



VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
Nichols Humanitarian Fund



2023 Reflection Reports



To the recipients,

Thank you for living beyond yourself and making service to humanity part of your life. Never lose your enthusiasm and your idealism and never stop doing what you can to help others and improve the human condition. You are the best of Vanderbilt. You are our heroes!

With all our gratitude and admiration,
Ed and Janice Nichols

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Introduction

The Nichols Humanitarian Fund is a companion scholarship fund to the Nichols-Chancellor's Medal. These programs seek to make Vanderbilt students better members of their communities and society in general by supporting their humanitarian activities and bringing speakers to Vanderbilt who embody the best of humanity. For more about the Fund, visit its website or contact Vanderbilt's Office of Experiential Learning and Immersion Vanderbilt.

Forty students received awards in 2023 to work on humanitarian projects during the summer academic break in eight U.S. cities and sixteen foreign countries.

The projects are in Burlington KY, Indianapolis IN, Nashville TN, Pittsburg PA, Redwood City CA, San Francisco CA, Santa Barbara CA, Washington D.C., Ecuador, England, France, Germany, Honduras, Italy, Kosovo, Mexico, Pakistan, Peru, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tanzania, and Ukraine.

The projects include creating the first Peruvian School of Emerging Leaders program in Lima, Peru; an archaeological dig in France; helping the homeless in Barcelona, Spain; battling food insecurity in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; working with the disabled population in Nashville, Tennessee; creating a program to support young people formerly, currently, or at-risk of involvement with the California justice system; working to improve child education, care, and poverty within Ecuador; working as an emergency medical technician in Mexico; aiding female entrepreneurs in Peru; providing education to individuals with special needs; partnering with Women's Economic Ventures in Santa Barbara, California; supporting the Mercy Health Clinic in Washington, D.C.; and much more.

Recipients and projects can change after the Recipients Booklet is posted. The Reflection Reports contain the final recipients and projects for the year after all changes and may differ slightly from the Recipients Booklet.



John Abad '26

Computer Science and Economics
Data Science Minor

In a world endangered by the climate crisis and social inequality, there has never been a more crucial time for young people to stand up for our future. With this vision, I returned to my home country, Peru, determined to connect with the next generation of social and environmental leaders who will make lasting changes in their communities.

Thanks to partnerships with the Captain Planet Foundation, the Planeteer Alliance, and the Clinton Global Initiative University, we developed the idea of founding the School of Emerging Leaders. This institution would nurture young leaders that their communities desperately need. Before arriving in Peru, I reached out to numerous K-12 schools in communities that needed our help the most, from the Andes Mountains to the Amazon Rainforest. Upon my arrival in the country, I embarked on an exciting journey to use my voice to create the change I wanted to see in the world.

Through the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I

visited Peru's most underserved educational communities and organized leadership summits, both to identify talented individuals from across the country who would become part of our leadership school. As an indigenous student from the Quechua community, I first visited the Huancavelica region, considered one of the poorest states in Peru, and also my mother's hometown. Subsequent visits included the Junin Region, the Lima Region, and the Amazon Rainforest. During these visits, I developed speeches and workshops for different types of students - from high school students in urban areas to elementary school students living in remote mountain towns.

Each audience required distinct techniques to engage them. For instance, I used activism to connect with the younger audience and delivered an inspirational speech to motivate the older students. Throughout these two weeks, my perspective was to cultivate a leader in each region who would tackle a unique issue within their community. For instance, students

I spoke to in the Amazon Rainforest would advocate for reforestation and the protection of the world's largest forest, while students in Lima might focus on ocean conservation and efficient waste management.

An incredible collaborative environment emerged with the communities I visited, especially since my roots were from there. Since childhood, my father had shared stories of my grandparents being llama herders in Junin, and my mother instilled in me a deep connection to my Quechua identity from Huancavelica. The Fund enabled me to return home and educate students about my initiative and how we could protect the environment together. However, I also learned from them that nobody is too young to make a positive impact. For instance, Leonel, one of the young leaders I met in Junin, had been partnering with churches to provide food supplies to homeless people for the last three years. It's youths like Leonel who make me optimistic about the future and excited to continue educating future generations on social impact.

Initially, my goal for the Fund was to connect with more than 100 young people through visits. However, as soon as I publicly announced my return to Peru on my non-profit's social media, I began receiving requests from numerous schools in Lima (the capital of Peru) and Huancayo (one of the country's main cities). Due to my limited time in the country, I decided to host two large summits in both cities, apart from my visits, to engage with many delegations from various schools.

For the Huancayo conference, I collaborated with the city's mayor, the largest high school, and national media to promote our collective initiative. Over 15 schools and more than 100 students attended the Huancayo conference,

and my speech remains etched in my memory. Sharing the stage with influential politicians and engaging with the media, my organization, Save Our Planet, demonstrated our readiness to support Peru's young visionaries who take the initiative to champion the environment.

Regarding the Lima conference, I partnered with the Captain Planet Foundation, Planeteer Alliance, and CGI U to host the event aimed at training participants who attended. The two-day event commenced with a public speaking workshop, and on the second day, students were provided a platform to voice their initiatives for environmental protection. Noteworthy speakers included young leaders from the Ashaninka Amazonian community, NASA mentees, and neuroscientists. My next steps for the School of Emerging Leaders involve establishing a network of mentors and developing an online platform to track progress.

If I could go on this journey again, I would probably organize a large Amazon summit. This would enable me to connect with leaders from various indigenous communities and work together to address critical issues.

My fervent dream is that one day, all young people across the globe will unite, transcending borders and differences, to ensure a cleaner and safer future for all. The Nichols Humanitarian Fund allowed me to help turn this dream into a reality in Peru.



Alexys Ahn '24

History, Classical & Mediterranean Studies

I started my trip in Geneva, Switzerland which turned out to be a unique crossroads for many different people of different backgrounds. One of the most unique things to get used to first was the foreign language environment. I have taken French since middle school, but had yet to be in a situation where I would ever need to use it. Upon arriving in Geneva, my first interaction with a bus driver involved me asking where the bus to my hotel would arrive. This interaction was shockingly nerve wracking!

Eventually, I started my work at the soup kitchen right in the heart of the city. This soup kitchen works with an organization called "Crossroads" which focuses on meeting people at any difficult turning point in their life. As a part of Crossroads there is a place for people to shower, a place for children to get clothes, even temporary living spaces, and the soup kitchen.

While working at the soup kitchen I was stunned by the vast amount of people I met while I was there. There were refugees from

Iran and Ukraine, as well as various countries in Africa. These were some of the kindest people I met during the entire trip. While working there, I learned that the reason for the large number of refugees in Geneva is because there are many government assistance programs. Geneva provides refugees with jobs at non-profit charity organizations like Crossroads and pays them a living salary. The amount of government involvement in local life garners mixed feelings from locals, but the one thing everyone appreciates is the ability to help and care for refugees in a sustainable manner.

To finish out my cultural experience in Geneva, I had heard about a legendary coffee shop that I wanted to try to find. Interestingly, it was outside of the primary tourist area of the city, which led me to an area where far less people spoke English. In contrast to my first day in the foreign environment, where I was so nervous to simply ask where my bus would arrive, I had an entire conversation with the woman selling the coffee, asking her what kind was her fa-

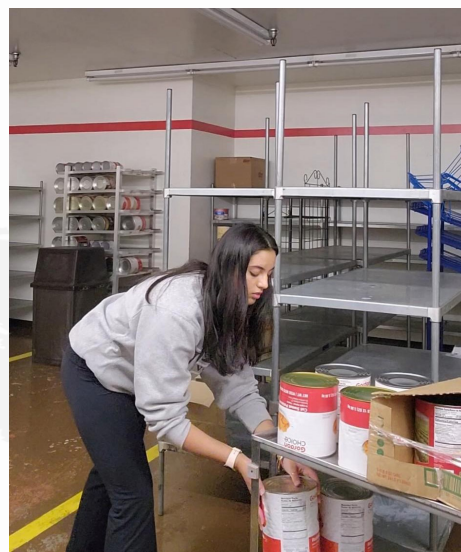
favorite and finding gifts for my family. It was so rewarding to see my confidence build so much in such a short time period.

After Geneva I went to the south of France to a small city called Grenoble to get an even smaller town in the French alps. It was this camp that I met some of the most incredible people I met on my entire trip. The majority of the camp staff are Americans who have dedicated their lives to serve specifically at this camp in France. I learned that many of the kids who come to this camp are French natives who struggle with perfectionism, particularly the painful effects of feeling like they need to be perfect all the time. One of the missionaries explained that the kids equate a bad thing they have done with being a bad person. At the camp, the kids learn that just because they did something bad or made a mistake, it doesn't mean that they, themselves are bad. Learning how to make a mistake and realizing that they can find redemption through God's love for them has been a life changing experience for

many.

I am so incredibly thankful for this opportunity to travel, serve and learn so much both about another culture and about servant leadership. I am so happy I was able to squeeze in both of these opportunities and make a real impact in the different locations along the way. I couldn't have done it without the Nichols family!





Marvi Ali '25

Economics and Cognitive Studies
Business and South Asian Language and Culture Minor

This summer, I volunteered with an organization called 412 Food Rescue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. 412 Food Rescue partners with food retailers, volunteer drivers, and nonprofit organizations to connect surplus food with individuals and families who are experiencing food insecurity. Throughout the summer, my main responsibility was working in the kitchen alongside a dedicated team of volunteers and under the guidance of the kitchen manager, Alexa. Together, we transformed surplus ingredients into wholesome frozen meals that would eventually reach individuals and families facing food insecurity.

While I didn't need to leave Pittsburgh for my Nichols service project, I did discover another side of it. And, my volunteer experience played a role in expanding my worldview and perspective. I realized that global issues, such as food waste and food insecurity, are not confined by geographical boundaries. These are issues plaguing my own local community. The Nichols Humanitarian Fund enabled me to

immerse myself in my local community and witness, firsthand, the impact that dedicated, passionate individuals can have on pressing local and global challenges. My work helped me become more attuned to the interconnectedness of our world and the significance of localized efforts in driving meaningful change.

Furthermore, in my time at 412 Food Rescue, I was fortunate enough to be a part of a dynamic exchange of knowledge, experiences, and ideas. I was humbled to learn from the community that I served, particularly from those who faced food insecurity. Their resilience and resourcefulness in the face of adversity were powerful lessons that I will carry with me. Simultaneously, I had the privilege of contributing my ideas and skills to the organization itself. Through discussions with fellow volunteers and the kitchen manager, I was able to share my perspective on improving kitchen efficiency and expanding outreach strategies. This mutual learning experience emphasized that community service is a two-way street, fostering

growth and understanding for all individuals involved.

My service project also helped facilitate a personal and skill-based evolution. Initially, my goal was to contribute to reducing food waste and food insecurity, but as the weeks progressed, my aspirations expanded. I became deeply invested in understanding the root causes of these issues and exploring more holistic approaches to address them. Moreover, my communication and teamwork abilities were honed through collaboration with other volunteers and the kitchen manager. This experience not only heightened my commitment to social responsibility but also equipped me with transferable skills crucial for my future endeavors.

The impact of my service with 412 Food Rescue has ignited a lasting commitment within me. Moving forward, I intend to remain engaged by volunteering remotely and assisting with digital outreach efforts. My time with the organization has also emphasized the importance of community engagement, so in an effort to continue fighting food insecurity, I hope to get involved with different organizations and initiatives here in Nashville!

Reflecting on the experience as whole, if I were to approach the project again, I would certainly repeat the hands-on kitchen experience, as it provided a more tangible connection to the mission. But, I would also be interested in delving deeper into the systemic cause of food waste and food insecurity. I would also like to explore partnerships with other local organizations to lead workshops on food literacy and nutrition. In having a more comprehensive approach, volunteers would be empowered with the knowledge and tools needed to advocate for sustainable change in our food system. In conclusion, my journey with 412

Food Rescue was a transformative experience that enriched my global perspective, facilitated mutual learning with the community, and cultivated personal growth in unforeseen ways. This journey has solidified my dedication to fostering change, both locally and globally, and has prepared me to contribute meaningfully to a more equitable and sustainable future.



Natalie Andreoli '25

Cognitive Studies
Literature Minor

With the help of the generous Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I was able to intern for Disability Rights Tennessee (DRT) this past summer. Disability Rights Tennessee is a state-funded, non-profit organization, which is part of the nationwide Protection and Advocacy Network. Their goal is to help all different kinds of individuals with disabilities fight for their rights. They do so through work including, but not limited to, raising community awareness, providing resources, litigation, and even taking part in investigations. I spent time working within both the Community Relations and Resource and Referral departments and enjoyed the supportive and passionate atmosphere throughout the organization.

I picked this organization because I am passionate about disability advocacy. As a now co-president of Vanderbilt's Alliance on Disability and Condition and a student with a mild form of cerebral palsy, I saw the gaps first-hand in education accessibility. Therefore, I was so glad to hear that my supervisor super-

visor at DRT truly cared about my interests and allowed me to work on education projects.

The stipend allowed me to stay in Nashville for five weeks and go to the headquarters to meet some of the staff face-to-face, as well as review tasks with my supervisor. I even sat down and had a conversation with one of the head attorneys working on active litigation, and she helped me brainstorm my main project within Community Relations! Additionally, my supervisor got me my own office, and everyone who met me there was so inviting and willing to help.

My main project was to create an updated informational flier for parents with kids who faced behavioral concerns in the classroom. These students sometimes have to take a Functional Behavioral Assessment and receive a Behavioral Intervention Plan. The research I conducted over the many weeks made me realize how tedious these assessments and plans are and that parents could get lost. Even

though the organization does not currently work on purely school-related litigation, it is good to know they can use my resources to guide concerned parents. Aside from this, I also helped with some social media posts on topics regarding healthcare and Tennessee's recent Third Grade Retention Act to continue to spread awareness on many issues.

At the end of my five weeks, I felt fulfilled and excited about my work, but I was ready to do even more than I expected. Therefore, I asked to extend my time with DRT but in a different way. Now, I talked one-on-one with constituents over the phone within the Resource & Referral department for an additional six weeks. I took calls made to the organization about many different concerns and then notified my team so they could provide me with the best resources to talk about with the constituents. It was so fulfilling to hear grateful responses from individuals and families who were finally able to find the resources they needed. It was also considerate when the team gave me a lot of the education calls, as they knew it was within my interests.

Following these experiences, I am so glad I got to spend this summer with DRT with the help of the fund. It only fueled my passion for disability advocacy more, and I was excited that I could make tangible products and contribute to meaningful conversations along the way. With how supportive and efficient this group was, I wouldn't change anything about my experience this summer, and I hope more people get a chance to see all the work DRT is doing for the community.



Charu Balamurugan '25

Biological Sciences and Medicine, Health, & Society

Hundreds of suicidality incidents at the California Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) signal mental health distress among youth. My service project was an 8-week musical wellness program to improve mental health opportunities for youth ages 12-18 who are formerly, currently, or at risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system in the Reentry programs of FLY, juvenile halls, and the Margaret J. Kemp Camp in San Mateo County, by enhancing mood regulation and mental wellness supports during the reentry process. An additional component of this project included creating digital mental health literacy resources and workshops for reentry youth and staff.

This summer service project consisted of both active and passive measures to enhance creative mental health supports at Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY). These active components were three-pronged. The first consisted of direct curriculum development and long-term (7-week) musical wellness programming for girls at the Margaret J. Kemp Camp (a songs (The

FLY Album: Vol. 1—"Beautiful Struggle", "Life Struggles", "Untitled"). The second consisted of 1-1 sessions for youth within the SMC Reentry program to cater to their Social Emotional Learning (SEL) goals. The third consisted of expanding awareness of and engagement with musical wellness for other at-risk youth and staff/leadership at FLY, which essentially entailed group sessions with other FLY programs (Leadership, Law) and a creative digital mental health literacy workshop and resources at the June SMC County All-Staff meeting. The passive component of this project consisted of sustainable incorporation of creative wellness opportunities into other major FLY programs. More specifically, I modified modules of the FLY Law program curriculum (used at multiple FLY county locations within dozens of high schools throughout the Bay Area) to incorporate music-based interventions in their Substance Use & Well-being module and the Know Your Rights (Part 1) module (specifically the section on "Triggers"). For the FLY Reentry Program, court-ordered, therapeutic,

juvenile correctional facility) within the San Mateo County Youth Services Center (YSC), resulting in a private collection/album of three I created a Creative Wellness Booklet (to disseminate among incarcerated youth) and a 10-activity Creative Wellness Binder for the SMC FLY Reentry Program for case managers to utilize during their required meetings with reentry youth to further their Social Emotional Learning (SEL) goals post-incarceration. For the reentry program, I also created a SMC FLY Reentry Program—Internal Overview binder as a tangible way to incorporate the aforementioned musical wellness resources into the SEL toolkit of current and future case managers.

Overall, I am most proud of my ability to be flexible and adaptable with regards to the constantly fluctuating needs of this vulnerable population. More specifically, I would say my best deliverables and outcomes were not in my original proposal and created due to miscellaneous needs that I saw and heard at broad-scale meetings and conversations with various FLY staff/leadership and youth. The 10-Activity Music & Wellness Social Emotional (SEL) binder was created due to the FLY Reentry Program's interest in emphasizing SEL among the four goals Reentry youth were evaluated on after their time in the 9-month program. The Creative Wellness Booklet was created when I heard about Miles, a youth that had mentioned to FLY staff/leadership that he was having a hard time with his mental health and needed a resource for things he could do to help (a resource that FLY Reentry staff previously did not always have on hand). The SMC FLY Reentry Program—Internal Overview binder was created via general meetings with the SMC FLY Reentry team, where they exhibited signs of often not being on the same page when it came to program requirements and timelines.

Receiving the stipend this summer has definitely expanded my global perspective, as I now focus much more on the intangible connections I make with the youth, the community, I serve, rather than the process of making tangible deliverables. More specifically, I feel that I have grown to be more perceptive of the impacts of my work and potential areas for improvement and further development, as well. In addition, I better understand the value in simply being a YES (as Dr. Starko would say) in life. If I hadn't agreed to tag along with FLY staff to court visits, high school Law Program graduations, Leadership program recruitments, and a variety of other FLY activities, I would not have been able to devise and create the deliverables that were not initially in my proposal. In other words, I am definitely aware of the importance of simply being open to take in my surroundings to the fullest extent. Moving forward, I will continue to be observant and learning from situations that might be outside of my comfort zone at times. Maintaining this kind of growth mindset will ensure that I continuously improve my ability to cater to vulnerable populations, like these justice-involved youth, in the future.



Benedict Ballman '25

Philosophy and Public Policy
Data Science Minor

For my humanitarian project, I worked in Quito alongside an Ecuadorian NGO called UBECI Foundation. This organization seeks to support the impoverished children working in the markets around Quito, providing them with social and educational programming to fill the need for education they otherwise would not have access to. My role at UBECI focused on their funding and grant schemes, working to improve their funding strategy and to complete several grant applications. Although my role was largely in their headquarters, I would accompany UBECI staff on their days working in the market on occasion, giving me the experience to see and participate in the programming itself.

This was an incredibly unique opportunity for me, particularly as an individual who is very interested in international relations and humanitarian work post-grad. This gave me knowledge and experience within the NGO framework, both in how these organizations function internally and how their programs

impact their target population. I have worked within the non-profit and philanthropic settings within the United States prior to this experience, but working both internationally and with an NGO opened my horizons for potential career paths in the future.

Over the course of this experience, I was able to both learn the basics of, and quickly refine, an understanding of funding strategies, grant application techniques, and how NGOs function in the long-term given the lack of certainty of funding streams. I gained a better understanding and awareness of the foundational and administrative components of NGOs, as opposed to the impact delivery I am more familiar with. I find that this wholistic understanding of these organizations is crucial for delivering the most effective impact possible when operating within them. These skills and perspectives will undoubtedly serve me and the organizations I work with in the future.

Prior to and during this volunteer experience,

I was hyper-aware of my position as a white American serving a population of impoverished, in many cases abused or traumatized, Ecuadorian children. I was without in-depth cultural knowledge of their experience and without proper mental health training or other useful skill sets to understand and address their specific circumstances. Despite this, I eagerly wanted to learn about them, the larger problems that have contributed to their situations, and how I could play a role in equitably helping them. This influenced to my decision to work within UBECI's funding strategy, an office-based position away from UBECI's programming. However, I was lucky to still take part in the programming. I found it important to see how the children of Quito reacted and benefited from UBECI's programming, which helped me to empathize so much more with their mission.

Further, despite my position as an outsider, I felt that the local children still benefited from my presence. They were all such kind, excited individuals who were eager to learn, play, and

interact. This gave me more security in my role, and definitely changed my views on the impact that international volunteering can have.

I thoroughly enjoyed and benefited from my experience in Ecuador, an overall incredibly positive experience. If I were to change anything, I would either want to extend my program length or to work more directly with the higher-level decision makers at UBECI. The first change is entirely because I would have loved to spend more time in Quito working with UBECI. For my second change, I am very curious how smaller NGOs such as this operate in a leadership capacity. I believed I learned a lot within the funding team, but I think that working alongside the leadership would have given me exposure to the funding as well as several different branches of the org I did not get exposure to.





Ojas Bhagra '25

Medicine, Health, & Society
Data Science Minor

This summer, I embarked on a transformative journey to Quito, Ecuador, driven by a budding interest for global engagement and a dedication to service. My project partner and I collaborated with the nonprofit organization, United Benefit for Ecuadorian Children International, under the platform of International Volunteer HQ. We served as NGO Support Volunteers, actively involving ourselves in the heart of Ecuador's developmental strides by assisting in parenting burdens placed on overworked local merchants.

Our primary role was to offer assistance in project management, stakeholder communication, and creative direction of UBECI's children's book geared towards American institutions who are attempting to teach Spanish. The local communities of Quito, despite being fraught with challenges, are vibrant with resilience, determination, and a keen sense of unity when it comes to building a better future for children who live in poverty. However, our organization understands that parents need help

and aid with childcare, education, hygiene, and engagement. Much of their finances comes via donations or grants. In order to be more financially healthy and sustainable, they sought out the development of a more passive stream of income. Out of this sentiment our project was born, to conduct market research on where and how much a digital educational storybook in Spanish could be sold in America. Our days were filled with researching institutions, coordinating the development of digital art, understanding the total addressable market and target customers. Our interactions were enriched by the collaboration with other volunteers, as we worked closely with volunteers from Canada of similar age, the NGO's staff, and most importantly, the incredibly resilient and playful children that we were privileged to serve.

The stipend I received this summer from my undergraduate school was not just monetary aid; it was an investment in global perspective expansion. Before this trip, I viewed the world through the lens of my experiences and the

stories I had heard. Being in Ecuador, working hands-on with a community, and experiencing their challenges, joys, and aspirations first-hand, greatly widened my horizon. Where once I saw disparities, I now see potential and opportunities for collaboration. I was intentional to make sure I didn't jump to conclusions either, nor did I want to immediately come up with solutions while I was in the storied country. I spent almost every day observing and exploring with an open-mind, and allowing my brain to freely breathe in the country without any predetermined goals in mind. Ultimately, this allowed me to assemble a much better understanding of the diverse country, from which I can now draw a wealth of inspiration from.

This belief was solidified by the immense collaborative learning that took place. From the community, I learned the importance of patience, perseverance, and hope. Their innovative solutions to daily challenges, their stories of resilience, and their unwavering spirit taught me that there's much more to learn beyond the confines of a classroom; especially when classrooms aren't even available to many of these children. Conversely, we shared with the children basic methods of structured problem-solving, hygiene, and communication strategies, giving them a broader toolkit to address their ongoing challenges even though they may only be from the age range of 5-11. Speaking Spanish with them, though challenging, was infinitely more gratifying than just nodding along and I am extremely glad I took Spanish classes in high school/Vanderbilt.

Throughout this service project, my skills in cross-cultural communication, problem-solving, and empathy burgeoned. My goals, initially limited to task completion, evolved into a profound commitment to make a lasting positive impact. The personal interactions I had,

the children I met, and the elders I spoke with, all added layers to my understanding of service.

Moving forward, while immediate plans of returning might be constrained, I am passionate about continuing my support remotely. I plan to coordinate with the NGO for virtual training sessions and engage in fundraising efforts back in Nashville. To ensure the sustainability of our work, we laid down structures, documented our processes, and trained the new batch of volunteers in various capacities to take over our roles. The new volunteers are more well-versed in graphic design, but we truly believe our foundational research in the market and target clientele, including a comprehensive list of institutions to strike B2B contracts with, is extremely helpful for UBECI.

In retrospect, if I were to plan the project again, I'd retain the element of close community engagement. However, I would perhaps change our preparation phase to include a more intensive training on the cultural and socio-economic nuances of Ecuador and extend the length. This would have accelerated our integration and effectiveness from the very beginning.

In closing, the service trip to Ecuador wasn't just an act of giving or a stint in international service; it was a profound lesson in humanity, unity, and what it means to be a global citizen.



Danna Chacon '25

Political Science and Latin American Studies
Data Science Minor

I volunteered and interned with the Excellence Center in Europe for five weeks. The center serves as a meeting point between internationals, locals, refugees, and immigrants. As a volunteer and intern, I completed case studies, taught educational legal and English language classes, and engaged with community-building events. At the same time, I learned about the struggles refugees face daily, reintegrating into a new society- the German society.

There are a vast number of skills I have acquired as a result of my work with the center. Most importantly, I have gained a more robust comprehension of the difficulty of migration. While I was aware of the dangers a long migration journey might come with, I was not conscious of the struggles that continue once a refugee reaches a new location. Gaining healthcare, an ID, education, and housing are just a few of the necessities one needs to regain. Language is another barrier many struggles with. The center focuses explicitly on minimizing this barrier by offering free En-

glish and German classes in the city of Halle. As an English teacher, I had the opportunity to first-handly understand how difficult it is to learn a new language. This specific experience made me realize how important it is for a country to offer free services to migrants and refugees to learn the language of the new country they call home.

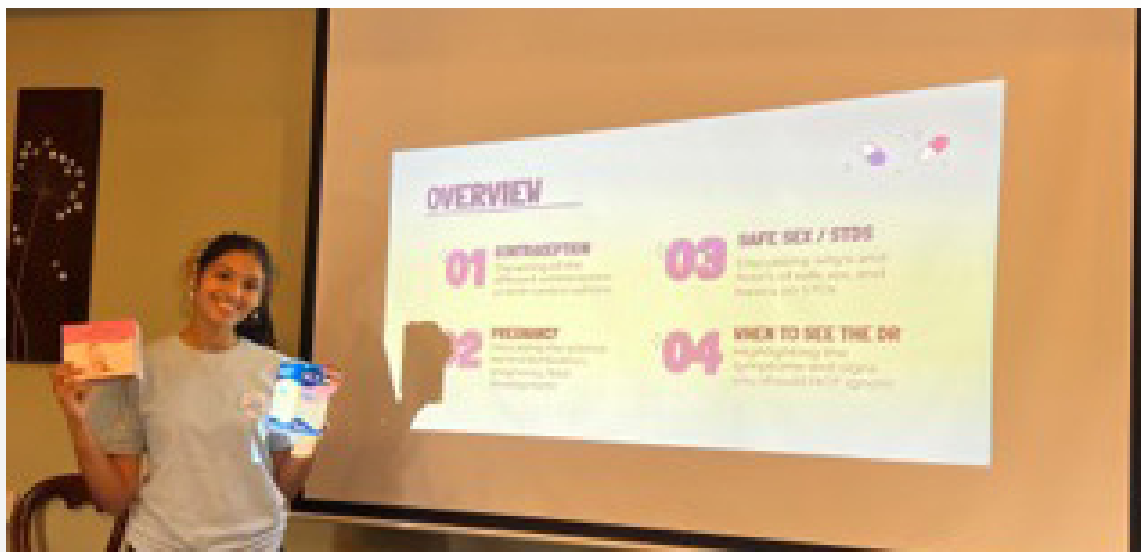
Another exciting aspect of my experience was living with a German host family. By doing so, I was able to experience a culture I was unfamiliar with. Quickly, I had to adapt to the customs and traditions of a family living in the German countryside. Through dinner conversations, I learned about their ways of living and, in my late afternoons, helped with the family garden. I was even invited to one of the girls' English classes as a guest speaker to talk about American and German stereotypes.

While I will constantly grow as a global citizen, conducting this service through the Nichols Humanitarian Fund has helped me

progress. I am now increasingly socially aware of others around me and the need to be patient and understanding and accept differences. I plan to take what I have learned and apply it whenever I experience a new culture, engage with others around me, and work on creating a more inclusive and accepting world.

Overall, my experience was like no other and one that I will treasure forever. While I have always enjoyed researching migration, immersing myself in serving refugees in Germany educated me in a way that is only possible by helping refugees in person. In the opportunity to plan my project again, I would have liked to create more elaborate plans for my weekends and add funds for commuting to work. I had unexpected transportation costs in Germany that I had yet to account for. Additionally, I would find myself going along with last-minute plans on weekends. However, I would have enjoyed meeting with other local organizations on the weekends to further my academic and humanitarian endeavors.





Riya Chinni '24

Medicine, health, & Society and Psychology
Biology Minor

This summer, I had the privilege of participating in the Nichols Humanitarian Fund 2023 Cohort and carrying out a project very close to my heart at The Julian Center in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Julian Center serves survivors of domestic and sexual abuse and violence, the majority of whom are women. One of the key tenets of the Julian Center is rebuilding and facilitating healthy, independent lives for survivors and education in various topics is a crucial component of this goal. While The Julian Center previously offered educational sessions on financial literacy, resume workshops, and more, I knew that there is a critical lack of accessible health education, especially in vulnerable communities. As an aspiring physician in women's health, it is important to me that women receive the tools they need to understand health issues and advocate for themselves in healthcare settings. Through a comprehensive women's health education program, I was able to empower women through education and provide them with the tools to understand their bodies and take preventa-

tive measures and protect their bodies as they continue to heal and rebuild their relationships with their own bodies, which was incredibly rewarding.

During this service project, I built deep bonds with the women who regularly attended these health sessions and shared their own stories as we discussed different topics. From hearing about Jamie's * health issues while incarcerated to community members offering each other advice on preventing miscarriage and navigating infertility, the powerful dialogues surrounding health were transformative to the community of residents at The Julian Center. Though I led our informative sessions and shared how to perform a self breast exam or the risk factors for ovarian cancer, I learned just as much, if not more, from our group members than they learned from my education sessions. From the survivors at The Julian Center, I learned about resilience in difficult situations and the importance of leaning on each other and uplifting communities we are

surrounded by, as modeled by my wonderful group members.

I do plan on continuing my efforts at The Julian Center by leading more health education sessions next summer as well, but I have provided the shelter with all of the slide decks and information from previous sessions to distribute among other survivors and lead more sessions throughout the year as well. Receiving a stipend this summer allowed me to provide nutritious sustenance for the women at the shelter in addition to critical products, such as menstrual pain relief patches, infant formula, pregnancy tests, various methods of contraception, menstrual cycle trackers, and more. These long-term resources will help in ways of providing comfort, knowledge, and security to the women at the shelter as well. While indirect, the women who attended each session are also sustaining my education efforts by sharing information with one another as well as those who did not attend, amplifying the lasting impact of my service project and time shared with our wonderful group members.

Through my time with The Julian Center this summer, I have grown in a myriad of ways as an individual. First and foremost, my

perspective has been broadened by the simple act of meeting those from different backgrounds and walks of life, especially when I was able to connect with survivors of various backgrounds and especially reasons for staying at the shelter. While I learned more about the stories behind the women I became friends with, my worldview shifted and opened my eyes to the inaccessibility of health for most women, especially as a generational issue. Not only am I further dedicated to educating women all around the world in the future, but I am more confident in my own ability to talk to the people I care about around me and urge them to take their health more seriously, especially in a world where women's health concerns are often dismissed by care providers. This project reaffirmed my career path, emphasizing the importance of health education in vulnerable populations and communities and the tremendous impact of such work, which I hope to continue both now and in the future. Thank you to Mr. and Mrs. Nichols for reminding me why I'm so passionate about women's health and allowing me to educate, empower, and uplift these women at The Julian Center with such a positive and transformative impact.

*survivor name changed for privacy





Muhammad Dilawar '25

Computer Science and Cognitive Studies

I collaborated with an orphanage-based school in Punjab, Pakistan, which lacked access to the internet and computers, leaving its students disconnected from literature. To address this, I donated funds to provide these facilities. Additionally, I organized workshops through 'The Walled City Journal,' featuring guest speakers. My goal was to acquaint students with multiple online literary resources and those available locally, that transcend time and place, in order to enhance their learning beyond the classroom.

I am thankful to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund for enabling me to broaden my global perspective in various ways. This stipend facilitated my understanding of the impact of literature, or the lack thereof, on the youth's critical thinking. This journey revealed not only more about myself but also altered my approach to creating change at a grassroots-level. Beyond just monetary investment, I now see the significance of investing with physical and intellectual means to get the best of education's trans-

formative potential.

Additionally, my belief in the fact that learning is a two-way process has been strengthened. Besides this, I think that children possess unique teaching abilities through their unbound and limitless curiosity. Interacting with the students fostered mutual learning. While conveying the importance of literature, I learned to address topics creatively, considering their diverse perspectives. Their fresh outlooks enriched discussions and kindled new insights for me. Meanwhile, my guidance empowered them to analyze texts critically and express ideas confidently. Through this collaboration, we expanded our horizons, discovering literature's profound influence on personal growth and societal understanding.

During my project on teaching these students about literature, my goals and skills evolved. I initially aimed to share knowledge, yet I quickly realized the need to adapt my teaching methods to engage and inspire my young

audience. I had a lot of discussions with a great friend of mine who just completed an extensive course on parenting and teaching and had a lot of reflections to share about teaching young students. I took his advice in great consideration and went on to implement it in the workshops which had great results. Moreover, navigating the students' diverse learning styles improved my communication, creativity, and patience.

Looking forward, I intend to sustain this work by partnering with local schools in Nashville to integrate literature appreciation into curricula. I'll also try to arrange workshops for educators on effective literature-based teaching strategies. By sharing experiences and resources, I aim to empower teachers to continue and expand the initiative's impact.

Reflecting on my literature teaching project, I would retain certain aspects while making changes for a more effective experience if I were given another chance. The interactive, discussion-based approach would stay as it encouraged critical thinking. However, I would adjust pacing, allowing deeper exploration of selected texts. Besides this, I would like to integrate multimedia more for the purposes of diverse learning preferences and collaboration with local authors or book clubs to enhance insights into literature's impact in curricula.

In conclusion, my collaboration with the orphanage-based school enriched students and me mutually. I'm humbled by the experience's transformational journey, fostering a deeper commitment to education's holistic advancement.





Carson Dixon '25

Human and Organizational Development
Business Minor

A journey through the vibrant streets of Quito, Ecuador, transformed my perspective on global citizenship, enhanced my cross-cultural skills, and ignited a new understanding of the complexities surrounding education. This experience, graciously sponsored by the Nichols Fund at Vanderbilt University, enabled my friend Ojas Bhagra and me to delve into the nuanced realities of Ecuadorian culture for the first time in my life. It was the only opportunity I've had to travel internationally without my family, which was an experience that opened many doors to independence and excitement.

My journey was far from a typical touristic trip; instead, Ojas and I immersed ourselves in local life, which helped improve my language skills substantially. As English speakers were a rarity, it forced me to polish my Spanish as I navigated food markets, interacted with locals, and even negotiated prices. However, it was not just a linguistic proficiency I developed but an ability to communicate and connect across cultures. This trip brought to life the textbooks and language apps, and underlined the impor-

tance of language as a tool for connection and understanding.

Volunteering with children at the markets also served as a valuable lesson in patience and resilience. The children, brimming with energy and rambunctious in spirit, required careful management. This experience helped me develop leadership qualities and an improved ability to remain patient and composed in challenging situations. Since communication was limited with the language barrier, it required extra attention to identify the best approach to helping them and spending time with them.

The social issue we aimed to explore was the lack of educational availability for children who were expected to work from an early age. Initially, I approached this issue with a clear-cut notion of 'problem' and 'solution.' However, my time spent amidst the local families painted a much more nuanced picture. I understood that this was not merely a social issue but a deeply rooted cultural practice. For gen-

erations, children had been incorporated into work early, and although education was valued by those who could afford it, not everyone perceived the situation as a problem needing intervention. This revelation profoundly shifted my perspective. While some families wanted to find a way to send their children through education, we found that it was not nearly as common of a stance as we imagined.

As a global citizen, this trip challenged me to look beyond my preconceived notions and understand that social issues are often more complex and multifaceted than they initially appear. The realization that diverse perspectives coexist, and that not everyone shares the same idea of family roles or education, fostered empathy within me. I learned the importance of suspending judgement and seeking to understand before aspiring to change.

With respect to planning the project again, I would undoubtedly spend more time honing my Spanish skills beforehand. Being more proficient would enhance my communication with locals and allow a more profound immersion into the culture. I would also extend the trip's duration; the cultural exposure, the unexpected epiphanies, and the valuable lessons were far too enriching to be condensed. I want more time to absorb, learn, and grow.

In retrospect, my time in Quito was not merely a trip, but a transformative journey. The skills I honed, the perspective I gained, and the empathy I developed along the way will undoubtedly guide me in my future endeavors. I now carry with me a nuanced understanding of global citizenship, a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity, and an enduring connection with the vibrant community of Quito.





Ralph Froancois '25

Psychology
Data Science Minor

This summer, I participated in a Forensic Aviation Project in France under the guidance of Dr. Tiffany Saul and Dr. Adam Fracchia through MTSU and the Department of Defense's DPAA Division. Prior to the starting the experience, I worried I would not like the archaeological work we would have to do as I had no prior experience in archaeological research methods at all. I also did not know any other of the people going so I did not know how psychologically safe I would feel in the group. However, that fear quickly dissipated as I began to meet my other peers. They were very kind, and many had extensive archaeology experience allowing me to build a mentor-mentee bond with many of them. Prior to the first field day, we had a short meeting to learn everyone's name and learn more about the history our fallen aircraft and the crew members whose remains we were looking for.

The next two weeks were filled with learning many archaeological field methods. This started with us learning how to make measure-

ments and leveling to create our individual units.

I was tasked with working in Unit 68 with Bryan, who LOVES everything aviation and one of my newest friends Kaitlyn. It was my first time 'opening a unit' which is the process that refers to the establishment of a clearly defined area that will be excavated or investigated. During the initial hours of opening, I was stressed as it seemed like everything was moving so fast and I did not understand the mathematical parts and it felt intimidated having to juggle so many numbers in my head. Rest assured, my team eased my tensions, and we spent the next few days digging and we found many parts of our aircraft and possible osseous materials which were went to lab to determine if they were animal or human bones. Bryan was great at finding them, it was like he had a gold thumb! Everyday demanded a great deal of physical labor from all of us under the cruel France sun but we did it happily as we playfully made jokes and discussed deep topics with each oth-

er throughout the whole day.

Occasionally, someone would yell 'CAKE BREAK' which was our pre-lunch break to eat sweet French snacks. My favorite were BNs which were these smiling cookies that tasted as good as they looked. Lunch was one of my favorite parts of the trip because we would all move to a large tarp where I would lie under the sun and take small naps after I finished eating. It was so peaceful it was almost like I was lying on sand at the beach. We would take weekly trips to the grocery store for supplies. I loved to buy sparkling juices, BNs, and blinis which were these small salty pancakes that were usually eaten with smoked salmon. I got to live in the cutest bungalow where I got a lot of experience cooking on a gas stove. We also got to travel to a few chateaus as well as the Palace of Versailles. Just 4 years prior, I was

taking notes on Versailles in AP World and now here I was at the actual palace, it was beautiful I couldn't wait to tell my French professor about all the experience I got speaking French and visiting all these historical monuments. I was so saddened I had to leave, I just wanted to live on the French countryside forever it was so peaceful and simple. This was my first time in Europe, and it was truly eye-opening and an experience I hold near my heart. I plan on traveling to Europe again and I think the experience made me heavily consider doing a study abroad program to see more parts of the world. Who knows maybe I will participate in another archaeology dig sometime in the future. I would have never been able to have this experience without the support of the Nichols family, I am deeply grateful for all the love I felt as a Nichols Humanitarian Fund Recipient.





Elaine Gboloo '25

Biomedical Engineering and Medicine, Health, & Society

This summer I worked with Roche Diabetes Care to analyze the current market for diabetes healthcare tools and generate and present reports to Roche leadership to aid them in improving their customer experiences. I worked with teams to look at Roche's competitors and communicate with healthcare providers to see potential areas of improvement. I largely worked on using publicly available sources to compare and contrast various healthcare tools offered by different diabetes healthcare companies. This work was conducted in Barcelona, Spain—the location of Roche headquarters. I was able to immerse myself in Spanish culture for three weeks to learn about the similarities and differences between American and Spanish healthcare systems.

Receiving my stipend this summer through the Nichols Global Humanitarian Fund allowed me the chance to travel to a country that I've never been to before to make an impact. I was able to experience a completely new language, culture, and group of people through the funds that

I received. My perspective has changed quite significantly since going on the trip; I now have a much global view of healthcare that allows me to effectively compare and contrast healthcare in the United States and healthcare abroad. Being able to form these kinds of analyses can help me identify areas in healthcare that I could potentially play a role in improving one day.

I initially signed up for my service research project to be able to make an impact in a field that I am passionate about. Though I feel as though I was successful in positively impacting the communities I encountered in Spain, I feel that I also learned equally as much from these communities. Not only did I learn technical research and market analysis skills that will be incredibly valuable to me moving forward, but I also learned lessons about globalism and navigating a new culture. I was initially challenged by being in a new location with a different culture, but I quickly learned how to ask for help and successfully navigate myself. I also

learned about interacting with people from different life paths and experiences, skills that I'm positive will come in handy in my future profession.

My initial goal for the project involved solely learning about the healthcare industry and working with a specific diabetes company to improve their customer service. As I embarked on my project, however, my motivations quickly shifted. I began focusing on global health in general and being able to effectively compare both the positive and negative aspects of healthcare in Spain and in the United States. As healthcare is an incredibly complex field, I was able to learn more about how specific communities are impacted by healthcare policies, shifting my learning goals during the project. By the end, I felt as though I had a solid grasp of these topics and how I want to impact the field when I am older.

Though my work with Roche specifically is over, I still definitely want to continue working within the healthcare field to learn as much as

I can. I have already begun working with other sectors of healthcare to take the lessons that I learned with Roche in Spain and apply them in my own community. I also feel as though I've prepared Roche to sustain the work that I started with them through the presentations and analysis that I did for them there that they still have access to and may implement in the future.

If I could plan my project again, I would definitely keep much of its original structure; it would involve working with a healthcare company in a different country. However, I think that I would prefer a bit more patient interaction as the program that I did largely focused on working with healthcare providers. Additionally, I think that I would extend my stay there a bit longer so that I can make a bit more of an impact. Overall, I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity that I was granted through this trip, and I will definitely keep the lessons that I've learned with me for the rest of my life!





Madison Glenn-Lawson '24

Political Science and Economics

The Nichols Humanitarian Fund played a pivotal role in enriching my summer experience with Launch Mentorship. Launch, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Nashville, is dedicated to uplifting metro students of all ages. Their outreach initiatives encompass targeted post-grad seminars for high school students, tutoring services, and professional development assistance. The focal point of my summer project was the third annual Nash Back-to-School Bash, a collaborative effort between Launch and local metro-Nashville schools. This event provides families with free backpacks containing school supplies, entertainment, and refreshments, fostering a sense of community and unity.

My work with Launch Mentorship began during the preparation for the second Nash Back-to-School Bash, making this year's endeavor my second time orchestrating an event of this magnitude. The prior experience equipped me with essential skills and insights. These enabled me to execute my responsibil-

ities more effectively, view challenges from a fresh perspective, and navigate unique obstacles with increased proficiency.

Planning for the event started at the beginning of the summer. The first task was securing the space required for the event. The Southeast Community Center in Antioch has served as our venue every year. This requires a sustained positive relationship with the center's administration. Our team consistently treats the space with the utmost respect before, during, and after the event. This creates a culture of gratitude and collaboration. In addition, vendors, entertainment, and food are integral to the event's success. Vendors were invited to showcase their businesses, organizations, or institutions, ensuring that families could access a broad spectrum of resources. Live music and games were organized for children's enjoyment, while a noteworthy change this year involved using monetary donations to prepare our own food, fostering a familial atmosphere similar to a family cookout.

The event's most crucial aspect, however, required meticulous coordination: the buying and assembly of backpacks for the students. For the third consecutive year, we partnered with a Chick-fil-A location for donations. Moreover, the funding we received from the Nichols Humanitarian Fund facilitated the procurement of backpacks and school supplies.

Organizing a citywide school drive for students in elementary school through high school over the course of a summer with Launch Mentorship was a transformative event that had a long-lasting effect on the people involved, their families, and the community at large. This program embodies the real spirit of charity and empowerment by promoting knowledge, building communal ties, and aiding personal growth. This was a thorough and informative experience that gave me a sense of passion,

opportunities for professional and personal growth, community service, and networking. Launch Mentorship was able to have a profound impact thanks to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund's crucial funding, further solidifying their dedication to improving the neighborhood.

In summary, the Nichols Humanitarian Fund was crucial in enabling my fruitful summer project with Launch Mentorship. The encounter not only emphasized the group's commitment to promoting educational opportunities and intergroup harmony, but it also emphasized the transformative potential of programs like Launch. Launch Mentorship's pertinent and permanent effects on the Nashville community are made possible by the continuous support of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund.





Ellen Habteyonas '25

Cognitive Studies and Medicine, Health, & Society
Child Development and Data Science Minor

This summer, I was honored to be chosen by the Excellence Center to complete their migration internship. The Excellence Center, which is located in Halle, (east) Germany, is a crucial part of the large refugee and migrant community that lives there through their work of providing free and low cost language learning services. As an intern, I was able to participate in the work they do hands on through teaching English, learning and improving my Arabic speaking, and learning from migration policy workshops. This programming facilitated building strong connections with the community I became a part of for the summer. Through working with the Excellence Center staff and other international interns as well as bonding with my host family, I truly feel like I made a lasting impact and have a second home in Halle, Germany. The Nichols Humanitarian Fund stipend was the foundation of making this experience not only just possible, but making it an impactful, reflective, connected, and fulfilling experience. Being able to see what my classmates, many of whom I'd never met

before, complete projects centered on issues I'd never thought as deeply about was so impactful and inspiring. Especially as young people, the financial barrier of following our passions for helping others can be overwhelming and disheartening, causing us to miss out on experiences that expand our perspectives. Due to my own background as a migrant, this internship helped me think beyond the "already pretty global perspective" I assumed I had. Being able to work with other interns from all over the world with different backgrounds and in completely different life stages helped me realize the power of pooling resources, which individually may seem small and insignificant. I am now better able to see myself in many different communities worldwide and take advantage of the resources and skills I have to make a larger difference.

In this internship I was able to learn most from living in a different culture in my home and professional environments, from my day to day basic interactions to how overall goals were

designed and worked towards. From the presentations, diverse coworkers, and compassionate migrant community, I learned how to help communities through empowerment mindsets, developing a relatable language to connect with people. One of the main skills I grew during this opportunity was knowing how to plan impactful service and programming, starting with building strong community bonds and trust in daily interactions, directly asking about gaps, utilizing existing community strengths and resources, as well as evaluating collaboratively to troubleshoot and improve designed projects. Part of this learning process was learning from what the Excellence Center itself as an organization could improve on to make their work more impactful, from my point of view as a staff member. I really benefited from being able to set goals for myself and reflect on them periodically, as well as give feedback to my leaders. It can be really challenging for me to voice concerns or points of conflict to those I work for. However, I really learned that for things to change and improve, it requires honesty and communication to those in authoritative positions and especially amongst my peers about our expectations and needs. Learning how to manage and communicate between the community I served, my coworkers, and the staff I worked under was a major strength that developed throughout this project.

The work I did this summer directly ties into my long-term career interest in community organizing and policy creation for young African and Arab migrants by building better systems to support the world's increased future globalization. This internship involved directly engaging with the groups I'm hoping to impact, providing a rare and unique opportunity to work within this community in a way that incorporates an educational and research aspect

in addition to the service work. In the future, I am planning to build off this strong foundation I've built and find more opportunities focusing more on the research and policy aspects of this work rather than just the direct community service work. Working at this macro level will help me advance in this field as well as have my work impact more people more sustainably compared to my direct volunteer work this summer. Because of the flexibility afforded in the set-up of the internship program, I found that there was less structure and organization than I anticipated or would have preferred. While this helped me grow out of my comfort zone and learn how to create opportunities for myself based on my goals, next time I do hope to take more initiative and not be constrained by the program itself. I did appreciate and love the atmosphere created by the migrant communities and other interns, the resources provided by the staff, and the variety of people I was able to learn from. When planning a project such as this again however, I would prefer a program that focuses its community work on many aspects rather than just language development and resources to better strengthen the contexts I can serve in.



Carol Ham '24

International Human Rights & Advocacy
Spanish Minor

San Francisco, one of the most prosperous epicenters of Western technology, is a city juxtaposed by glamorous wealth and extreme poverty. I chose to work in San Francisco specifically this summer to have the opportunity to learn firsthand about the city's rich and complex history of activism. For my Nichols Humanitarian Fund project this summer, I volunteered with Meals on Wheels San Francisco, St. Anthony Foundation, and Florence Fang Community Farm in the San Francisco Bay Area. My project focused on fostering food empowerment among residents of Southeast San Francisco, the Tenderloin, and homebound older adults in San Francisco while also learning about nonprofit strategic planning and execution.

My work with Meals on Wheels San Francisco and the St. Anthony Foundation provided invaluable insights into the challenges of addressing food security in a city characterized by wealth disparities and a high cost of living. Meals on Wheels has served as an incredible

support for older San Franciscans since 1970, ensuring that homebound older adults receive nutritious meals, daily human contact, and supportive services to prevent premature institutionalization. The St. Anthony Foundation, located in the Tenderloin district, an area of San Francisco known for its history of high crime rates, operates as a safety net center for unhoused San Franciscans. Its mission is to feed, heal, shelter, clothe, and lift the spirits of those in need. My roles in these organizations consisted of packaging home-delivered grocery supplies, preparing nutritious food in community kitchens, and serving food in local dining spaces and pop-up pantries. I worked closely with volunteers and community leaders from all walks of life, and I gained incredible insights into the operations of region-specific community initiatives and local chapters of international organizations.

I was connected to the Florence Fang Community Farm in July by a fellow volunteer. At the farm, which is nestled in the heart of

San Francisco's Bayview-Hunters Point (BVHP) neighborhood, I experienced a different approach to food empowerment. I learned from one of the founders that the farm holds immense communal significance, as it played a significant role in transforming BVHP from its status as a former food apartheid. A food apartheid is more than just a food desert; it represents systemic inequalities and injustices that limit access to healthy food due to factors such as race, income, and location. The farm has two parts – the left side is the original East Asian-influenced farm that grows more traditionally East Asian vegetables, and the right side is the Black Organic Farm, home to the Bayview Black Farmers Program. Through the practice of natural farming techniques, the Florence Fang Community Farm achieves more than crop production. It fosters unity among communities of color and supports local farmers, nearby food pantries, and farm-to-table restaurants. At the farm, I worked on mulching, planting, and painting the farm's community stage, which serves as a platform for open discussions, knowledge exchange, and cultural preservation.

Amidst the environmental challenges faced by the community, the Florence Fang Community Farm stands as a resilient symbol. It demonstrates the power of collective action, the preservation of heritage, and the potential for meaningful change when communities come together. My time spent volunteering at the Florence Fang Community Farm not only deepened my understanding of sustainable agricultural practices but also broadened my perspective on the importance of advocating for food sovereignty and cultural preservation through food. If I could plan my project again, I would allocate more time at the beginning of the project to create formalized objective trackers to maximize my impact and involvement in

each organization I worked with. Nonetheless, my summer experience ultimately led me to a place of profound learning and a newfound commitment to advocating for food sovereignty, social capital, and cultural preservation through the cultivation of food and community bonds. In terms of continuing the work I initiated this summer, I am dedicated to remaining engaged with local food empowerment and education initiatives in Nashville through organizations like the Nashville Food Project. In closing, I want to express my deepest gratitude to the Nichols family and their generosity in providing me with the incredible opportunity to embark on this transformative journey of learning and service.



Jonathan Jesalva '25

Electrical & Computer Engineering
Computer Science

This summer I went to Taiwan to work in Taipei's poorest district Wanhua and at a church in the south to assist with organizing and distributing donations. In Wanhua, I was working at a children's Christian summer camp in partnership with an organization called OMF International.

I was working with a diverse group of people: three missionaries, one from Switzerland, Singapore, and another who was a local. I also worked with a Bible seminary student from Germany, a missionary from Hong Kong, and a missionary from Australia. Each individual I worked with came together to form a diverse community. I used to think the US was the only melting pot in the world but Taiwan proved me wrong. The group I was working with alongside the many different ethnicities and immigrants made up the melting pot of Taiwan.

In addition to working in Taipei, I was also able to assist a church in a place called Hengchun. I was helping move and organize various items

that could be donated. The group I was working with was comprised of all Taiwanese people which allowed me to receive a firsthand experience of Taiwanese culture. This experience was extremely unique because interacting with the people from a tourist perspective only gave me a glance at what people seemed to be like but living with the people felt like I was given a family. From eating home-cooked meals together to me sharing my experience living in the US, we became family. Even though it was a short-term trip, I can say I have a family that lives in the south of Taiwan.

Before arriving, my expectations about the work I was going to do were going out on the streets talking to strangers about the Bible and witnessing people's lives being changed. However, I found myself playing games with children and helping the church clean its storage spaces. I had traveled thousands of miles to Taiwan and I was slightly disappointed just to play with kids and help clean. However, these humbling types of work proved to me that they

were important. The parents expressed their gratitude for the time I was investing in their children from playing new games to simply having a conversation. It was the simplest acts of kindness that moved the hearts of the families.

It was also through simple things that I was able to connect the most with the children. Initially, I was worried about how I would relate to them because I had limited experience working with children. One time, I thought about teaching them to play the game red hand. Despite its simplicity, the children loved it and would follow me everywhere wanting to play the game. I learned children's communication and relationship-building are founded and grow upon these fun interactions. While I taught the children a game they loved, the children taught me about their perspective of life, not by telling me but through action. I would observe the children every day and how they would navigate their lives. I learned from them that it was the simple things in life that mattered like reading a pop-up storybook and imagining what it would be like to live in the medieval ages or the times when they asked me to play a game of ninja with them. In all of the activities we did together, laughter was a key component of our bonding.

Living in a different society made me realize that there is more than one "right" way to live. Before coming to Taiwan, I was biased towards the ways of life in the US, that the US was doing everything correctly. However, coming to Taiwan showed me another "right" way to live. I began to understand how communication is not just through words but also through gifts and food and how being afraid of walking home at night does not have to be an issue. Public places like restrooms were clean and transportation was smooth and efficient. There

were more things to learn from Taiwan than I thought.

I did not just learn more about other life conventions but how I am capable of connecting with all types of people regardless of age or race and being able to make an impact on their lives. From these experiences, I know I want to continue doing humanitarian work in some shape or form. There is something inviting about a community of volunteers that want to help, external to money or material gain. It is people's reactions and expressions of the kindness I share that have a long-lasting impression on me. To continue my work, I have joined organizations like International Family which is dedicated to serving international students through a Christian lens, International Orientation Leaders for welcoming international freshmen, and Alternative Spring Break (ASB) for serving needy communities during spring break. Along with the Nichols Humanitarian Fund which I hope to participate again in, I am excited to embark on a future that involves helping others in both the big and small.





Recognizing Emotions!

by the Vanderbilt University ACCESS Program



Happiness: if you are happy...

- You could be happy if you get a new toy or you see your best friend
- Usually you feel happy when you do something fun that you enjoy



Sadness: if you are sad...

- You could be sad if someone said something mean to you
- You might feel like you have to cry, or you feel very upset
- What if you dropped your favorite snack on the ground?



Anger: if you are angry...

- You could be angry if you have to do something you don't want to do
- What if someone broke your favorite toy, or you had to go to bed when your favorite show was on?



Fear: if you are scared...

- You could feel scared if you are worried about something happening to you
- If you are afraid of bears, how would you feel if a bear was chasing you?



Surprise: if you are surprised...

- You could be surprised if you didn't expect something to happen

Min Joo Kim '24

Biochemistry

My understanding of autism began during my writing class, “Problems in Literature: Literature and Public Policy.” As part of our final project, we were tasked with writing a profile for Autism TN, a nonprofit organization in Nashville that supports individuals on the spectrum. For one of the interviews, I met with the Teen & Adult program manager Mr. Griffin, who was also on the spectrum. He shared his first-hand experiences about how his lack of social awareness played to his detriment and explained that’s why he started “Game Day”, a social event where teenagers and young adults can practice social skills. This project opened my eyes to the ignorance I had regarding autism, particularly growing up in Korea where the topic is highly stigmatized. Through this project, I realized the lack of social awareness I possessed, motivating me to start volunteering for Autism TN. Over the past year, I have had the opportunity to learn from interacting with parents and individuals on the spectrum about their challenges. This experience has guided me in finding ways to provide the best oppor-

tunities for them.

Consequently, I have been collaborating with Autism TN to launch the “ACCESS (Autism Children Care for Early access to social skill training) program,” aimed at helping children practice social skills from a younger age and fostering a supportive community for parents who are struggling to find assistance. The idea of the project popped into my head during an Autism TN event in which we had the chance to interact with numerous families in Tennessee. Many parents came up to the booth asking about different opportunities for children, explaining that their kids have recently been diagnosed. By then I have been volunteering for a semester with Autism TN. Through my interaction during ‘Game day’ and my conversation with teens and young adult’s parents, I noticed that people on the spectrum who had more exposure to different activities and therapies had an easier time adjusting to different social environment as they grew up. Thus, with the generous funding through the Nichols

Humanitarian Fund, I was able to transform the idea into reality.

Our first activity is oriented towards children from 6 to 7 years old on the spectrum to recognize, interpret and respond to their own and other's emotion. Once I started the project, I realized that amount of time and effort to organize a service program. So, I have recruited a team of 6 to start building basic structure of the program along with different documents so once the program starts it can be sustained as part of an official Autism Tennessee program. Through our emoticon activity, we hope to help children learn about different emotions using arts and craft activity with examples from everyday interactions. By giving out flyers to the parents after the program, we hope to get feedback and give out information that parents can utilize once they go back home. With the 'ACCESS' program, children will learn how to interact with others and parents will find resource and community throughout the journey. Although I had limited awareness about autism a year ago, my time with Autism TN has allowed me to develop a better understanding of individuals on the spectrum, and reinforced my commitment to learn about their backgrounds and needs. With the Nichols Humanitarian fund, I hope to continue my effort to build the 'ACCESS' program and make it sustainable as a part of Autism TN to help the spectrum community in Tennessee.



J.M. Kongmanychanh '24

Biological Sciences
Psychology Minor

While at the Office of Family Safety in Nashville, Tennessee, I had the honor of serving victims of domestic abuse, interpersonal violence, and stalking or harassment. There, I worked directly with clients to create a safe environment and to help people obtain orders of protection. In addition, I managed the donations closet and food pantry; provided care to at-risk children; and answered incoming, sensitive calls. It was a pleasure being able to get to know people like Courtney Muller and Cagney Stinson, my direct supervisors. They created a workplace that was empowering and caring, allowing for me to grow and find space throughout the summer. Without that type of support, I know that my experience in assisting our clients would have been very different.

Being a part of the 2023 Nichols Humanitarian Fund Cohort permitted me to interact with a breadth of backgrounds. Primarily, the funding allowed me to live in Nashville, which has a diverse population. From homeless individuals to professors and psychologists, we served peo-

ple from all walks of life. Having a roof over my head meant that I could step into the office every single day with the best attitude and headspace. It showed in my work: clients always commented on my empathetic and sincere nature, children started to request to have me accompany them, and senior advocates always acknowledged my contributions. I found myself feeling like a true young adult who could support a wide array of individuals. I would be on call listening to lengthy stories of abuse or comforting children whose traumas showed up during playtime, but I was always able to be present. The security that the NHF provided me made this the most fulfilling summer I have ever had.

At the start of my service, I wasn't prepared for how client-facing I would be in this role. Although I knew that I would be doing primarily front desk tasks and helping write orders of protection, I found myself making a role for myself. At the Family Safety Center, I shadowed many advocates while they wrote orders of

protection. In those spaces, I wasn't allowed to talk or perform the interview; however, active listening with my expressions and attention allowed clients to feel heard. Furthermore, I constantly found myself helping children with obtaining their own needs and to feel like they were being cared for. I put my whole heart into the internship in ways that I never expected to. I could do something as simple as intuiting what another might need: a coffee, breaks in the session, or food, and somehow, it always made a world of a difference to them.

Interacting with clients taught me many things. First, that I am a capable person. Whether I could provide crisis counselling or get someone a drink, I could run front desk, lobby, play area, security, and advocate organization. Second, that my compassion has no bounds. Without even talking, I've had many clients lean towards me to tell their stories. They would tell me that they felt safe with just my presence, that I was someone who they knew was listening. Third, that I'm able to communicate boundaries. I would often juggle many tasks, trying to do everything all at once. However, by midway through the day, I would accidentally burn myself out. It took a lot of trial and error to find out how to best convey my need for assistance but being able to do so had

strengthened me to become a better advocate. With these newfound strengths, I know that clients felt like they were being heard. I found ways to break down complex legal jargon, and I found that even senior advocates would use the terminology I discovered worked best. From me, clients learned that a haven away from danger does exist. Even though there are sometimes barriers to our goals, I taught clients that we are not alone in recognizing and confronting those obstacles. It meant a lot to teach others by leading, elaborating, and taking time for them and making space for them. Although I'm going back into my senior year, I was asked to remain as a full-time position at the Office of Family Safety. I cannot thank the OFS enough for providing me with the experience they did. If I cannot make it into graduate school, my full intention is to work at the Family Safety Center as an advocate and data scientist. However, in the meantime, I hope to provide resources to students at Vanderbilt about how they can file orders of protection if they experience stalking, harassment, or intimate partner violence. On campus, students are not aware of the resources they have in Nashville. I would love to spread the knowledge I have to help protect other students.





Camille Liska '25

Medicine, Health, & Society and Cognitive Studies
Political Science Minor

This summer, I worked with a non-profit organization, Awamaki, based in Ollantaytambo, Peru, a historic Inca-colonial town in the Sacred Valley. Awamaki provides opportunities for rural Indigenous Andean women artisans living in Peru by connecting them to an online marketplace and wholesale opportunities to sell their craftwork. Further, the organization aims to equip women with business and empowerment skill development through educational sessions in hopes for women to grow their businesses independently of Awamaki. The organization works to support women's financial independence, supporting their families and local communities to keep their traditional culture alive.

I supported the organization's marketing and communication efforts through social media, email campaigns, online engagement opportunities, photography, and design work. Awamaki relies on volunteers to photograph the textile work (bags, scarves, pillowcases, etc.) and their sustainable tourism program to attract tourists

to participate in their cooking classes, tours of communities, and overnight visit programs. I was able to bring my camera from home and leverage my past photography experience to document Awamaki's work bringing fresh images to their website and social media.

Receiving this summer stipend has profoundly impacted my overall global perspective. Without the generosity of the Nichols family, I would never have been able to afford an experience such as this. I am immensely grateful that I could live in Ollantaytambo, Peru. In the past, I have gone on vacations outside of the country but had never truly "traveled" before to somewhere so culturally different than the United States. This trip ignited a passion for travel and made me want to explore more to learn about/experience various cultures. Overall, this experience brought an entirely new global perspective that I did not have before. I now have a deeper appreciation for different cultures and see how beautiful differences in life can be.

Throughout my time with Awamaki, I reached my personal goals of improving my Spanish and overall communication skills. When departing for the trip, I had some Spanish under my belt and had taken courses at Vanderbilt to prove my proficiency in the language. However, I still was nervous to speak on the spot without first thinking about what I wanted to say in English and then translating it into Spanish. During my time in Peru, I really pushed myself to speak as much as possible in Spanish without planning. By the end of my time volunteering, I had a notable difference in my confidence levels, comprehended the language much easier, and knew I would always be able to communicate what I wanted to say. This was a tremendous accomplishment for me. I am so grateful for this skill going into my Junior year at Vanderbilt, where I will study abroad in Barcelona, Spain, in the spring semester.

Further, my goal of enhancing my communication skills through my writing for Awamaki changed. I knew I would work writing about impact/advocacy (something I am deeply passionate about and want to make a career out of) for the organization. Still, this was my first

time writing about a population such as Awamaki's. The organization equipped me with a toolkit, learning how to write in anti-colonialist language. It became a goal of mine to learn more about this skill and how our language really can have a negative impact on communities. Since I was handling marketing and communication for the organization, this skill was vital and something I will continue to work on and develop.

Although I am not continuing to work directly with Awamaki, during my time this summer, I did develop a plan for the organization to release content for user engagement, such as blog posts, social media posts, and volunteer recruitment videos for them to continue their marketing and communication campaigns. By setting up a plan for Awamaki to recruit more volunteers to continue this work, I hope the organization can host more volunteers aiding Awamaki in its mission! Volunteering with Awamaki and living in Ollantaytambo, Peru, was an incredible experience that opened my eyes to world travel and different cultures.





Emma Marlowe '24

Sociology

The first day of class brings mixed emotions for most people, no matter how old you are. A few days ago, I attended the first classes of my Junior year at Vanderbilt University. We did the typical introductions, so naturally, everyone had a fun fact or a favorite piece of media ready to share after their name, major, and grade. It's easy to forget first-day-of-class introductions, but one stuck out to me. After introducing themselves, one of my fellow students said, "I've been watching *The Office*. I hate to read, so my favorite book isn't really an option for me." The class chuckled, and I did, too, but I later realized the offhanded comment revealed an almost invisible privilege.

Upon reflection, it became apparent that to know you "hate" to read, you must first have the privilege of literacy. To be literate is an astounding feat; it means you can decode twenty-six letters and the sounds they make in combination with one another, continuously interpret, and then recall the corresponding message. Literacy is taken for granted by many

in the U.S., who fail to realize that literacy is not only a decoding superpower, but that literacy is also justice. The U.S. has an education and, consequently, a literacy crisis. Student literacy rates are abysmal across the country, especially in marginalized communities.

This statement, "literacy is justice," is the essence of East Nashville Hope Exchange's mission. East Nashville Hope Exchange (ENHE) is an organization that seeks to address an undeniable injustice in the Nashville community: most Metro Nashville Public School (MNPS) elementary students are not on track to become literate. As of 2022, 72.6% of third-grade students district-wide were not on track to become literate. This glaring disparity is exacerbated in English language learners, economically disadvantaged students, and Black/Hispanic/Native American students, with 92.3%, 85.6%, and 82.5% not on track to literacy, respectively. When I learned about this, I knew I wanted to use my experience as a private tutor to help. I applied for the Nichols Humanitarian

Fund, and when it was awarded, my summer plans were set. I would stay in Nashville and work in ENHE's six-week reading program.

Because of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I was able to forego a salary for my Assistant Teacher position, and ENHE was able to use what would have been my salary to support other elements of the program. The first few days, I was nervous. I was the youngest staff member, wasn't from the East Nashville community, and didn't have in-class teaching experience. I worked with Kindergarten, and my fantastic lead teacher was understanding and supportive of both our students and myself. Kindergarten serves as a crucial developmental stage for children, where we, as educators, ensure that dozens of students learn letters, shapes, and social skills. However, teachers aren't only accountable for this formal teaching, they must also have impeccable classroom management. Most people would crumble under these pressures, and I couldn't help but marvel at how my lead teacher handled every-

thing with such tact and grace.

We were not only able to teach these students all of their letters and letter sounds, but many of our students also learned dozens of words and were able to begin leveled readers. I noticed progress within two weeks, and I marveled at how rapidly and enthusiastically they began to decode their surroundings. I was incredibly fortunate to witness the positive impact a collaborative concentrated intervention could have on students. A few parents reported their children learned more in the six weeks of the program than they did in an entire year of preschool. I remain incredibly moved by the transformative power of education, and I intend to continue volunteering with ENHE in the coming months. Thanks to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I left ENHE's program assured that these young learners are not merely on the path to literacy, but are also cultivating a genuine love for reading.





Ansley McDurmon '25

Law

This summer, I was a legal intern at Global Rights Compliance, an international human rights law firm based in London, England and The Hague. I worked with the firm's Starvation Mobile Justice Team, which was comprised of lawyers and ex-military investigators who collect evidence to spur International Criminal Court prosecutions of starvation-related war crimes in conflict zones. The team was spread across Europe: Ukrainian staff and many team members deployed regularly to Ukraine for trainings and investigations, while others of us worked remotely from states across the European Union. I was a remote intern working from Piove di Sacco, Italy, a small town near Venice. I was tasked with writing memos clarifying various international legal issues, collecting open-source data for impact analyses, building parts of training exercises for Ukrainian lawyers, and amalgamating reporting mechanisms into a jurisprudence table that presented evidence of starvation-related crimes around the world.

My team consisted of highly regarded international lawyers, so I was a bit intimidated at first! Thankfully, they also happened to be lovely, caring people who quickly integrated me into the team. With their help, I learned how to navigate a system that follows neither our Common Law legal system, nor European Civil Law. To do so, the GRC team asked me to apply my international law coursework at Vanderbilt Law to the realities of starvation case-building. This is no small task—the fascinatingly complex nature of international law would likely be labyrinthine to even the most well-prepared student. The GRC legal team were incredible guides: they mentored me closely as I learned to conduct international legal research, identify useful legal precedent, collect open-source content that evidenced our positions, and write memos tailored to discussing international law.

I was excited to support to the team as an intern, and even got to use some of my undergraduate science major during the process!

Though I'm now training to be a lawyer, my undergraduate degree is in ecology, so I was able to interpret scientific information for the legal team as they addressed the environmental damage caused by Russia's attack on the Kakhovka Dam.

This work asked me to dig deeply into the complicated issue of starvation and its role in global conflicts. Prior to this work, my perspective on global human rights was constrained to peacetime concerns. Now, I've begun to see how those concerns interrelate with—and often lead to—the crimes that arise in conflict zones. The Nichols Fund made it possible for me to engage in an area of law that is both traditionally under-funded and essential to protecting global human rights. I hope to make this work the focus of my legal pro-bono work in the future and am addressing these issues in a note article for my Law Journal to help me build further understanding in this area.

If I were to repeat my project, there are many things I'd like to keep the same, and a few that I would do differently. I would absolutely live in a European country again. Being on the same time zone as my colleagues was incredibly useful because it enabled me to build connections with the team and ask questions in real time. Because our work often dealt with two or more cultures interacting, I also appreciated the daily lived experience of interacting with a

community so unlike my home in the South-east. I would also continue to share my skills and ask for projects that interested me, because it helped me connect with aspects of our team's work that will inform my future legal work. Of course, I'd choose to work the GRC again in a heartbeat—you'd be hard-pressed to find a more dedicated, funny, and compassionate group of legal experts.

If I were to change anything about my work, I would be sure to keep a reflection journal to help me process the emotional strain of working in human rights law. War crimes and crimes against humanity happen on a scale that I couldn't have conceptualized before this summer, and I would like to have begun the summer with a routine in place for addressing the difficulty of this work. I loved my internship and the way it awakened me to global realities I'd never considered. That awakening could be painful at times, but there was an opportunity to turn that emotional pain into a greater sense of gratitude for my own safe and opportunity-filled existence as an American citizen and Vanderbilt Law student.

I am so thankful for this opportunity and for the lovely people I met this summer. I am especially grateful to the Nichols family for making this opportunity possible. I will be a better lawyer and global citizen because of this experience!





William McGoughran '25

Law

Over the summer, I worked for Guernica 37 Chambers, a law chamber in London, United Kingdom. The group of barristers at Guernica specialize in human rights and humanitarian law internationally, working toward accountability for a wide range of issues from crimes of aggression in Ukraine to the violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention in Syria to extradition domestically. As a pupil there, I aided these barristers in the research and drafting of legal arguments and preparation for meetings and hearings.

The work was invaluable to me. Not only because of the experience it provided me in complex litigation on an international scale but because of the ability it gave me to be just one part of the greater international community in pursuit of accountability when foreign powers disregard the obligations they have to the rest of the world to pursue peaceful and responsible conflict resolution. This pursuit of accountability showed me that when you have the right people together, the law can be wielded as a

tool of justice, even when the target is some of the most powerful individuals throughout the international hierarchy. I now have a clearer vision of how I want to use my law degree, seeing just what is possible when determined lawyers pursue truth and justice.

My research and writing skills have improved tremendously throughout this experience. Through the nature of Guernica 37 Chambers, I had to adapt to various issues, from handling a number of international conventions to understanding the jurisdictional constraints of the International Court of Justice to having enough of a grasp of United Kingdom domestic law to aid in extradition defense. Being able to rotate between this wide range of topics on a dime was an important skill to have in Chambers, and I fine-tuned that skill daily as I would be handling multiple projects at a time and would be asked regularly to switch what I was doing to help out elsewhere. I was also required to write in a succinct and legally sound format that conveyed the current stance of the law to

barristers in a way that would best help them utilize that law to reach their desired ends.

I also had to learn to be proactive. With 10-15 barristers all working on their own projects in Chambers, it can be easy to get lost in the shuffle. I learned that if I took a passive role inside Chambers, I would not be able to gain the experience I envisioned upon arrival. I learned to consistently ask to help and follow up with colleagues regarding their projects to ensure I was the first on their minds when the opportunity arose for help to be needed. My experience could have been vastly different if I had not done this. I learned that to be a part of the most important cases, I had to show the passion, drive, and desire that instilled barristers with the confidence they needed to hand over tasks

that needed to be done quickly and correctly for their cases to continue running smoothly.

While this experience was great, I did have to rent an apartment, take the bus to and from work daily, and pay for a flight from Nashville to London to make it possible. The internship was unpaid, and it originally seemed unlikely that it would be practical to afford. The money received through the Nichols Humanitarian Fund was the only reason I could afford living expenses while working for free. Without it I would have been deprived of the opportunity to partake in this internship, and I am forever thankful to the Nichols family and Vanderbilt, for providing me with this opportunity.





Mahd Mohsin '26

Computer Science and Mathematics

In the second half of 2022, heavy monsoon rainfall caused devastating flooding in Pakistan which affected 33 million people, killed over 1,700 people, and led thousands homeless. As a result of the wide-scale destruction, several projects were initiated by NGOs both in Pakistan and globally to provide relief and rehabilitate the flood victims. Over a span of 4 weeks, from the start of May till the start of June, I too spent my time working with the Human Necessity Foundation (HNF) and the Rizq Organization on a similar humanitarian project centered around providing clean water access to flood victims throughout Pakistan.

Receiving \$3,800 as a Nichols Humanitarian Fund recipient played a pivotal role in our project in many ways. The fund allocation proved to be of immense significance, as it not only covered essential costs associated with my travel to and from the affected regions, primarily in Southern Pakistan, but also enabled the acquisition of crucial equipment such as water purification systems, filtration units, and

water testing kits vital for the success of our mission. This support from the Nichols Humanitarian Fund not only eased logistical and financial burdens but also amplified the impact of our efforts, contributing significantly to the well-being and recovery of the flood victims.

Working on the project over the summer was a transformative experience for me. I was able to interact with the flood victims directly, many of whom had lost everything overnight - from their homes and livelihoods including cattle to their loved ones. This led an indelible mark on me because it made me reflect on the privilege I, as someone who was fortunate enough to not have been affected by the flood, had and the importance of extending a helping hand in times of crisis. Witnessing the victims' resilience in the face of such immense adversity was a humbling experience that also deeply touched me as I realized that the impact of our clean water supply project was not just about the physical assistance we were providing, but also about the emotional support we were able

to offer in their time of need. The gratitude expressed by the flood victims for our efforts reinforced the value of empathy and kindness, emphasizing that even small contributions can make a significant difference in the lives of those who are struggling.

If I could plan the project all over again, I would firstly ensure that the funds for the project were disbursed to me on time. Due to some technical issue this time around, the disbursement of my funding for the project was delayed by a few weeks and since it did not overlap with my duration of stay in Pakistan, I had to exhaust my personal funds for the project and was faced with a slight financial burden initially. However, the staff at the Office of Experiential Learning and Immersion at Vanderbilt was extremely cooperative and helpful, and I was able to receive my funding soon without much hassle.

I remain in contact with the project heads who are spearheading the effort in different regions of Pakistan and therefore stay updated on the installation of new water plants in flood-affected regions. Just over a month ago, the board running HNF also held an event in the Islamic Center of Nashville (ICN) to reach out to the public for donations. I plan on continuing my own individual effort and being of assistance when I visit Pakistan again, most probably during the coming winter break.



Maya Mueller '25

Clarinet Performance

My name is Maya Mueller, and I am a clarinet performance major at Vanderbilt. The Nichols family funded my humanitarian project in Tanzania. I partnered with the Daraja Music Initiative to teach clarinet and tree conservation to school children in the Kilimanjaro Region of Tanzania. Tree conservation and clarinet education work hand in hand since most clarinets are made from African Blackwood (“Mpingo” in Swahili), which happens to be Tanzania’s national tree.

“Daraja” is Swahili for “bridge.” The founder of Daraja Music Initiative chose “bridge” because of the program’s goal to connect two vastly different cultures and to use music as a sturdy and powerful bridge. This bridge was more than effective; I felt instantly connected to everyone I met. I think about the power of music every day. In many ways, I am studying “the power of music” here at Vanderbilt. I learn how musical pieces and ideas came to be and how they affected the population. I aim to make my music powerful enough to drive people to

tears. However, I realize now that I was utterly ignorant of how powerful music can be. I cannot begin to describe how receptive and excited the children were to hear and learn about music. As part of the program, we would travel to at least two primary or secondary schools weekly to plant several Mpingo trees. During these visits, we would teach why these trees were so important, why the kids must take care of them, and that they should never cut down trees without replanting. We would also provide a musical presentation of our clarinet made from the Mpingo trees. Often, these presentations would be in front of at least a hundred children who were smiling, cheering, and laughing at our presentation. It was amazing to see the children so hungry for knowledge and music. There was one instance when we asked if anyone had questions, and this brilliant girl stood up and asked us if we could please teach clarinet classes at her school because she wanted to learn how to make beautiful music (the program was only teaching classes at one local primary school due to the small number of vol-

unteers). I remember feeling such strong emotion in response to this question, and I felt on the verge of tears. Another instance was when a group of children sang us a beautiful song as a thank you for our visit. I will never forget how beautiful it sounded.

I would teach classes at a local primary school with the other volunteers every day. We taught two general music classes and an hour-long clarinet class of about forty children. Once again, the children were hungry for knowledge and music. It was always easy to keep their attention, and they soaked up new material like sponges. Their progress always impressed me, especially with the drastic language barrier between teachers and students. Though I was teaching them, I was also constantly learning myself. Participating in this program has taught me how to teach music effectively. It also challenged me to get very creative with my teaching methods. By the end of my three-week stay, I fell in love with all the kids. Watching their progress and performances each week

filled me with a new sense of pride I had never felt before.

The only downside of this experience is that I can only partially explain to people how great it felt to be there. I met so many people and saw so many things that made me appreciate the planet we live on. Everything about life felt so much more beautiful than before, and even now, I find it difficult to explain why. Perhaps this feeling stems from Tanzania's culture of selflessness, family, respect, and gratitude—something I do not believe is so familiar in America. I plan to return to Tanzania to climb Kilimanjaro and teach more clarinet. I am so grateful that I had the opportunity for this experience that I will never forget. I sincerely believe that this trip to Tanzania has changed my life completely. I feel happier and eager to travel like this again. My adventure to Tanzania would not have been possible without the support of the Nichols Family, so from the bottom of my heart, thank you so much.





Anthony Munoz '24

Physics and Bassoon Performance
German Minor

This summer, I spent two months in the beautiful city of Peja, Kosovo. For most of my time, I worked with Besim on a jalepeño farm where we grew peppers, fruits, and other vegetables for his family and community. We still chat, and he has been sending me updates about all the crops we were growing. The jalepeños are almost ready for harvest, and I am so excited to see how they turn out. In my spare time, I explored the incredible mountain range and countryside, visited local community centers, and worked with the local government. I am not a stranger to foreign countries and cultures, but this was my first experience with an Eastern European nation and truly becoming ingrained in the people. Not only was I able to pick up some of the language, but I had the privilege of standing beside my new friends and hosts while they showed me their traditions. I will never forget being thrown in the middle of a dance circle surrounded by jubilant Kosovars and having to quickly learn their dance or launching fireworks and grilling hot dogs on the Fourth of July. I feel as though I

received a generous glimpse of people's lives halfway across the globe. We spent many nights speaking about our cultures, comparing them, and learning from each other.

While my plans initially began with a simple farming idea, it developed considerably throughout my time there. A devastating storm came halfway through my trip, and the city was left in disarray and loss. I was able to see how a community united after tragedy and supported one another. My farm helped provide some surrounding villages with much-needed food and supplies while they began rebuilding. The city organized a funeral for those who lost their lives in the storm, and almost the entire town was in attendance. The Kosovars I was with genuinely demonstrated to me their core principles of hospitality, care, and love for their people in a way I had not experienced before. At first, seeing their country was a bit of a culture shock. After hearing and seeing videos of how the country was destroyed during their civil war, I was truly amazed to see

how much they had rebuilt in twenty years – it only further proves their strength, resilience, and tenacity.

I have been so inspired by the people I met in Peja that my future plans have entirely shifted. Before, I planned on simply going to graduate school and pursuing a career in science. However, now, I am currently in the process of applying to go back to Kosovo and teach English as a second language through the Fulbright program. I witnessed the desires and work ethics of my friends abroad, and they all would tell me about their dreams. Some wanted to become doctors, some wanted to move to America, and some wanted to go into politics. In so many of these conversations, I found myself wanting to return and help them achieve their goals in whatever way I could.

I feel so fortunate that the Nichols Humanitarian Fund allowed me to experience everything I could. As a twenty-one-year-old, there are few opportunities to live amongst a foreign people outside of school. If I could go back and do this trip over again, I would only want more time.





Imaad Muwahid '26

Economics and Political Science
Data Science

Undertaking my humanitarian project was a choice grounded in both personal experience and a deep concern over the tragic economic circumstances in my homeland, Sri Lanka. My country faces a major youth unemployment crisis, primarily due to troubling skills mismatches since almost 85% of the youth entering the labor force lack the necessary skills to succeed. This has led to individuals being plunged into poverty with low-paying informal sector jobs. Therefore, I decided to target my intervention to benefit an almost invisible and overlooked youth demographic: orphanages.

Given the resources generously extended by the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I chose to embark upon a mission of youth empowerment this summer and founded my own project, the 'Resilient Futures' initiative. I assisted two different orphanages, the Center for Islamic Studies' Girls Home, and the Methodist Church's Boys Home. I learned about the immense hardships and difficult backgrounds that the children

came from before they entered the orphanage, with some of them not being able to access a single meal per day.

Hence, over a period of 2 months, I created a holistic curriculum that incorporated digital and soft skills and dedicated each weekend to teaching lessons including communication skills, graphic design, setting goals, developing resilience, etc. I emphasized the vast power of the internet to gain knowledge, learn new skills, and access a plethora of opportunities previously unavailable so that the children could empower themselves to live decent lives. I also provided laptops to the Girls Orphanage, addressing their computer shortage, and financially supported two disadvantaged college-level students using the stipend. The stark realization that the children do not have access to resources to improve the quality of their lives and only receive an education focused on rote academic learning reassured me that an upskilling program was necessary.

My project had a profound effect on my perspective and taught me several valuable insights towards implementing a social service initiative from the ground-up. There were several challenges that I did not anticipate having to deal with whilst I was in the planning stage. A poignant example lay in my interactions with the boys at the Boys Home. Upon realizing their limited grasp of English, I swiftly recalibrated my strategy by translating the learning materials, finding volunteers who could speak Sinhala, and using an approach that could still engage the children despite the language barrier. This was an important moment for me as it opened my eyes to the need to adapt to sudden changes within a short period of time.

Simultaneously, my experiences refined my capacity for innovation and creativity. Some children were far more advanced in terms of the knowledge of the skills I taught whilst others had learning difficulties, including one boy who was autistic. Thus, I had to identify different approaches to cater to all the children and create an inclusive educational program. Moreover, as an outsider to their realm, the children were initially unreceptive towards the lessons that I attempted to teach. Therefore, this forced me to think outside the box and experiment with interactive games and activities to engage the children to make the workshops enjoyable and beneficial.

Being able to navigate these challenges has been an incredible journey and inspired me to delve further into the sphere of social action. In the short term, I have ensured that my summer program will continue to promote growth within the children as I have created handouts that summarize each lesson taught, thereby enabling multiple generations of children at the orphanages to learn digital and soft skills. In the long term, I hope for the Resilient

Futures Initiative to be a platform through which I can continue to contribute to my local community and enact positive change. I have collected data on the children's performance levels and knowledge, and I hope to pursue a research project reviewing existing academic literature on similar interventions to empower Sri Lankan youth.

Overall, the Resilient Futures Initiative was designed to emulate Vanderbilt's motto: Dare to Grow. Hence, with every workshop I organized, I strived to share its powerful wisdom so that each child we helped could achieve their greatest dreams and aspirations with a greater capacity to lead fulfilling lives by venturing on a path of continuous learning as they leverage digital technologies for success. Plus, the diverse skillset that I have acquired is not only transferable to my studies at Vanderbilt, but to my career as well. I now approach challenges with a more innovative mindset, view change as a strength rather than a weakness, and possess a more refined ability to plan, organize, and communicate effectively to make a meaningful impact. I am tremendously grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Nichols and the Nichols Humanitarian Fund for granting me the transformative opportunity to make a lasting impact on the world.



Micah Olson '25

Economics, History and Philosophy
Business Minor

The generosity of the Vanderbilt Nichols Humanitarian Fund and the Nichols Family allowed me to experience the trip of a lifetime in the Northern region of France. During my trip in early August, I had the opportunity to join the staff of a bilingual Christian camp put on by a collaborative effort of French and English teachers and professors. This camp focused on bringing together both French and English students for the purpose of sharing each other's cultures, languages, and joining together in a common faith. Students who attended this camp ranged from age 14 to 18, and came from all across the United Kingdom and France. As a bilingual camp, the majority of leaders spoke both French and English, and all camp activities were translated into both languages. It was an incredible experience to witness the coming together of two languages and cultures in a fun, upbeat, and relationally driven camp.

As the only American on the staff team (and one of the few people present who only spoke one of the two languages) my role of service

was primarily logistical support. Alongside four other volunteers (a mix of Parisians and Brits) we took on a massive responsibility of behind the scenes work to keep the camp going. From cooking to cleaning, setting up chairs and tables, washing dishes, clearing plates, and organizing free time games for the kids, we found ourselves constantly challenged to keep up with the next task necessary to keep the camp functioning. While our work was never glamorous, and turned out to be one of the most demanding jobs I have ever had, the impact was tremendous. By serving in this capacity we allowed the students to not only have a smoothly run camp experience, but also gave them a homely sense of being taken care of. This work also gave the other leaders the freedom to take extended and focused time with their students and increase the impact of those relationships. In all, our responsibilities never felt like a burden due to the constant sense of appreciation we received from the other volunteers and campers.



This experience, on a personal level, was unlike any other I have encountered. In the past I have had many opportunities to serve in some of the most impoverished countries in central and South America, and while these experiences were incredibly impactful, I found serving in a similarly modernized but culturally different country from the U.S a new kind of challenge and learning opportunity. Not long into my trip I realized that unlike my past service trips, I could not simply rely on the compassion of lacking material needs around me for inspiration to serve. Rather, I found myself inspired more so by the love of the people around me, in spite of their obvious differences. I found this to be a freeing experience as I was forced to engage on a more personal level of relational service. This gave me the opportunity to gain deep relationships and make new friends from both France and the UK in spite of the limited time I had to converse with them. I was inspired by a love for them, and that made nearly every moment more meaningful regardless of whether we were cleaning floors, cutting bread, or moving tables. This kind of relationally-driven service has left a tremendous impact on me and will continue to allow me to serve those around me at school, in my family, and throughout my life.

I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity this scholarship has given me, and look forward to sharing my experience with those around me. I believe the lessons I learned through this program have been among the most influential during my time at Vanderbilt, and will serve me well moving forward.



Aidan Pittsenbargar '24

Mathematics
Business Minor

Across a 2 week immersion at the beginning of the 2023 summer I had the pleasure of volunteering with Esperanca Barcelona, an organization that in their words “gives food, clothing and a bit of love to the homeless on the streets of Barcelona.” Esperanca Barcelona focuses on preparing, sorting, and delivering food to the local homeless population of Barcelona by organizing city-wide “marches,” which are composed of teams made up of 4-6 volunteers that hand-deliver individual meals to the homeless.

As a smaller organization I was able to assume many different roles and take on a variety of responsibilities that spanned their organization, including but not limited to: meal preparation, meal partitioning, march preparation, march organization, and march execution. At a detailed level, I arranged meals that are considered staples to Spanish cuisine like “bocadillos” and “magdalenas” (Bocadillos are the Spanish version of ‘simple’ sandwiches - baguette bread, various cheeses and vegetables, and tuna - individually wrapped in tinfoil,

and “magdalenas” are Spanish vanilla muffin cakes). Once these meals were prepared and divided into individual portions along with a variety of fruits, chocolate, vegetarian soup, and juice boxes, our team loaded the items into their respective pull carts in preparation for the next march. For each march, I led a team of 4-6 volunteers around a predetermined route through the Gothic quarter of Barcelona - an area known to have a high homeless population as a result of the tourism-induced gentrification. Each march consists of a 2 hour long walk in which meals are directly handed out to the homeless population.

The generous stipend of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund facilitated the incredible learning experience of Esperanca Barcelona. As described by our team, our mission was to “humanize the homeless” - it was never just about handing food and clothing to individuals - we were encouraged to hold conversations with these individuals and account for any situational needs they may have had. This starkly

contrasts my own extensive experience working with similar organizations in the United States where volunteer training often contains safety procedures that encourage one to maintain distance from the homeless. These conversations held with homeless individuals in Barcelona enabled me to truly develop the 'global perspective' I had hoped for as discussed in my original proposal and answer questions like

- How does homelessness compare in Spain?

What might be the root causes for a nation with a significantly high child poverty rate? Most of these individuals that I developed a relationship with over the 2 week period were in fact members of fully functioning families

- parents and children that were not able to afford the local housing under the umbrella of a volatile economy. Before my experience it was easy to assume that characteristics of homelessness are constant across geographies and similar to my own experiences in the United States, yet being able converse with these families first hand and provide items of necessity like cell phones and proper meals revealed the unique circumstances that may force one

to lead a life without shelter. As my initial goal outlined in my proposal was to specifically support the Barcelona youth population it became apparent that many of these youth were members of intact families rather than on their own. This changed my perspective entirely and provided me with the context to understand that homelessness is very close by for many families in Spain.

As a continuation of my project with Esperanca Barcelona I hope to continue my efforts here in the United States by emulating the "humanization" effort with local food banks in the United States. While certainly dangerous and appropriate under specific circumstances, having the opportunity to directly hand out meals and support to those in need while also conversing with them provided the educational opportunity and impact that I was looking for.

Thank you to the Nichols family for your support and generosity!





Jack Polucha '25

Law

I thoroughly enjoyed my experience with the Nichols Humanitarian Fund. To understand my experience, I will explain the work, why I enjoyed it, and some minor grievances about my time doing remote work.

I worked for Chemonics which is a contractor under USAID. They are a Ukrainian nonprofit fighting for reforms in the legal system. I was a legal intern and I had five main projects under them.


I first worked on a memo detailing professional standards around the world. This entailed researching the basic education, knowledge, skills, and values of different legal professionals. The different occupations were advocates, judges, prosecutors, and notaries. I was tasked with researching France, Germany, Nigeria, India, Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the UK, and South Africa. Information available was inconsistent across countries, but at least I put something for each of them. Overall, I really loved the assignment because it allowed me

to research many countries I admired. The assignment was also a wake-up call to strengthen my understanding of comparative law.

The next assignment I worked on was on the American practice contempt of court. In this case, the Ukrainians wanted to study it so they could improve discipline in their own court system. The work here was relatively simple. I poached cases and concepts from secondary sources to assemble the memo, and I cited everything.

Following this, I worked on researching joint ethical standards. To do this work, I scrutinized the codes of conduct and I found common responsibilities among different parties. It was my least developed assignment because other work got in the way.

Later, I assembled a list of EU law schools and professors to provide contacts to further support Ukrainian legal education.



My final assignment was my favorite. I worked on a memo analyzing Mexico legal education, regulation of the legal profession. This was to support the group before they went off for a conference in Mexico. This topic was my favorite because it played to my strengths. Just before the internship I completed classes on human rights and international humanitarian law.

Now I must reflect upon the work beyond my assignments. My bosses Ashot and Artem were fantastic people and I'm very grateful for the experience. My partner Kadi was also fantastic. She worked alongside me on most of these assignments. I would be more than happy to work alongside all of them in the future. Beyond that, I realize I was a relatively small player in this broader scheme. The organization I worked under is doing amazing work which will transform Ukraine's legal system.

I'll share some minor grievances, from my own choices, that are not the fault of the program or my employers, but they did detract from the experience. Since the work was remote, they were in Ukraine, and I was in California. This made communication somewhat difficult. Alongside this, my time with them was colored by loneliness because I was closed off from others through much of the summer. Nonetheless, the experience was still very positive. I hope to work with them in-person and when I am a better lawyer.



Davis Recht '24

Public Policy Studies and Climate Studies
Human and Organizational Development Minor

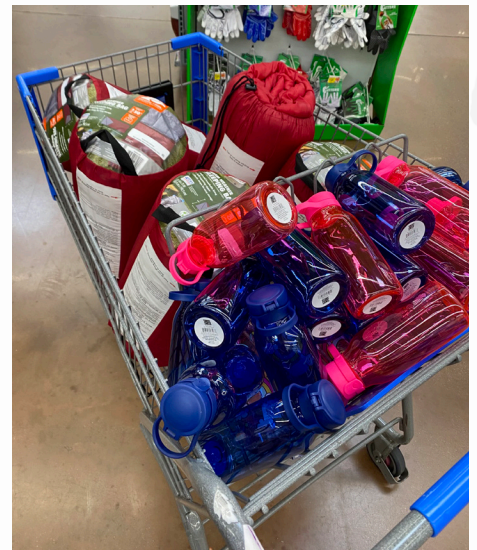
Children that attend summer camp come for a break from everyday life and a chance to enjoy making new friends free from technology. Across the 11 years that I attended and worked on the staff of this camp, I began to notice a common issue. Children would arrive at camp without the necessary supplies, including bedding, multiple outfits, closed-toed shoes, a thick pair of shorts, or swimsuits. The children would become cabin pariahs as they were forced to then sit out of activities or experience many unrestful nights on a bare mattress. The camp has a robust financial aid and scholarship program, so often children of low socioeconomic status experience these circumstances. Project Campfire was created to address this need through a resources center on campgrounds that have provided in two summers over 1,086 items of bedding, clothing, and hygienic products and 541 weekly mail packages for scholarship children to promote inclusion. Operating this organization, I know the needed items are clothes and bedding.

This summer I had the joy of working on a service experience that expanded the bedding, clothing, and toiletry items of Project Campfire. As co-founder and president, I spearheaded the effort with the help of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund. This summer and through this project, the nonprofit would expand its distribution of needed resources to children attending the summer camp and create a new bedding package system. The summer camp is the largest overnight YMCA camp in the United States. Ultimately, the innovative bedding packages will create a system so that more children receive the highly asked-for resource this upcoming summer. This goal was accomplished. I was able to provide over 130 bedding packages for children that requested assistance.

Overall, the closet established by Project Campfire serves the over 5,000 children that annually attend the summer camp. I am also excited to announce that I was able to pay for a camper to attend the summer camp for one week this summer. With an overarching

mission of promoting financial inclusivity, this seemed like a perfect way to leave a lasting impact this summer. This has inspired me to set up a scholarship with this specific goal in mind for summer programming events. The hope would be, in the future, that Project Campfire can fund kids' summer activities for those that need financial assistance.

I want to praise the amazing staff at the summer camp that I partnered with on this project. They were able to help organize and assess the needs of potential campers which was critical to our mission. Without the support of the front office, Project Campfire would not be able to operate. In the future, I hope that Project Campfire can continue its efforts for the thousands of kids that will attend the summer camp. I am just beginning my public service journey and thanks to this amazing opportunity I feel as though I can make a career out of it. Finally, thank you to the Nichols family for this opportunity. Good people are doing good things, and this summer only reaffirmed this belief.





Luke Rickers '25

Psychology and Communication Studies
Business, Data Science, and Spanish Minors

To state it frankly, my summer spent in Peru was the most transformative experience of my life. The beauty of both the town and the culture of Ollantaytambo was absolutely breathtaking. Between the snow-capped mountains protecting the town of Ollanta and the ancient Incan ruins perched on the high cliffsides overlooking the Sacred Valley, I was left utterly astounded by the surrounding scenery of my volunteer site. Every day, not only did I have the opportunity to admire this impressive backdrop, but I also got to know the town on a more personal level. As someone who has been learning Spanish, I had the perfect opportunity to perfect my language by chatting with many members in the community. I visited local street markets, tried Peruvian foods at new restaurants, and even played soccer against the kids from the local school district. As someone who is very passionate about exploring, I am very grateful my volunteer work led me to this beautiful Sacred Valley community.

For my service project, I volunteered for the

organization Awamaki, a nonprofit focused on providing the women of the Andes Mountain community financial independence through textile sales. In order to accomplish this mission, I spent my time in Peru working to identify new domestic and global markets for the sale of the women's products. My day-to-day work entailed me working at the Awamaki storefront, selling products to tourists in the area, while simultaneously crafting a company marketing strategy. To be honest, during my first couple days of volunteering, I struggled to grasp the scope of the work I was doing. However, after settling in and getting my feet on the ground living in a new place, Awamaki challenged me to further delve into the culture and community of Ollanta.

Awamaki recognized that for me to complete my work most effectively, it was critical to understand the culture of the people and the mission of the organization. This discovery process entailed paying regular visits to a plethora of communities spread throughout the Sacred

Valley, some even exceeding elevations of 12,000 feet! In these communities, I talked one-on-one with the women of the weaving collectives. I witnessed firsthand the creation of the traditional textiles I was responsible for selling, and I was even given the opportunity to try to weave a blanket of my own! I cannot say my final product was at all impressive, but this experience seeing the culture on a more personal level was enlightening and aided in refining the scope of my work. While completing my volunteer work on the sales end of the process, I recognize that I could have easily overlooked the significance of the products Awamaki sold and the work done. After this experience, not only did I get a newfound appreciation for the intricacy and skill behind artisanal work, but I now understood the importance of delving deeper into the culture of those you wish to help. I believe I am walking away from this journey with a more focused perspective on volunteering, memories that will last me a lifetime, and an everlasting love of Peruvian culture.





Marius Schueller '25

Computer Science

I worked with the Church of San José de Nazareth in El Vallecito Paraíso in Villa María del Triunfo in Lima, Peru. Villa María del Triunfo is one of the poorest areas in Lima. While there, I played music during the local church's mass, taught a youth choir, taught English to kids, and taught the sport of ultimate frisbee to the youth there. It was an incredible experience filled with lots of learning and rich experiences. Receiving the stipend has allowed me to live among the community and, more specifically, learn about how people and youth live in Villa María.

During my time there, the big topic that kept on coming up was the pandemic. Due to the densely packed and, for the most part, unregulated nature of this part of the city, Villa María was hit very hard by the pandemic. That being said, I learned a lot about how the community came together throughout that difficult time. In particular, I visited many "ollas comunes," which translates to common pots. These are places where mothers work together to provide

cheap food (around 30¢) for the neighborhood. These 'ollas comunes' started during the pandemic, and I saw first the continued perseverance from the workers to provide vital food for the community. They plan to continue providing the food as long as there is a need, despite the financial and logistical constraints that come with these communities being in the hills with limited transportation possibilities.

My main work with the community was through music, ultimate frisbee, and English. With music, I helped with the church's youth choir during a practice. I got to know, taught some music, and sang with the kids there. With ultimate frisbee, I showed the kids how to throw, and after some practice, we played a game. Ultimate frisbee is a sport that both boys and girls can play simultaneously, which worked well with the group and kept everyone engaged and having fun. Ultimately, I gifted all my frisbees to the kids for them to continue playing. With English, I joined in on a catechism class, and we played games to practice

English. Though most schools teach English, their education tends to lack good quality teachers, and they don't get many opportunities to practice it with native speakers, making my time with them a great way to practice and improve their English.

During the trip, one skill that improved was my Spanish, which allowed me to better connect with the people and kids around me. Few adults speak English in the area, so being able to speak Spanish was critical during my project. Throughout my time there, my goals stayed reasonably consistent. The main change in my planning was adding time to meet people in the community, not just through service. This change gave me more time to learn about people's lives and perseverance and get to

know the community.

If I could do this project over again, I would increase the duration of my stay in the community and work to organize events ahead of time. Much of my schedule was finalized when I arrived because of unexpected travel issues. Doing that would have allowed me to make a more significant impact. Overall, I'm very thankful for the opportunity to travel to Peru and undertake in service.





Yunah Song '24

Cognitive Studies and Child Development

The Nichols Humanitarian Fund allowed me to dive deeper into my service experience with GiGi's Playhouse, a Nashville organization that is near to my heart. GiGi's Playhouse is a nation-wide nonprofit that serves as a Down Syndrome Achievement Center. Their aim is to provide free educational, therapeutic-based, and career development programs for individuals with Down syndrome, their families, and the community through a fun and engaging playhouse model.

My involvement with GiGi's Playhouse began a year ago when I joined as a math tutor and program volunteer. During this past year, I identified a notable limitation within the tutoring program – the lack of access to electronic resources. While the national GiGi's organization utilizes various digital tutoring tools, the Nashville location remained unable to tap into these resources due to the absence of electronic devices. With the support of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I provided tablets and additional tutoring materials, such as age-appropriate

books, to further elevate the tutoring program for all of the students served by GiGi's.

During this summer volunteering at GiGi's Playhouse, I had the pleasure of working with the same student for math tutoring. Through this experience, I was reminded again of the remarkable work GiGi's accomplishes within the Nashville community. Some of my fondest memories stem from lively races with my student to sort all of the colored bears, followed by counting those bears as we became closer and closer to our goal of counting to 100. Moreover, the tablet transformed my tutoring experience. My student previously disliked the time we spent practicing writing numbers, but the range of interactive writing options the tablet offered led to greater engagement and significant improvement in my student's writing abilities.

Because of the tablet, tutors gained access to previously inaccessible online resources. However, the tablet was not limited to solely

educational purposes. Not only did I use the tablet to practice writing and accessing educational websites, but I also used it to play my student's favorite songs during our dance breaks. Thus, the iPad supplemented the tutoring program in unexpected ways that made the learning experience exciting and enjoyable for the students participating in the tutoring program.

Through the generous support of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, I had the privilege of engaging with GiGi's at a meaningful level beyond my prior role as a weekly volunteer. The funds not only allowed me to dedicate my time as a volunteer during the summer but also enabled me to provide valuable resources that will remain beyond my time at GiGi's Playhouse.

Looking ahead, I am enthusiastic about exploring avenues to further my involvement with GiGi's. For the remainder of my time at Vanderbilt, I plan to continue volunteering as a math tutor and also take on the responsibility of co-leading the TeenTastic program. I extend my sincere gratitude to Janice and Ed Nichols for their service heart and willingness to support Vanderbilt students' passion for service. This experience is one that confirmed my love for working with children and opened my eyes to the incredible ways organizations are striving to advocate for and support their local communities.





Matthew Stein III '24

Neuroscience

Ever since I was a child, I have been able to spend the majority of my summers in Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua, Mexico. It holds a special place in my heart because of all my friends and family that live there. I practically grew up there in addition to the U.S. When I was younger, I had previously volunteered at the Cruz Roja Mexicana, filing paperwork. I always dreamt of being able to go on the ambulances with lights and sirens. These past two summers, I have been able to do just that. During this past summer, the Nichols Humanitarian Award led me to serve as a Técnico Médico de Emergencias for the Cruz Roja. Through this experience, I have treated patients ranging from motorcycle accidents, and construction electrocutions.

This stipend enabled me to go to Mexico for the second summer in a row to volunteer for the Cruz Roja Mexicana. This project contributed to my global perspective because I was able to enrich myself in a familiar but different culture to the U.S. I feel like my perspective on life has

changed after seeing many horrible accidents where many could have been prevented. In addition, I have developed a passion for learning about how to make hospitals more effective in my community in Mexico because I have seen too many instances where patients suffer unnecessarily due to a lack of infrastructure and resources.

One aspect I have realized from this experience is that all of the people who work and volunteer for the Cruz Roja are one big family. During my time there, we were all learning together how to carefully tend to patients the proper way, and there were instances where some of us had to take a step back and learn through observation. When we go with the lights and sirens to a 911 call, we have no idea what we are going to encounter. This has taught me to keep an open mind, and to not make any assumptions when learning about patient details.

After spending a significant amount of time

in the back of Cruz Roja ambulances, my own goals in life have taken a turn. I have developed a passion for emergency medicine, and I now desire to become a trauma surgeon. As a medical doctor, I hope to help patients treat them for similar emergencies that I have already experienced this summer. As a medical professional, I hope to contribute to the international relief process for other countries too. I know that one person will not change much in the healthcare profession in the international community, but a collective effort will hopefully start to make it better for everyone.

During my gap year next year, I will be going back to Mexico to volunteer for the Cruz Roja again for a longer period. It will be a continuation of what I have done these past two sum-

mers. If I could plan my project again, I would extend the amount of time spent in Mexico. When I traveled back to the U.S, I realized that 3 weeks was not as long as I thought it would be originally. While I did learn a lot through this brief time, an extra three more weeks would have given me more time to employ what I learned.

This summer was an amazing experience, and I am forever grateful for the opportunity to serve a community that has given so much to me over the course of my lifetime. I want to thank Vanderbilt University, the Cruz Roja Mexicana, and especially the Nichol's family for supporting this project.





Julia Tilton '24

Earth & Environmental Science and Spanish
Communication of Science and Technology Minor

There is a faded Mexican flag stuck into a cactus pot on the windowsill. The window is open, allowing a gentle breeze to flow through, one which hints at a rain that will arrive in an hour or two. The window's mosquito netting is frayed from the determined passages of many rescued dogs who stubbornly refuse the idea of a doorway. On the wall hanging next to the window is a chalkboard fashioned from what was once the wooden door of a cupboard, in a past life. A declaration in green chalk proclaims, "No cometas el error de no hacer nada solo porque no puedes hacer todo."

Do not make the mistake of doing nothing only because you cannot do everything.

This summer, I worked with Ninth Wave Global in Campeche, Mexico, where I practiced a zero-waste lifestyle to fulfill this chalk-scrawled promise of making choices that align with my values of environmentalism. In name, my Nicholls Fund project centered around storytelling and ethical environmental journalism, but in

reality, it involved so much more than that. By immersing myself in numerous green initiatives present in the community where I lived in the Yucatán Peninsula, I drew upon my experiences to inform my writing. Upon starting my project, I understood that ethical journalism involves building relationships and earning trust – a process that rarely happens on a strict deadline. Still, when I arrived in Mexico eager to put my pen to paper, I had to reckon with the pressures I had imposed upon myself to produce content quickly at the expense of telling stories authentically.

Over the next few weeks, I poured my energy into my surroundings, adjusting to life on the zero-waste farm where I resided. The property consists of a polyculture growing space and animal refuge home to dogs, pigs, chickens, goats, and horses. I built two plant beds and seeded crops such as corn, tomato, and cucumber, and looked after a malnourished puppy that had been rescued from the streets. In the growing space, I learned about the milpa, an ancestral

Mayan practice used for planting maize and other crops. As the weeks passed in Campeche, it was rewarding to witness the fruits of my labor as the corn grew from seedlings to stalks measuring three feet in height. Partnering with one of Ninth Wave's participating Green Businesses, we later harvested basil to bring to the kitchen of a local restaurant, contributing to their "farm-to-table" menu and promoting sustainability within food service. We also worked with waste, making daily trips into town to load up industrial-sized buckets of food scraps from three local restaurants into the back of Ninth Wave's Jeep. After our rounds, we would return to the farm, where the "organics" would be used as feed for the animals: banana peels and carrots for the horses and limes and onions for the goats.

The most impactful part of my experience in Campeche occurred each Saturday at the weekly Mercado Verde, or Green Market. Situated in a central square, the market brings together dozens of local artisans each week. Open to the community, Mercado Verde promotes environmentalism as a lifestyle, hosting workshops and language classes and featuring local dance troupes, Mayan activists, teachers, and music groups. It was working at these market days where I familiarized myself with Campeche's community and built relationships with locals. Campeche is a home of contemporary Mayan culture, and much of the region's growing tourism industry centers around Mayan history and archeological site visits. As the city navigates increasing numbers of tourists, cultural loss and exploitation loom as locals fear their Mayan heritage may become commoditized. In weekly conversations at the market, I learned from artisans and teachers who shared their experiences with me. These conversations ultimately shaped one of the stories I wrote this summer, which profiles Margarita, a Mayan

language teacher who offers classes as a way to reconnect herself and her young sons with their heritage. The article explores these types of lessons as a recent iteration of Indigenous resistance against cultural exploitation.

As I reflect on my time in Campeche, I return to the chalkboard sign: Do not make the mistake of doing nothing only because you cannot do everything. My project certainly did not do everything when it comes to remedying the socio-environmental problems the Yucatán faces. Yet I feel proud of the work I accomplished, of the stories I told. My final pieces fulfilled my goal of practicing ethical reporting, each remaining true to the particular story's nuance. My actions, too, aligned with my beliefs: following a zero-waste lifestyle, I produced just one-cubic foot of non-reusable waste that went to landfill during my time in Campeche. I like to think these actions embody the chalkboard sign's message. I like to think they are, at least, a start.





Aryana Valedon '24

Spanish and Medicine, Health, & Society

I am incredibly grateful to the Nichols family for their generosity, which allowed me to have such a life-changing experience this summer. With the stipend, I was able to spend three weeks in Honduras working as a volunteer with One World Surgery. This non-profit owns and operates a surgery center located on the Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos Ranch, a children's home, and aims to provide free surgical and primary care to the local community. Not only do they arrange medical volunteer missions from around the world, but they also supply hundreds of jobs and unique fellowship programs to Hondurans.

During my time on-site, I served many roles. I helped coordinate general volunteer shifts, scribe for physicians in the clinic, turn over operating rooms, translate between patients and volunteers, initiate an inventory project, and much more. Over the three weeks, we provided care from multiple specialties, including orthopedics, urology, ophthalmology, general surgery, and more. In my free time, I was allowed

the opportunity to shadow and even scrub into surgery. As a pre-med student, this was an incredible opportunity, and thanks to the kind surgeons, anesthesiologists, and CRNAs, I learned so much. This trip even further confirmed my passion for medicine and serving underprivileged communities.

While getting to see surgeries and talk with all sorts of medical professionals was amazing, the best part of the experience was interacting with the patients. Never in my life have I met more grateful and enduring people than those we served at the surgery center. These patients had been turned away and failed by the health-care system time and time again but refused to give up. I never heard them complain about post-surgery pain; the only things out of their mouths were, "Thank you" and "Gracias a Dios". One of the doctors even told me a story about a patient who was prescribed painkillers to take home with him. When he returned a few days later for his post-op appointment, he brought a small baggy of the leftover pills

he had not used so they would not fall into the wrong hands. A story we would never hear in the United States. Another moment that changed my life forever was witnessing a 70-something-year-old patient regain her ability to walk and stand on her own for the first time in years. Earlier that day, I watched as her daughter helped her through the door as she dragged her right leg behind her painfully. Only about 6 hours later, he was upright, smiling, and using her walker to take her first normal steps in years. With only a nurse behind her for safety, her daughter could watch from afar, smiling, clapping, and cheering her mother on as they both regained their independence. I was overcome with emotion and reminded of just how important our work was. Not only were we impacting individual pa-

tients' lives but also those of entire families.

I am excited to say that I will be continuing my work from this summer in a different way this coming year. I am writing an MHS honors thesis exploring the impacts of private and non-profit healthcare groups on the Honduran economy and community. My summer experience has opened my eyes to this highly complex question, and I look forward to putting what I learned into something meaningful. I hope to return to Honduras and the surgery center soon, but again, I am incredibly grateful for the opportunities I have been given already.





Soumia Vellanki '25

Human and Organizational Development, and Sociology
Business and Data Science Minors

Across my time this summer, I have the immense blessing of learning from an all-woman staff of community oriented WEVies. This experience has shown me the barriers facing small business owners in California, and particularly, the need for culturally relevant content to train, fund, and empower Hispanic entrepreneurs in Santa Barbara and Ventura County. Although I had originally approached WEV through my interest in women's micro-finance, I soon found myself diving into the nuances of how a CDFI and Women's Business Center like WEV serves more than the lending needs of small business owners. From these conversations, 8 weeks of research and robust deliverables, I am happy to note that my Credit Building Program development has been effective as outlined in my proposal. At the same time, I have received feedback that my turn-over guidelines are easy to follow, allowing for the smooth implementation of my recommendations at the project prepares to launch next year. I feel proud to have pushed extra hard this last week to make sure all of the infrastructure

for the next phase of WEV's Credit Building Program is prepared. At the same time, I enjoyed every last second of time in Santa Barbara, a city I have grown to adore and represents immense personal growth. My final day with WEV was emotional, as I presented my final recommendations, said my goodbyes, and drove around with Genelise until I caught my train away from this beautiful place and the kindest co-workers I have ever had.

As I reflect on my time with WEV, there are many takeaways, some of which are summarized in this SWOT:

Strengths: I am proud of the deliverables I have turned over to WEV. I believe my assessment of existing credit building resources, legislation, and the needs of the WEV community will accelerate WEV's program development phase. I identified partners such as the Credit Builder's Alliance (CBA) whose robust training materials will give WEV a baseline to develop their curriculum from. In my last week, I also

created “Learning Minutes” to be released on WEV socials for credit-related microlearning content (e.g. “5 Credit Myths Debunked”; “Your Credit Pie: Factors Impacting Your Credit”; “5 Strategies to Improve Your Credit”).

Weaknesses: Near the midpoint of my project, I started to realize my original project scope may have been slightly too ambitious. I had anticipated that 8 weeks of dedicated work on research and development would produce a “ready-to-go” Credit Building Program. However, after digging through the program development documentation from WEV’s files, it became clear that to be intentional with this process, I would most likely only be able to finish the research phase of the program. Decision-making that is required to “storyboard” the program using my research will require cross-team coordination and I was often working in a silo.

Opportunities: WEV will be able to offer expertise in culturally relevant content, bilingual instruction, and DEI informed money mindset principles. Adding an understanding of cultural elements, such as familismo, will elevate WEV as a provider of accessible credit education to the Hispanic community members it serves.

Threats: Limited WEV staff capacity to institute 1on1 credit counseling may lead to WEV relying on referrals to other agencies. Quality control of credit advice can be difficult if not conducted in house. It will be important for WEV to empower students with the tools to recognize predatory lending or fraudulent credit scams.

In the future, I look forward to staying connected with WEV to evaluate the progress on this project as well as check-in with staff members who I know will be excellent mentors

in the space. Most immediately, I have set up bi-weekly check-ins with Genelise who is in charge of facilitating the next phase of program development. I have left preliminary guidance on KPIs and pre-/post- program evaluation tactics to assess the project’s success. I look forward to reconnecting with Keri, WEV’s Impact Officer, in 2024 to learn how WEV’s credit program has improved credit education access and thereby capital access for women in California. I am incredibly grateful to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund and the Ingram Scholars Program for giving me the platform to identify this project with Women’s Economic Ventures and finding mission-alignment with the ideals of financial inclusion. It is bittersweet to leave WEV, my supervisors and friends, but I am confident in the well-designed service delivery model WEV employs. As I reflect on the deliverables I leave WEV with, I feel pride, but it can also feel insignificant knowing that WEV has already curated upwards of 10 business training programs for small business needs. I have learned that program development is an immense task, especially doing so in an intentional, structured, and well-documented way. I feel inspired by the work of CDFIs – the gritty, people-first, and non-linear process of changing a culture of mistrust in banking institutions amongst marginalized identities. Reading books about impact investing and microfinance often paints a rosy picture of moving capital to the causes you care about. In some ways, it feels as though the elite use these terms to avoid grassroots exposure – “throwing money at the problem.” So as much as this project reaffirmed my interest in financial inclusion, it also taught me which roles and what type of work I would like to dedicate my time towards.

On a personal growth level, I am fortunate to walk away from this experience with improved self-confidence, independence, and

emotional regulation. I attribute these learnings to solo practices such as journaling, yoga, morning and afternoon walks to work, deleting social media, and physical distance from the hustle and bustle of both campus and major cities. I hope that I can hold onto this ideal of focus and clarity as I return to a faster paced reality in the fall. In the meantime, I will continue to express gratitude for the chance to have learned and reconnect with my service motivations.





Carson Viggiano '25

International Political Conflict and Spanish and Portuguese


Initially, I had been accepted to work with the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) as a Spanish and Portuguese translator—a job that revolved around interpretation and linguistics. I was thrilled to be able to integrate my two fields of study, language and political science, which are all too often disconnected. This position only held for the first three weeks of the summer. The lab's head statistician soon reassigned me to work in data processing and statistical analysis. I was neither prepared for nor particularly excited about my new responsibilities. Staring back at me from my computer screen were thousands of lines of code, data embedded in each of them, all of it which was mine to clean and model. The numbers didn't care about the displeasure I felt for my tasks. They simply demanded that I process them.

In large part, my time with LAPOP was a learning curve. My assignments, so different from what I had first expected, required me to embrace a new type of thinking. Or, at the very least, a type of problem solving that felt en-

tirely alien to me. Logistic regression models seemed so far removed from the things I knew, pragmatics and phonology and all the tangled branches of linguistics. I found my inexperience to be isolating. Being in an office where only two people worked in person compounded the feeling. But this isolation was temporary as I found connection in two ways.

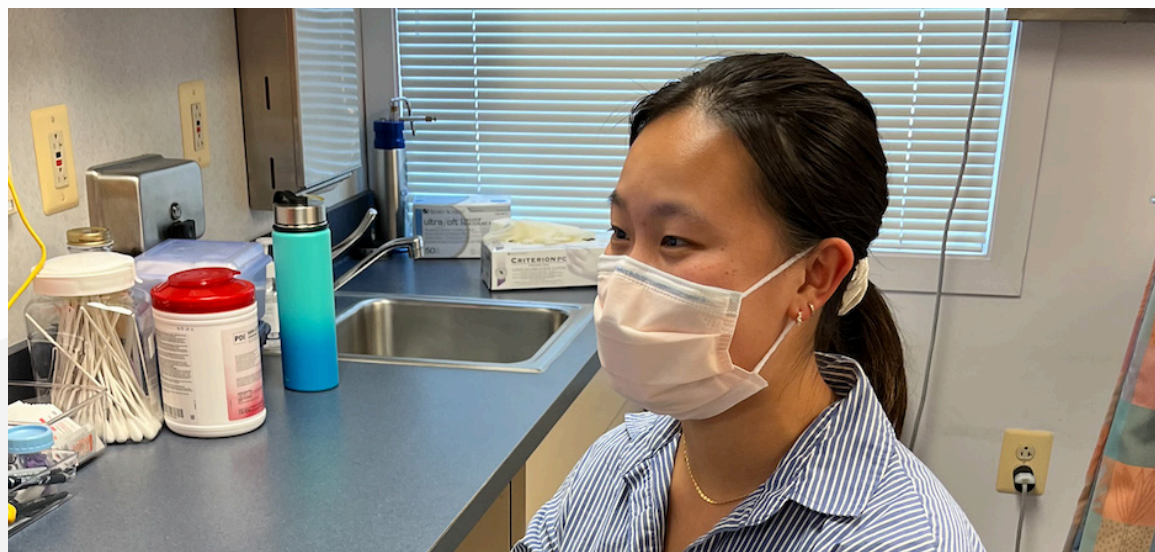
The first: my work was, in fact, exactly what I knew and loved: language. I came to realize that my conception of 'language' was too restrictive. It is a type of communication, but more fundamentally it is a system of basic interaction between parties. By this definition, the binary data I was working with was its own kind of language. So were the various softwares I used to process it. My discomfort with my work, which was rooted in its unfamiliarity, dissolved a little when I accepted this interpretation of language.

The second: the data I was processing, which I perceived as technical and impersonal, was



given meaning by humans. A silly realization, I know. Long hours working alone on a computer made me mistake the project's distance for isolation. LAPOP, on its most basic level, is enabled by an entire network of people spread across the world. Two continents, two hemispheres, more than 25 countries—this project, if nothing else, is a collaborative effort. Of course my work seemed detached from the broader project; my computer, which housed all of my data and work, only showed me my own reflection. But this data, it had been recorded by one person, entered by another, cleaned by someone else, organized and coded by yet another person, all before it reached me. Afterwards, it would go to various analysts and authors. Eventually, it will make its way into the hands of administrators at USAID and other nonprofits. LAPOP is the sum of individual action. In no way was I nor my work isolated, but in actuality was enabled by and enabling dozens of other people.

Each day with LAPOP was challenging and introspective, and I am thankful for what I took away from the experience. I am also overwhelmingly grateful for the philanthropy of Mr. and Mrs. Nichols, without whom I would not have had this opportunity. Thank you, Ed and Janice, for your generosity and genuine interest in my work. I appreciate everything you have given me immensely.



Lillian Zheng '24

Psychology and Medicine, Health, & Society

This past summer, I had the privilege of volunteering at MercyHealth Clinic, a free healthcare center dedicated to serving underserved populations in the greater Washington D.C. area. Through my role as a patient scribe, I had the unique opportunity to observe and actively engage in addressing health concerns impacting these communities. I was able to integrate this role as I carried out my Nichols project as well. I hope to share this experience and reflect on my personal growth and the impact of this project in the community.

My role allowed me to witness the intimate interactions between patients and healthcare professionals. I had the privilege of being a part of a team of dedicated volunteer physicians, nurses, and other staff that genuinely cared for the well-being of each patient, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Without non-profit clinics such as MercyHealth, many patients would have limited access to healthcare. Additionally, the clinic's proximity to Washington D.C. made it accessible to those it aimed to

serve. Their mission overall resonated deeply with me, as bridging gaps in healthcare accessibility and equity is a cause I am passionate about. Receiving the Nichols Humanitarian Fund stipend to support my volunteer efforts this summer highlighted the importance of financial support for non-profit, community-based organizations, like MercyHealth Clinic. This stipend not only allowed me to fully immerse myself in the work, but also emphasized the value of external contributions in sustaining such initiatives. I was able to donate all of the fund as well as additional resources directly to the clinic which pledged that the amount would go into the care of 40 patients for an entire year along with any medication they needed.

My perspective underwent significant changes during my time volunteering at the clinic. I learned about many of the challenges that underserved communities face when trying to access healthcare; witnessing patients waiting for weeks to receive urgent medical care was

a stark reminder of the healthcare disparities that persist in our society. I heard patients' stories of overcoming adversity and learned from their hope for better health. Their experiences humanized the statistics and fueled my commitment to advocacy and action. Quality healthcare accessibility is a global issue and my experience at MercyHealth Clinic has made me more resourceful and determined to address these disparities.

My experience at the clinic broadened my skillset and helped me refine my original goals. I honed my communication skills, developed a deeper understanding of healthcare systems, and gained practical experience in medical documentation. More importantly, my sense of purpose became clearer. I want to use my career and future position within the medical field to improve healthcare accessibility. As such, I am determined to continue the work I began this summer at MercyHealth. I plan to maintain my role as a patient scribe and actively participate in the continuous initiatives

aimed at expanding specialty care services and improving diagnostic imaging efficiency; I intend to fundraise and seek partnerships to secure ongoing financial support for the clinic. Empowering the community to sustain this work is essential, and I will actively engage with local organizations to assist in supporting the clinic long-term.

If I could plan my project again, I would keep the core focus on improving healthcare accessibility and equity. However, I would seek to expand the reach of our initiatives by collaborating with other local healthcare providers and organizations. This broader network could facilitate relationships and connections that can redirect specialty care and diagnostic imaging for underserved individuals. Additionally, I would emphasize community education on preventive healthcare measures to reduce the demand for urgent care services.





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