted to create a difference in my community in the most impactful way that I could, and I have found that way in education.

I've always been a very aspirational person, and I've always aspired to do something great with my life. As I grew older and approached adulthood, however, my abstract dreams of "greatness" needed to become something concrete, and I still didn't know what that looked like or meant. I didn't know how I could turn ideas into action, and I wanted to learn. After graduating high school, I decided I needed to find the passion and leadership that would steer my future. So, I took a leap of faith, took "the road less traveled," and applied for Public Allies Arizona.

From the get-go, through each step of the admission process, I witnessed myself growing. To be able to meaningfully "pitch" myself, I had to grapple with who I was and what I'd bring to the table. Though it may have been nerve-wracking in the moment, I loved having to interview with so many organizations and having to think on my feet. Through being tested, my confidence grew. I saw myself rising to each new challenge. I would eventually be matched to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Arizona (BBBS), where I'd become the Community Relations Assistant and—later—the Community Relations Specialist.

At BBBS, my work has consistently been about engaging and empowering others. Starting out, my main focus was recruiting community members to become changemakers and role models in children's lives—also known as Big Brothers and Big Sisters. Through hosting informational booths at community events and presenting to local businesses and community groups, I've shared the mission of my agency with hundreds of people. I've had the chance to exercise my public speaking skills, increase my professionalism, and—most importantly—inspire others to do something great. The core of this work has been about opening people's eyes to their potential so that they can open a child's eyes to their own. This creates a self-sustaining cycle of empowerment, which is critical to ending the disconnection and disempowerment that prevent individuals from living the life they're worthy and capable of.

Midway into my service term, my focus shifted to youth and family outreach, which I've come to love even more than my prior service objective. This work has entailed cultivating partnerships with school districts, city governments, community groups, and nonprofits serving at-risk youth. I've done everything from implementing referral programs with local
social workers and school counselors to spending time in affordable housing communities engaging directly with families and children. Any weekend, I might be out at a family outreach event or community resource fair, hosting an informational booth piled high with candy, talking with families about helping their children succeed, and connecting them to our program. Recently, I was out hosting a resource table at Save the Family, a local nonprofit that serves, houses, and empowers hard-working families. In that few hours, I talked with dozens of moms and I got 34 referrals for youth. That means in one day’s work, I took part in changing 34 lives. I took part in injecting positivity and potential into 34 lives in just a few hours. One week later, I saw some of the kids already coming into our office to get interviewed so they could get matched to a life-changing mentor.

Through the experiences of this year, I’ve realized the dream of my lifetime—that every human being upon this earth gets to experience their extraordinary potential, their uniqueness, their magnificence, and their limitless capability. I believe that “potential” is a human right—it is one’s right to themself and their inherent greatness. My dream is that everyone is able to strive for their dream—that no one’s sight is limited by their circumstances—that no one’s future is limited by their past. I feel that my duty and purpose is to catalyze our progress in pursuing our possibilities—to elevate the heights to which we aspire—to maximize our facilities for effecting change. With every choice I make, action I take, and sentence I speak, I aim to create and spark the most impact possible. Working to strengthen our interconnected existence, I experience the power of collective impact on a daily basis. I see how our actions ripple through the lives of others. The more engaged I become, the more I grasp what I can become. The more I serve, the more I understand just how much I can contribute. Through the journey of Public Allies, I’ve learned to strive continuously, relentlessly, and fearlessly—pursuing the height of both my individual potential and our collective potential. I commit myself to a lifetime of success—measured only by helping others succeed and thrive. Thanks to Public Allies, I am now—and forever—an agent of impact.

Identity Refresh of Opportunities for Youth

Our organization has faced endless transition; between changing its fiscal agent from MCESA to ASU last summer and having complete turnover of staff by February of this year, Opportunities for Youth is almost unrecognizable in comparison to previous years.

In its past life, Opportunities for Youth was heavily associated with 100k Opportunities Initiative, because this national initiative is essentially what inspired the founder. 100k Initiative aims to bridge the opportunity divide for the 4.9 million Americans, aged 16 – 24, who are out of school and not working. Since its founding, our priority was job fairs connecting youth to employers and community resources. But 100k, almost entirely focused on youth employment, didn’t account for the other 75% of our organizational structure. We have 4 action teams – Positive Youth Development, Educational Momentum, Career Connections, and Reengagement Centers. We have a leadership council that strategizes youth involvement and development and engages the perspectives of several professionals serving opportunity youth today. Other demonstration cities for 100k were nowhere near building such a capacity. Opportunities for Youth is more than just a job fair organization, it is a community collaborative, a movement of men and women who believe in the futures of our youth. This organization had a story that I believed I could tell.

How do we stay true to who we are, without separating ourselves from our funders? How do we convey our key messages, while still accounting for that of each action team, leadership council member, and fiscal supporter?

These questions were more often than not being posed to me, a 21-year-old journalism major with just over a year’s experience in professional marketing, who hadn’t even finished her undergraduate degree yet. It’s safe to say I felt overwhelmed, underqualified, and set up for failure. However, I operated under the tactic that works best for me – I took it one step at a time.

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The first step began with Kristin Ferguson, who in the Fall was standing in as Interim Executive Director. Kristin was elated by my resume and experience, and apparently far more confident in my abilities than I was. She went ahead and asked me to create a communications plan for OFY. Now, I have seen a few communications plans in my day. These were fairly large documents, typically created by marketing agencies with acres of experience and reams of accolades. These weren’t, by any means, documents created by interns.

While I was flattered Kristin believed in my ability to create such a substantial document, I was also terrified of the pressure and expectation I realized I had. It was a big responsibility, to say the least. I printed out a 40 page template for creating your own communications plan and filled it out, page by page, with what little knowledge I had about the organization I’d only started working for a few months in advance. When I was finished, I shared it with my staff, who were probably a bit taken aback by its detail. I included things like key messages, our mediums of communication, our audience, our stakeholders, and even attached monetary value to some of the services I believed we needed.

After the communications plan came the rebranding of the website. The old website was incredibly hard to navigate and refused to be user friendly. I used the existing platform, changed the design completely, updated imagery and messaging, and deleted at least 40 unnecessary, unlinked floating pages. The website now has a youth-friendly user experience, you can clearly find information about the initiative, request services, or join the collaborative efforts.

After the website came the biggest challenge of them all – creating a logo. I was convinced it would be created by the hands of some wildly creative opportunity youth. This was before I learned it was almost impossible to get youth in the same room (even with incentives like a $50 gift card and free breakfast). I had one youth show up to my meeting. His work, while creative, did not go over well with the leadership council nor did it resonate with youth from our focus groups. So, I went back to the drawing board, did research on logos for similar organizations, created a few mockups and presented those mockups to youth focus groups for their feedback. We were able to decide on a logo and tagline that resonated with all of them and clearly spoke to what the organization had to offer.

I like to say that we didn’t rebrand the organization, but we refreshed its identity. We did more than slap on a new logo and stationary – we redefined ourselves and our message to the youth and stakeholders. Effectively telling our story will lead to more youth being served, the collaborative growing, and our community impact increasing.

Guitar Story: I am working at Arizona Foundation for the Handicap which is a day center for adults with special needs. AFH’s mission is to provide quality individualized services to people with physical or intellectual challenges in the least restrictive environments. AFH partners with other valley organizations to create more opportunities for our members. We believe in everyone’s right to choose services that most interest them. It’s estimated over 785 million people in the world today are living with a disability, over twice the U.S population. In Arizona, roughly 100,000 Arizonans have some form of a disability. In the past, people with disabilities were viewed as cast-aways and hidden where they would be “safe”. Thankfully, over time the focus of care has shifted and now we advocate for self-determination. Members at AFH are encouraged to participate in a wide range of activities, like cooking, art class or going out into the community.

AFH has 3 locations: Maricopa, Casa Grande, and Phoenix. My placement is at the Phoenix location, nicknamed “Perry”. I was hired as the creative activities coordinator, in charge of creating 3 programs for our members: art, music and physical fitness. Perry was intimidating but luckily another Ally had been placed there as well, Ellie, who oversees volunteer coordination.

The members at AFH could not be more welcoming, greeting me every morning with tons of energy and lots of fun handshakes. I have made so many new friends and care for each of them. Perry’s instrument selection was a few shakers and drumsticks, so Ellie had the great idea to make flyers asking for musical instrument donations. We mapped out music stores throughout the valley and went to them explaining who we are and get permission to post a flyer. The store owners were all very receptive and willing to help us out. One day later we got our first donation, a guitar from Bizarre Guitar and Drums.

A few weeks later, I was walking outside when I came across a member playing music on that same guitar. I sat with him while he finished his song. Afterwards, we struck up a conversation and he shared with me that he knew how to play the drums as well and used to love playing with his friends when he was younger. I asked him if I could record him playing, and he played a song that was special to him, “Goodnight Irene.”
I felt like I was stuck working in a place where there was no more room for me to grow and develop. I didn’t know what my next step was going to be. I was working mixed shifts at Starbucks wondering what the next challenge was going to be. I’ve always known my dream was to become an educator and empower children to love to learn and believe in their capabilities. I wanted to be someone that kids can look up to for guidance and encouragement and to make a difference in their lives. One day I got a message- it was from my now director telling me to apply to Public Allies.

I can honestly say that my life has changed dramatically with Public Allies. Not only have they helped me overcome some small fears, such as writing a professional email and making connections with nonprofits. They also taught me to advocate for myself. I was always so terrified to speak out. I doubted myself and worried that what I had to say wasn’t great and wouldn’t offer important input. Those small skills brought so much confidence and developed my character greatly. I can continue to use everything that I’ve learned anywhere I go both in life and in future job opportunities.

One of the ways that I helped build capacity in the neighborhood that I work with is by starting a block watch. We held community meeting about some of the issues that have been going on the neighborhood for years. We reached out to people from the City of Phoenix to find solutions for some of these problems. One of the biggest problems was that some of the homes get flooded during monsoon season and the houses get expensive damages. It was great to see the community come out and take charge to take care of their neighborhood. We did our part on getting people from the City of Phoenix out there and left it to the community to take charge and make a difference. We have had such a great turn out.

The community has come out and talked about some of the differences that they want to see. They are starting to come together to form a group that will take care of the neighborhood.

One of the most meaningful moments that I had this year was getting to form a great bond with a handful of girls at Excelencia Middle School. They volunteered with us in more than half of the events that we hosted, always ready to help and lend a hand. I’ve become an unofficial mentor and tutor for these young students who are so eager to learn and become leaders themselves. I occasionally help them with their homework or just talk to them when they feel like they have no one else to talk to. I feel so grateful to be in their lives. To walk beside them in the journey that is ahead.
My name is Taylor Polen, I was born & raised in Arizona, and I am passionate about finding creative solutions to inspire systemic equality & opportunity for all. I graduated from high school in 2016 and had little notion of what I wanted to do with my life. I found the program while searching for financial aid & applied late despite discouragement. My service with Public Allies & the Alzheimer’s Association began as an Outreach Specialist in December 2016, and my second year as a Program Specialist in October 2017. Because of this program, I have been given the opportunity and guidance to achieve my life mission to create meaningful, lasting & positive change.

TO ELIMINATE ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE THROUGH THE ADVANCEMENT OF RESEARCH; TO PROVIDE AND ENHANCE CARE AND SUPPORT FOR ALL AFFECTED; AND TO REDUCE THE RISK OF DEMENTIA THROUGH THE PROMOTION OF BRAIN HEALTH.

This is the mission of the Alzheimer’s Association, but in what capacity do I serve that supports this mission? As a Program Specialist, you may think that I have been limited to one “program” or “role”. That, however, is simply not the case. Since I began at the Association, I have been utilized in all different areas of my organization. I have provided support in data entry, event staffing, leading community education presentations, helpline support, early-stage engagement, fundraising, health fairs, organizing internal fundraisers & activities, marketing material design, program development, technical support, event set-up & tear-down, advocacy events, filing & organization, and more! Performing these tasks and filling the numerous & varietal roles has provided me an opportunity to expand my professional capabilities while guiding the direction of my future career.

On the first and third Wednesday of the month, I plan activities for & attend a social engagement group for individuals with early-stage Alzheimer’s and their care givers. Oftene times when an individual is diagnosed with dementia/Alzheimer’s disease, they can become depressed and withdrawn socially. This is why early-stage engagement is important, not only is it beneficial to give the care giver an excuse to go out, it also encourages the person with dementia to continue socializing (socialization has been proven to slow cognitive decline in patients). I assist in facilitating the group and inciting discussions, friendly interations & competition through gameplay. Participating in these activities allows the caregivers to destress and spend time with their loved one and other couple dealing with this disease in an upbeat and neutral environment. Not only that, but it also allows for persons with dementia to participate in simple, entertaining activities, sometimes including physical activity, art and music. While seeing an individuals decline and transition out of the group may be saddening, I feel confident that despite that individuals current state, a difference was made in their lives & the lives of their care partners.

My second program year has been an invaluable experience. It has provided me with many opportunities to expand my capabilities, skill set, networks, and experience. Because of these numerous opportunities, I feel that I have truly started to flourish as a leader and I am motivated to continue on my journey to create positive change in the world where ever I go. I will be starting at ASU this fall pursuing my BS in Nonprofit Management & Leadership and have been accepted to Next Generation Service Corps (a cross-sector academic& leadership development program). I will continue to creative positive and lasting change where it is needed.
In my 10-month period of working with the Children’s Museum, we have attended more than 30-plus community events with an estimated outreach of over 8000 families with children. Our scope has spanned throughout the Valley from our Central Downtown location to a 30-mile radius to the outlying areas.

I don’t need to sugarcoat it. Some people haven’t gotten anything out of the program due to transitions in leadership and confusion. Instead, it’s become about hours and time. Perhaps just a transition in order to buy some time, but one can’t deny that in that time there has been some forced experiences that would have never been. Some of us speak and write and so eloquently twist words and create passion, to feel like we are contributing to uplifting society towards some greater purpose. I think our presentations on impact should mean a summary of all the people and personal growth we have accumulated towards not just a tangible number but the way we have had the chance to change and grow. That’s the word. Grow.

I have had the pleasure to work with the Children’s Museum of Phoenix as the Outreach Coordinator. We have tabled and promoted the Museum’s mission of learning through play and getting the parents and caregivers of children information on what it means to learn. Various types of intelligence are not all equal but there is appreciation for all those who come to embrace the museum’s mission. It may be just a job but it’s weighted with knowledge and purpose just like every one of us. So, as I choose to inspire rather than leave empty-handed, I want you to think of this: why let it be so simple?

Volunteering, working together, and having meaningful conversations is what makes a community. It’s not always perfect, but it exists for all of us to feel appreciated, wanted, and needed. Struggle for that appreciation or that knowledge so that we all don’t go swiftly on into that good night but instead learn with vigor and serenity, for poise and grace, in spite of obvious acts of cruelty towards those who have struggled. That’s who we are as human beings, serve but don’t serve, as one almighty ruler of your own universe. Save yourself from egoism and self worship. Why can’t we be some component to an overall machine that pumps out goodness towards man. I work with kids who don’t know any better than what we teach them. It’s the silly activity or game that brings out their unique perspectives. It’s being told they’re completely worth every minute we give that allows them to stick with their way of seeing the world, their “childness.” That variety of perspective that builds success for the future that lies ahead and is unknown. Whether different forms of intelligence change in popularity, everyone learns when they participate and play and learning through play is the only evolution for humans to keep their personality and strengths intact.

I have met very few humans that do not like beaded bracelets, seasonal hats, kazoos, and marshmallow creations. There’s a lot in being that knight of outreach. That black panther of two worlds. Wakanda Forever. Wakanda Outreach.

Giving back to a world that deserves protection from those who wish to prey on others, especially children. To give back the right information and attention they need to feel loved and smart in all ways. For creativity and construction, both deserve equal merits. When I serve as the face of Public Allies or the Children’s Museum Outreach Coordinator, some level of thinking and meaning has gone into the position. It is both humbling and beautiful to be taught a lesson by my peers and apply this to my mission to protect and uplift the youth. Through knowledge and playing, maybe we find something more than just the hours of service.

Many thanks go out to the women of the program. Thanks mostly to women. Program Managers and friends. Gaybrielle Fernanda Sarah Kate Marion Ellie Michelle Cynthia Judy Luv Kendall Hanan
After graduating college and moving to Arizona, I was unsure of what path to take in life. I knew I wanted to continue my education but I was not ready to be back in the classroom setting, I wanted real-life experience. In my search for continued learning, Public Allies quickly became an appealing way to continue my personal growth. Coming into the program, I had a general idea of where I wanted to go in my career but I was unsure how to accomplish my goals and felt as though I needed more professional and personal development to become a more effective community leader and a more effective social worker in my future. Public Allies helped me accomplish this.

Throughout the placement process, I was introduced to Arizona Foundation for the Handicapped (AFH) and immediately knew that it was the type of organization I wanted to work for. I have always been interested in working with individuals with special needs and AFH provided me with the opportunity to serve a population I am passionate about. During my time at AFH I have learned so many important lessons from our members. They’ve taught me about positivity, friendships, hard work and countless other lessons.

As the Community Engagement Coordinator, I developed a volunteer program and worked towards building community knowledge about AFH and its programs. While all aspects of my positions have been exciting and have challenged me to reach beyond what I believed I was capable of, by far the most rewarding experience has been working to improve the quality of life of the members at AFH. One of my favorite experiences was organizing an event with the Phoenix Fire Department. We have so many members who are huge fans of fire fighters; one young woman even says her last name is “fire truck”. Upon developing a relationship with the Phoenix Fire Department, I was able to get them to come to AFH and show a fire truck to our members, as well as educating them about the roles and responsibilities of a fire truck. Every single member had a smile on his or her face that day!

Another memorable experience occurred while I was walking down the hallway one day. I walked past a young man who had a huge smile on his face. I asked him how his day was going and he responded “Great! Did you see me on Facebook the other day?” Through AFH’s Facebook page we have been working to promote the programs we have developed for our members, and it just so happened to be that this young man was featured in the previous day’s video. I told him that I had seen him and I thought he did an amazing job and that I was proud of the work he was doing. We continued to talk for a few minutes before his ride home and we both left that day in great moods. I also left knowing that my work made a difference in his life that day and with renewed excitement to continue the work that I’ve enjoyed so much.

My participation in Public Allies has been challenging, rewarding, but most importantly educational. I’ve learned about ability to overcome issues, how to plan large-scale events, how to manage individuals and the impact that positivity can have on your work.
During my time at Public Allies Arizona, I have experienced many run-ins with people that have changed my outlook on life and the way that I go about my professional career. One man in particular has touched my life in a way that I will always be grateful for. One of my main duties is to manage and maintain Better Breathers Clubs around Arizona, and the man that I am talking about in particular is a facilitator of one of these clubs located in Lake Havasu City. Better Breathers Clubs are support groups around the valley for people who are fifty and older and, have been diagnosed with a chronic lower respiratory disease, such as COPD. This man in particular has been diagnosed with COPD and is in his late 70s, so his future may not seem so bright to some doctors. However, this man has turned heads in his home city. When I first started talking to him to record his numbers (which is part of one of my tasks at the American Lung Association) he would always ask about how am I doing, put a smile on my face, and he would always give me some insight. The biggest impact that he has on the people that he facilitates the group for is his ability to always maintain a positive outlook on life, no matter what the circumstances may be. You see, this man was diagnosed with COPD which for a lot people can be a death sentence, and he fought the odds of his life ending and dedicated the rest of it to help people who were in the same circumstance as him. He chose to uplift people the same way he uplifted himself because of his disease and he choose to help others find the light that he found. Everytime that we talked over the phone, he would always give me the same story about how he was diagnosed with COPD and the doctors didn’t think he would last for past three years, but he proved them wrong. He improved his lung health and it still improves each year. He also promotes the Better Breathers Club and he is the test subject of many research projects for University of Arizona.

My name is Niamey Thomas. My name means River, it is the capital and largest city in the West African country Niger. My name represents the essence of Power, Strength, and Peace which I try to embody every day. I am Black and Mexican and I am a Creator. I create Dances, Curriculums, and spaces for people of color to understand their Identity, Passion, and Purpose. These are lessons others tried to teach me but failed because they were more concerned with the box I did not fit into than the freedom I can have outside the boundaries of that box.

Identity is very important to me. I believe it is essential in navigating society and before you can love or accept anyone else you must first love and accept yourself. When looking for an organization to partner with during my term at Public Allies, I wanted to find an organization that would allow me to be myself, an organization that would allow me the opportunity to create, and one that would not try to place me into a box.

I found that organization. Swift Youth Foundation is an organization that focuses on supporting the social and emotional development of youth and enhances social awareness and leadership skills for teens through mentor relationships. As the Program Coordinator, I created the curriculum for four of the seven programs, Swift after School, Club Swift, Swift Saturday, and Club Swift Jr.

Club Swift is an after school program for teens in North Phoenix. This specific program is geared towards giving the teens the skills to be great leaders within their communities and at Swift After school program. During the school year, we at Club Swift covered many topics to equip and prepare them to be the best leaders. These students come from low socioeconomic communities and are not expected to achieve much, however neither was I. I was expected to get pregnant in High School, drop out, and never attend college. And when I went to college I was expected to drop out after my first semester. With these odds against me I understood the importance of informing these students that they could achieve.

A time that sticks out to me was the day we were talking about our leadership style. The students each took an assessment that would tell them their strengths and leadership style. It
was exciting to learn that things they had always thought of as being odd or weakness were actually strengths. One girl specifically comes to mind. She wanted to be a makeup artist but was not sure how to do it. Becoming “Instagram famous” did not work for everyone and she felt defeated that her posts were not getting the views she desired. We begin to talk about the expectations and the work ethic to be a makeup artist. The other students were so kind and began to affirm her, reminding her that she could be whatever she wanted as long as she worked hard and used her strengths.

It was empowering to see the strength of these students, to see the support and love that they have for one another, the respect that they have. It is amazing to see young people understanding and owning their identity, especially in a world where being plastic is in fashion. The kids at Swift are all so authentic in their own right, and that is how I knew I belonged at Swift.

Thinking back, I remember having no idea where I was and where I wanted to be. I only knew that I wanted to be in the Nonprofit Sector- I knew wanted to help! I've always known that to be my purpose. Exactly how I was going to get there and to do any good was up for debate. That is, until Public Allies! They took this single mother of two who was pretty much stuck in life doing the bare minimum, and by believing in me they gave me a chance to express all my talents and gifts to the community and the opportunity to connect with my purpose. I'm here to help others find a way out of no way!

Throughout all the trainings, workshops, and countless social engagements, I started to remember who I was and what I brought to the “equation called life.” I brought hope that you too can dig deep and grasp anything your heart desires, anything you reach to seek no matter the situation. Realizing you don’t have to let your circumstances define you! This is the mindset I chose to keep while at kept the whole 10 months of the program year and while serving at my placement, because this isn’t no kiddie stuff anymore it’s the real deal, I’m actually working and contributing to the cause.

I never want to take this time granted. I've learned so much along the way and will take this information with me forever! Coming in, I was just a stay-at-home mom, and entering back into the workforce was another whole challenge of its own! But I got out of my own way and proved it to myself that I belong and that I am useful. While at my placement my position was the Post Office Specialist and I ran the only Post Office in the US whose mission is to serve individuals who are experiencing homelessness. Often we don’t realize how important it is when fighting homelessness to have a reliable address, so we have access to medical information, SSI benefits, medicines, and most of all correspondence with our housing partners.

In addition, I gained useful organizational skills, paying attention to detail, customer service skills, building capacity, not to mention creating systems for the longevity of the partner organization. When I thought I was giving back to our clients, they were giving me what I've been missing for some time now. Humbleness! I worked with people who were down on their luck, maybe even at rock bottom, and saw that they could still smile and give me a little joke along with some kind words. That's the circle of life- to know that no matter far we believe ourselves to be separated, we are still so close. I will forever be grateful for the Human Service Campus-Lodestar Day Resource Center letting me be part of something so great and so powerful. This experience will stay with me for a lifetime! What Public Allies means to me in a couple words…LIFE CHANGING!
“When the cause is not about you and your personal greed, but the greater picture of mutual need.”

Hello, my name is Rachelle Wayne. I am a Nonprofit Leadership and Management at Arizona State University (ASU) with a certification as a Nonprofit professional from the Nonprofit leadership Alliance student organization at ASU.

As an intern, I chose to do a second year serving as an AmeriCorps volunteer in the Public Allies program under the Lodestar Center for Philanthropy, and Nonprofit Innovation. The three programs combined aligns perfectly with my personal mission statement: I work to create a world that provides everyone with the opportunity to create a quality life for themselves and future generations alike.

Under the Public Ally Program, I am placed at the local Nonprofit MIKID (Mentally Ill Kids in Distress) with the objective to help build capacity within the organization. Working in the nonprofit sector for almost a decade, I have gained an interest in what it looks like to lead in Distress) with the objective to help build capacity within the organization. Working in the nonprofit sector for almost a decade, I have gained an interest in what it looks like to lead within the field and how leaders can better collaborate to provide accessible opportunities for all to learn, grow, and thrive in ways that are culturally appropriate to their needs and wants.

I recognized that there is a lot to learn to understand leadership in the nonprofit sector. So I decided I would be in the leadership programs available at ASU. When planning for my internship, I started searching almost two years in advance because I knew I wanted to complete my internship as a second year Public Ally. Second years need to develop their positions with a partner organization and then present to Public Allies as opposed to a first-year Ally who would generally interview for a position that was already developed between Public Allies and the partner organization.

5. MIKID worked with me to develop a position that:
   a. Met the needs of MIKID by working towards their mission.
   b. Would develop me personally and professionally in areas I was interested in growing.
   c. Met the requirements of Public Allies and my internship.

6. Once I had everything approved by the organization, I applied for Public Allies and crossed fingers. Having all of these incredible opportunities is a tremendous honor and fantastic opportunity that is a privilege that I am extremely grateful for.

Working with AmeriCorps Public Allies, MIKID, ASU’s Nonprofit Leadership Alliance Student Organization, and ASU’s Nonprofit Leadership and Management degree program has been an amazing and humbling experience. I have had the honor and privilege of learning from and experiencing so many passionately dedicated people that you can’t help but feel inspired with hope. Throughout the time I have spent in these programs under the Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Innovation, I have had many struggles and challenges that I have had to overcome and I could not be more grateful for all the incredible amounts of support and guidance I have received. I honestly could not have done a fraction of what I have accomplished without this fantastic network of caring professionals that I gained as a result of my participation. From staff leadership to my colleagues and classmates I thank you all with my entire heart for all you have taught me.

“Work smarter, not harder” has been the mantra I have dedicated myself to as I approached participating in the three nonprofit leadership programs. Planning, planning, and more planning has been the only way to make all this work. Before every semester at ASU, I would sit down with my syllabus and program in every single class time, deadline, and assignment I could, and then schedule everything else around it for the rest of the semester. Communication has been my primary tool for accomplishing all I do, and this can be a challenge as I try to stay on top of deadlines and make sure I am not double-booking myself for important events and tasks. Prioritizing is one of the most important things to try to master when creating a packed schedule for the year. I used my communication skills and mantra to make sure “first things first” stayed a rule. I decided that my degree program and self-care was my priority. When I approached my partner organizations and Public Allies, I made sure to thoroughly communicate that and check to make sure that none of the critical dates for the different programs crossed in ways that would be detrimental to completing expectations of all the programs. MIKID was well aware that education and self-care is the priority and worked around my class schedule when creating my position.
I also communicated my needs around self-care and how I could create a space to be most productive.

During the first half of my ten-month service with Public Allies, I took 16 college credits at ASU with one of those credits counting for my participation in the nonprofit professional leadership certificate program. Some studies say the average student spends around 2-3 hours studying a week per credit hour so with a 16 credit hour caseload you are looking at a possible 40+ hours a week spent on school. The Public Allies program hours averages out to about 43+ hours a week to get the 1700 hour total for the ten-month service term. Planning for a possible average 100+ hours of work a week is daunting but applying my smarter not harder mantra reminds me to be creative, critically think about the work at hand, and what opportunities are available to be flexible. One way I accomplished this was by looking over my job description and class assignments to see if they crossed paths. I mean, they all are nonprofit programs and what better way to learn than to apply my class assignments to my placement objectives. I was delighted, and more than a little lucky, to realize I could directly apply some of my class assignments to my placement at MIKID.

For example; I took NLM 430 Managing Nonprofit Orgs and found that we needed to develop a program or new nonprofit model for the final senior project. At my placement, I was assigned the task of developing the transitional age youth leadership program. So I was able to use the tools from class and immediately apply them to my work to create something that was put into practice right away, and count my hours spent working on that class assignment for hours at placement because I was essentially doing my job. Another excellent example of this was during my Evaluation class where we had to create an evaluation for an organization. In order to create transitional age youth programming, and to improve the certified peer support training, I needed to do a lot of observing and analyzing. I needed to make sure that what I was creating and possibly imposing on the organization was a good fit that met the needs and culture of the organization. My NLM 402 Assessment & Evaluation of Community Services class gave me the tools to do this much more efficiently then I would have without the coursework, and again I was able to count the time working on my course assignment as placement hours.

It is important to note that most assignments I could not count for hours because the assignments did not directly align with my placement objectives however, I was still able to use and apply many of the theories and teachings on a regular basis. I mimicked the way the instructor of the Certified Nonprofit Professional program plays more of a supporting role that empowers the cohort to take charge of their education and make it what they want, as opposed to creating more of a lecture or dictating how or what we should be learning. I used this style of empowering leadership when developing the Youth Leadership group and now the youth partner co-creates group activities with peer supports that teach life skills in the areas of professional development, healthy relationships, healthy bodies, and life hacks.

Public Allies allows some room for additional training opportunities so I could count my week-long trip to Kansas City for the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance annual conference towards my 1700 hours of service needed to graduate from the Public Ally program. I have to put the emphasis on communication and my gratefulness for MIKID’s support for this one because MIKID and Public Allies did not have to let me take time away from placement to go to the conference or let me count it for training hours. However, because I asked months in advance and was able to write out why and how this conference was helping me accomplish the goals of the Public Allies program and how it would help me at placement with MIKID, I was thoroughly supported. My degree and certificate program have made the world of difference in my ability to accomplish my objectives during my term of national service innovatively.

The Public Allies training program might have been equally as beneficial as my coursework in helping me accomplish my objectives at MIKID while working on my personal and professional growth. Although the Public Allies program is also a nonprofit leadership program just like the degree and certificate program and is all under the Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Innovation, Public Allies is a national program under AmeriCorps first and foremost. Public Allies approaches the ideology around leadership seemingly different than the degree and certificate course. From a micro view this could seem almost contradictory with the ways with Public Allies’ approach to leadership being more about boots-on-the-ground leadership and the degree program preparing students for more administrative work consisting of leadership with a given title. Public Allies’ motto is “everyone leads” to me this is the realization of accountability that we all create change in the world for better or for worse and the power we have is in the choice of what kind of leader we want to be. Being a leader in this sense is not something a job title can dictate, it’s who we are to our communities, families, and friends. The butterfly effect created by how we move through this world regardless of grace or stride we have to be the change we want to see in this world every day. With a focus on social injustice and equity training, we can take a much more macro look at social issues and create innovative solutions that treat the cause as opposed treating the symptoms. Striving to demonstrate Public Allies core values in everything I do I am more equipped to obtain all of the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance Core competencies in a way that aligns with my personal mission statement.

It is important to continuously learn how the political climate is changing and how people are communicating with each other about these issues especially when attempting to market your mission through public relations. I found that my degree program focused more on the importance of marketing presence, public relations, following trends, and appropriate methods to do so. Staying up with the times on how people are communicating information. On the other hand, Public Allies seem to focus more on learning specifically what social issues are currently happening and what terminology is presently accepted or not expected when speaking on these topics. It is equally important to have all of this information when talking to the public or you could accidentally say something that is damaging to your organization’s relationship to the community without even realizing you put yourself in a controversial political stance without realizing it for one example. Being culturally aware is extremely important when attempting to collaborate with different entities and communities at large or at small. We have to recognize and respect each other’s differences in social norms even if we do not agree with them to find common ground to build change off of.

I have come to believe that culture is a language that you speak with your actions. When we are not aware of how our efforts are being persevered or take the time to learn why others do the things they do we can become stuck in a place or noise like the static on an old television that gets in the way of communicating our true intentions. Every time I walk into a space I try to take note of that spaces culture. At MIKID I had to take a step back to learn how the staff and youth communicated with each other and amongst themselves to create change that is equally desired by the population we serve and staff while remaining empowering.
I struggled at the beginning of my time at MIKID because I thought that the front line staff was just as excited and aware of all plans and ideas I had as the administrative staff seemed to be. I thought the team understood my position and in my head thought the providers had this expectation of me that I was desperately trying to live up to. However, because I did not take a second to step back and analyze the situation, I hit the ground running thinking that I impressed them when in reality that was not at all how they had preserved mine overachiever attitude. Instead, I was seen as a “know it all” who thought she was better than them and I was even asked at one point if I was trying to take away peoples jobs. This glass shattering realization of how I was preserved was horrifying because it went against everything I had sought out to do which was empower the youth as well as the staff to use their voice and own power, but in their eyes, I was taking their control away from them. I had to work hard to earn my trust back all because I assumed they wanted their current culture to change as much as their administrative staff did. So we have always to meet people where they are at by using productive and intentional dialogue to work together.

In the nonprofit sector being politically aware is not just crucial to political correctness we also have to continually learn about financial resources development and management even if are roles never directly come in contact with funds. Many nonprofits have some kind government funding source and the programs we work so hard to develop and maintain can be directly affected or even shut down based on the political climate. I have come to understand that every single person that works for an organization affects fundraising efforts either directly or indirectly and when we stand for or against any given thing it can help make or break the resources available to the mission at hand. In public, Allies can help us better understand what we will and will not stand for by having an open dialogue about current facts and opinions around the work that nonprofits do. The Nonprofit Leadership Alliance provides us the professional tools we need to use the nonprofit sector as a mode of transportation on the train of change by letting us know and build off of what foundations are already in place. Although both programs work to essential do the same thing on the macro level they focus on different parts of the wheel needed to get there something that does not differ between the programs is the intense and powerful emphasis on integrity and collaboration.

When we utilize our integrity through legal and ethical practices and decision making to build strong networks of caring professionals that merely want to make things better because we all have to share this thing we call our world. I view everyone as these puzzle pieces that are seemingly random and shaped weird but when we come together with the intention of focusing on our assets, strengths, and interests we magically start to link together creating this beautiful big picture of equity and justice. During my time in the programs I have learned my puzzles, shape, and color but have not explicitly found where I fit yet but I am surrounded by an overwhelming amount of opportunities to figure it out that I can’t help but be optimistic about all the great adventures I ahead of me. Maybe the big picture puzzle is made up of fluid parts instead of fixed cardboard that continues to flow, shape and bend with time and space just like we do and I am already in my place. I only hope I can make a ripple.

An 18-year-old boy named John, who is raising two younger siblings who are 15 and 13. Their parents were unexpectedly deported and John became the sole provider for his siblings. At first he was embarrassed to ask for assistance, but with the help of his aunt and sister he was able to ask for help. We were able to provide them with Christmas gifts, Holiday food box and a grocery gift card. Right before Christmas day we learned that John, working a fulltime job to provide for his family, did not have a bed. Through the generosity of the community, a futon was donated. We drove it over to John’s house right away and he was beyond grateful.

The opportunity to serve him and families like him was very humbling to me and it made my ten months working with Public Allies at AZCEND worth it.