PART A: NARRATIVE REPORT

Summary
In Caracas, Venezuela, the Community Ambassadors project expanded its reach by empowering 80 vulnerable youth through a three-month training program that focused on diplomatic skills, critical thinking, and socio-emotional competencies within simulated United Nations discussions. This initiative not only diverted participants from violence but also transformed them into change agents, fostering greater collaboration, reduced prejudice, and enhanced social responsibility within their communities.

Project Description
The Community Ambassadors project, implemented in Caracas, Venezuela, set out to empower and transform the lives of vulnerable youth through a comprehensive three-month training program. With the overarching objective of fostering diplomatic skills, negotiation abilities, critical thinking, public speaking, and socio-emotional competencies, this initiative aimed to impact 80 young individuals from disadvantaged communities. The project's unique approach involved engaging students aged 12 to 18 in a series of 8 simulations designed to replicate United Nations discussions. In an impressive feat, these students not only participated actively in these simulations but also secured 4 awards for their outstanding performance.

During these simulations, students interacted and debated with students from private and high-income schools, embodying the roles of ambassadors from different countries to tackle real-world issues such as gender equality, human rights, climate action, migration, and more. By doing so, this project provided a constructive alternative to violence and fear, nurturing participants to become catalysts for positive change within their communities.

Furthermore, this project went beyond simulations by providing students with special lectures that enriched their learning journey. One such lecture featured a conversation with Nora Fischbach, a distinguished political science expert and daughter of a Holocaust survivor. This lecture added a poignant layer of historical significance, deeply resonating with the students. The conversation not only expanded
their perspectives but also nurtured empathy and raised awareness about how history's impact continues to shape the present world.

Continuing in alignment with our commitment to elevate the research and learning experience, we effectively restored four computers and furnished three tablets and laptops for communal student usage, ensuring widespread access to information. These resources have been instrumental in seamlessly facilitating the research and learning journey for all participants, significantly augmenting their active involvement in the program.

The inspiration for the project was deeply personal and rooted in my own experiences. At the age of 15, I joined the inaugural cohort of participants in this initiative. Around the same time, my family and neighbors faced the devastating loss of our homes and possessions due to catastrophic flooding, leading us to rebuild our lives in a Caracas shelter. Continuing my path as a Community Ambassador, they supported my ongoing education and helped me secure a scholarship to attend college years later. These circumstances illuminated my resilience and capacity to inspire younger generations in my community. Through this initiative, I completed my education, transitioning from the shelter to positions at the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and even as a Global Shaper of the World Economic Forum. My journey from living in a shelter to Washington DC via this program exemplified the far-reaching impact of such initiatives. This conviction led to the decision to address the same issues that once shaped my own path, allowing me to become a positive role model among my neighbors and advocate for change.

Selecting Caracas as the host site was a decision guided by my history and familiarity with the community. This familiarity proved invaluable in establishing local relationships, securing cooperation from schools and volunteers, and integrating the program into the fabric of the region. While the project encountered delays in its implementation timeline due to administrative requirements, the strong network established overcame these challenges, demonstrating the power of community ties in ensuring success.

Adaptations to the original plan were necessary, particularly due to unforeseen factors like delayed authorization from schools and attrition rates among beneficiaries. Although the number of participants was adjusted downward to 80 from the initial target of 100, the core objectives of imparting socio-emotional skills, reducing prejudice, fostering collaboration, enhancing self-esteem, and nurturing social responsibility remained resolute.

This project was not solely reliant on the donor's funding. The presence of partnerships with Metropolitan University, International House, and collaborative relationships with school directors and community members contributed substantially to its success. These alliances were instrumental in providing both volunteers and sustained support, further enriching the project's outcomes.

As the current phase concludes, there are compelling opportunities for ongoing impact. The rapport built with local institutions and community members is poised to extend the initiative's footprint. These
connections offer avenues to continue addressing the same issues and nurturing young leaders. With a dedicated commitment to ensuring others access the opportunities that transformed the project lead's life, the potential for lasting change remains robust.

Reflection

I’ve come to define peace as more than just the absence of conflict; it's a state of harmony where individuals and communities thrive in cooperation, understanding, and shared aspirations. The project's impact on contributing to peace is profound, manifesting in various ways. In the short-term, participants experienced a notable shift in their attitudes and interactions. The simulations of United Nations discussions provided a safe platform for dialogue, encouraging critical thinking and diplomacy. This, in turn, reduced tensions within the participating groups, demonstrating the potential of dialogue to defuse even small conflicts.

Long-term changes were even more significant. As participants developed socio-emotional skills, their attitudes towards other social classes transformed, ultimately leading to reduced prejudice. This shift towards empathy fostered stronger collaboration and enhanced self-esteem, cultivating a sense of social responsibility. The ripple effects of this transformation extended to their communities, as these young agents of change shared their insights and inspired others, thereby fostering a more peaceful and empathetic environment over time.

During the project, I encountered a significant conflict rooted in the diversities and disparities among the participants’ backgrounds. Navigating this required a balanced approach, encouraging open dialogues while emphasizing shared aspirations. This experience highlighted the importance of fostering an inclusive and safe space for discourse. Moving forward, I aim to explore more comprehensive conflict resolution strategies to address similar challenges effectively.

The project has undoubtedly changed my perspective on the world. Witnessing the transformation of young individuals and their communities through dialogue and education underscored the power of holistic approaches to addressing conflicts. It also challenged my belief in the potential for positive change, even in contexts that seem entrenched in discord. This experience has inspired me to delve deeper into understanding the intricate dynamics of conflict and peacebuilding, encouraging me to seek innovative ways to create lasting positive change in vulnerable communities.

Personal Statement

"As a former beneficiary of the Community Ambassadors project, I've experienced firsthand the life-altering potential of education and dialogue. Now, having the privilege to give back thanks to the Davis Projects for Peace and International Houses Worldwide, I've learned that even a single act of
empowerment can create ripples of positive change, fostering empathy, collaboration, and a brighter future for all." Astrid Garcia