Introduction

During their junior year of 2013-2014, the Servant Scholars of the 2015 cohort served at several organizations throughout LaGrange, including the Chattahoochee River Keepers, the Enoch Callaway Cancer Clinic, DASH of LaGrange, Broad Street Church of Christ, LaGrange First United Methodist, and the Salvation Army. While serving in these various places throughout the town, they personally gained experience within LaGrange’s social and economic inequalities that The Huffington Post refers to when it lists Troup County as number nine of the twenty worst counties of class inequality between the rich and the poor in America (Cohn). Moreover, through their involvement with Our Daily Bread soup kitchen, the local Boys and Girls Club, the Hillside Scavenger Hunts, and LaGrange Memorial Library’s Primetime, the Scholars realized that as a cohort they all shared the same passion to specifically serve families and to mentor children. Taking these pivotal observations into account, they wanted to help strengthen the existing community of LaGrange, and conversations with the residents of Hillside opened up opportunities to work in the neighborhood, especially with the kids. Thus, the Scholars decided to work to strengthen the Hillside community through community development as their senior project.

In From Brokenness to Community Jean Vanier states that “Community means caring: caring for people” (35). This became the goal behind the Scholar’s efforts in the senior project, focusing on strengthening the Hillside community through building genuine relationships with the residents. When asked to elaborate on their motivation for serving, many of the Scholars responded with a mission statement that expressed their Christian faith as a driving force for caring for people. Vanier elaborates: “As followers of Jesus, we are called to look at Jesus and see how he lived and moved among people. First of all he called people into a deep relationship of communion with himself [....] Jesus calls those who accept this communion with him into community [...]” (29)

When deciding on a name for their senior project, Scholar Leah Foster suggested “The Koinonia Project”. She felt the meaning behind the word “Koi-
“Koinonia” best captured the essence of their mission to serve in the Hillside community. Koinonia translates from Greek to mean “community” or “fellowship”, and in Biblical writings is often used to describe the body of Christ and the relationship that we should have with our Savior. Koinonia describes an extraordinarily deep bond, and the goal of the Servant Scholars this year was to create this type of deep fellowship in the Hillside community for *The Koinonia Project*.

**Dignity Serves**

As a precursor to their service in the Hillside community, the 2015 cohort gathered over the course of two days for a collective nine hours with Ben Wheeler (Community Developer for DASH for LaGrange) to study Phil Hissom’s *Dignity Serves*. Ben Wheeler’s insight and teachings were significant because DASH was crucial in the development of the Hillside community. DASH of LaGrange is an organization that focuses on providing dependable, affordable, sustainable housing for the people in the once thriving mill villages of LaGrange, Georgia. Ricky Wolfe founded DASH in 2002 after moving back to LaGrange. Upon his return, Wolfe was riding through the Dunson mill village, where he was raised, and was dismayed by how it had fallen into disrepair. He wanted to see the mill villages become thriving communities again. In an interview, Wolfe discussed the joys of living in a mill village as a child: “As kids we would wander in the street. It didn’t matter where you were at lunch time [because] someone would feed you. And really the only rule was you had to be home before dark.” Wolfe then bought the property of what was once a church for the headquarters of DASH, which has grown into a fully functioning nonprofit organization that has made a great impact upon the Hillside neighborhood through the restoration and building of dependable, affordable, sustainable houses. Ben Wheeler now leads Community Development in DASH and lives in the neighborhood himself, interacting daily with the DASH residents.

During the Dignity Serves workshop, Ben Wheeler led the Scholars through six lessons inspired by verses from Philippians. Through various interactive activities involving colorful sticky notes, writing on the walls, videos, a case study adapted from real-life issues, and reflective discussions, their perspective of service was broadened and they learned how to become servant leaders that appropriately uphold the dignity of those being served by them. They discussed Jesus of Nazareth’s example of dignity, and that one’s desire to serve should stem from not only their spiritual beliefs, but also through the universal calling to have relationships with others. Ben illustrated throughout the workshop that one’s relationship with God crosses over into their relationships with others, as we all bear the same image and are loved regardless of what we have done, connecting us all through a shared sense of dignity. Dignified interdependence can be summed up in a three-circle Venn diagram that shows “God,” “self,” and “others” overlapping to depict those interconnected relationships with an emphasis on reciprocity. As important as it is to serve others, it is equally important that we allow those we serve to return the service with their
gifts as well. As Vanier points out, “In community we are called to love people just as they are with their wounds and their gifts, not as we would want them to be. Community means giving them space, helping them to grow. It means also receiving from them so that we too can grow” (35).

Service should be a long-term effort that requires personal commitments to build trust between others, knowing that people and their growth are more important than change. Dignity Serves prepared the Scholars well for the year ahead, which called for listening to and responding to the needs of the residents by asking questions first before acting on any given proposal. This meant changing their plans many times, but listening to and responding to the wants, concerns, and needs of the neighbors took priority over any pre-conceived plans that the Scholars already had for the Hillside neighborhood. Active listening and open conversations with the neighbors over time gave the cohort a better understanding of the true nature of Koinonia, and the Dignity Serves workshop gave the Scholars proper preparation for enacting servant leadership through its most important aspect: listening.

**Immersion into Hillside**

Community development can be defined as the cultivated empowerment of the individual members of a community. It takes great patience and effort for the developer; focusing on the wants and needs of the community discovered through the building of relationships and providing opportunities for individual growth. Community development is rooted in the importance of listening to the members of the community in order to discover their hopes and fears for the future of the community in which they live, in order to provide the members with opportunities to achieve their needs.

The Scholars were confronted with this reality regarding their playground idea. After several discussions with residents about the possibility of building a playground, they discovered that this was not a real need. Parents informed the Scholars that the neighborhood had already been through two or three playgrounds. With each playground that was built, vandals would take over, causing the koinonia of the neighborhood to dwindle. Though the plans had to change, this change symbolized immersion and was a truly positive change: “It’s not about us, but rather them...” the Scholars were learning to let the Hillside community decide for themselves. Vanier writes in *From Brokenness to Community*, “The next source of conflict is in learning to give space to others so that they may grow rather than competing with them and lording over them” (31). Koinonia is about all of us working together to create a better environment, with the Hillside residents taking the lead, and they decided that ultimately they would like more trees in their community.

**Movie Night**

We have all either seen or heard rumors of the influence media has over youth; well-developed theories delineate when and why exposure to
media's dogma of self-loathing, violence, and acceptance of indecent behavior intensifies into children practicing these attitudes. However, if we accept these proposals as true, then should we not also believe that media promoting friendship, family, community, and perseverance to achieve one's dreams also stimulate similar symmetric behavior? This question motivated the Scholars to establish a family movie night within the Hillside neighborhood. The first movie was Jump In!, released in 2007 by Disney. The movie promotes family, friendship, and following your own dreams rather than what loved ones or society thinks is best for you, a theme most fitting for koinonia.

Literature Review

The importance of knowledge and understanding of community development was an essential part of the project. Entering into a new community must be done in a very specific way, and to obtain a better grasp on community each Scholar read a different book concerning the importance of community. The books ranged in topic from focusing on the psychological effects of helping a community to varying philosophies of neighborhoods and the mechanics of community development and planning. When in need of motivation or explanation, these books better explained how to immerse oneself into a community and become a part of its diversity. The selected readings broadened the cohort’s ways of thinking regarding the purpose of helping others and offered suggestions for implementing particular skill sets in order to serve more adequately. As well as individual readings, each student read From Brokenness to Community by Jean Vanier which offered a first-hand account of an attempt to create a community in a struggling neighborhood, analyzing the connection between the university of the learned and the university of the poor.

Concerning this connection, Robert D. Lupton writes in his book Toxic Charity: “For disadvantaged people to flourish into their full God-given potential, they must leave behind dependencies that impede their growth. Initiatives that thwart their development, though rightly motivated, must be restructured to reinforce self-sufficiency if they are to become agents of lasting and positive change” (102). Becoming a part of a community, if done properly, is a slow and meticulous process. With the help of quotes, insights and information from authors such as Robert Lupton and Jean Vanier, we (the Scholars) were able to persevere through the difficulties of the project.

One vital component of building a sense of community is helping others help themselves. As previously noted, Lupton instructs readers in Toxic Charity how to serve appropriately. He presents an interesting view on how serving people incorrectly actually does more harm than good, and offers correct ways to serve communities that will lead to real-world, long-lasting change. Similarly, John Perkins, a past member of the Peace Corps, describes in his book With Justice for All: A Strategy for Community Development that giving money is not enough to end poverty or sustain an organization. We must devote ourselves to the people and the mission of whatever group to which
we are donating. We must work as a community to help provide the skills to overcome barriers and begin the journey out of poverty. A more lighthearted, but highly inspirational, read was that of David Rubel; If I Had a Hammer, a step-by-step walk through of the foundations and mechanisms of Habitat for Humanity written as a children's book. He offers the privileged a way to reach out, help others, and experience a sense of love and camaraderie that can only be felt through service. Tom Gerdy states it best: “We're all just supposed to join hands and do what’s needed.” Toxic Charity implies that service shouldn’t be something thrust undesirably upon people. Henri Nouwen takes this idea and writes his book Peacework: Prayer, Resistance, Community to inspire leaders of peace in society. His message is that peace is God’s grace but is also the duty of both Christians and all of humanity. While teaching how to achieve peace through the principles of prayer, resistance, and community, he establishes the importance of breaking down barriers and of peace-making.

Paul Loeb wrote The Impossible Will Take a Little While as a collection of essays from Desmond Tutu, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, and many others expressing what it takes to change the world’s problems. The common themes are holding onto hope through the bleakest of times, loving people even if they have opposing views, and doing the small actions that at times feel useless but realizing that together small actions create changes in the world in ways that no one can predict. Similarly, in The Abundant Community, McKnight’s writings illustrate the importance of community by showing how individuals working together can better achieve mutual goals and aspirations. He provides an explanation of how a neighborhood of people with gifts and talents must work together to reach their potential, in order to provide prosperity and peace of mind for the community as a whole. However, no one person contains each gift or talent that resides within a community. Every individual holds within themselves a unique perspective and set of values. Michael Ignatieff’s The Needs of Strangers discusses how, as humans, there are different needs for each person and their situation. To understand the needs of others, one must place his or herself in the other person’s situation. Although everyone is a part of one large system while still retaining a form of uniqueness, life is self-organizing. In A Simpler Way, Margaret Wheatley and Myron Rogers explore ideas and perceptions about life itself and how all things are interconnected, how selves are formed, and how everything thrives through growth and experimentation. The authors believe that creativity and self-transcendence are essential for the growth and continuation of our world, and the writings provide a philosophic approach to community, what it truly means, and what is at the heart of interdependence and all relationships in life.

Clearly, a community is a complex being and as we, the Scholars, decided to dive head first into the Hillside community we needed some foundation of technical writings and opinions from professionals. Most of the books mentioned above write to inspire its readers to do something; they describe fallible ways to serve but fail to list ways that we can immerse ourselves into a
community. One substantial resource was *Community: The Structure of Belonging* by Peter Block. This text amalgamates role models and resources in the circle of servant leadership. Block advises on building social fabric, accountability, and transforming the isolation in our community into unity and caring for the community as a whole. He pulls from the practices and beliefs of well-known citizens bringing their gifts to creating a sense of belonging, including but not limited to Werner Erhard, Ken Murphy, and Carl Rogers. Robert Putnam also discusses in his book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, that Americans have become increasingly more disconnected with one another. Organizations such as the PTA, churches, and political groups have diminished greatly. The damage from the loss of these connections is greatly impacting our society and this book explores how to repair them. Also, concerning the educational system, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* infuses Robert Greenleaf’s concept of servant leadership with exploring the plight of battling oppression through the use of education. Freire calls for a reform in the traditional student-teacher status quo in oppressed areas, claiming that it only enables the problem. He suggests, instead, a new type of “problem-posing” education directed to help those who are oppressed to learn to think critically. He argues that change must be introduced by the oppressed, and the oppressed must leave their comfort zones to create a new type of system all together in order to prohibit the society from falling back into the circular pattern of oppressive behavior. With such emphasis over education, we knew that would be vital partition of people in the Hillside community with whom we needed to work. However, that left a majority of the population there out of our service work and we needed to cover the entire community with our fingerprints. Vanier’s *Community and Growth* analyzes the breakdown of modern society and how community helps individuals find their true gifts and live in fulfillment. Vanier sees people being called into community life in order to share God’s love, grow individually in their faith, and help others do the same. Varying life experiences, gifts, assets, ages, and ethnicity are a small constellation of factors that coalesce to make a community a home.

**Scavenger Hunt**

Community development focuses on the needs of a community; serving with neighbors rather than doing all for them. An important component of the Koinonia project has been the weekly Scavenger Hunt on Thursdays in the neighborhood. Each week three or four Servant Scholars led the children and youth of Hillside in a time of discovery, exploration, fun activities and learning. Many people often think of a Scavenger Hunt as being given a list of objects or tasks to complete in an allotted time frame, but the Hillside Scavenger Hunts are more about giving the children and youth an opportunity to explore the neighborhood in which they live as well as the interests they have. The activities each week come from the interests of the children and youth.

During the first semester of this year, the Scavenger Hunts focused
on the use of cameras to help the kids find beautiful things in the neighborhood. Ben Wheeler helped find rolls of old film, along with easy to use film cameras. We spent several weeks teaching the children how to load the film and use the cameras properly. Many of the developed photos were not perfect; often the film had gone bad or the film had been overexposed due to little hands opening the camera before rewinding the roll. But the point was not to teach them how to be professional photographers but to encourage them to find the beauty in the world around them, and exposes the kids to new interests they might have never encountered on their own.

The Scavenger Hunts grew out of three of the Scholars’ junior year experiences: Rebekah Meadows, Kevin Metasavage, and Angela Hutchins’s volunteer-experience site at DASH in LaGrange. As Rebekah researched to write her senior thesis, “Church Based Community Development: From Backward to Flourishing,” she discovered that a majority of the families in the Hillside community are struggling to stay above the poverty line. Parents or grandparents work odd shifts that can change from month to month while children and youth are left at home. Parents were expressing interest in a structured activity for their children to go to a couple of times a week while they were still at work. The community had discussed the possibilities of an afterschool tutoring program, but that had failed multiple times in the past. Looking for some fresh ideas, Ben contacted a neighborhood in Sarasota, Florida, that had started a weekly Scavenger Hunt, and the Hillside community used Sarasota as an example. For the first couple months Ben led the Scavenger Hunt and developed the weekly activities, but then he slowly handed the lead off to Kevin and Rebekah, who taught the kids theatre games, made crafts and played kickball. Throughout this senior year Ben has mainly helped by getting the word out to the families in the community, while the Scholars as a whole have come together to organize and lead weekly Scavenger Hunts. The families of Hillside hope to see the Scavenger Hunts continue long after the Servant Scholars move on.

Running Club

In late September, Servant Scholar Tyler Eady started helping with the running club at Ethel Kight Magnet School. With the school being located a half a mile from the Hillside neighborhood, the teachers there felt that Scholars being involved would be a great help. Working with the physical education teacher there, Tyler Eady and Coach Brack Hassel helped kids learn to enjoy running for exercise and distance. They taught the kids the differences in heart rate during exercise, types of running shoes, and how pacing while running long distances can affect the way one’s body feels during long distance running, and how certain exercises can help. At the end of the semester, they put on a one mile race held by running club, open for all the kids in the school who wanted to participate. The kids had a blast and performed very well, with all kids in the running club showing improvement in their times. The greatest ac-
complishment however, was being able to make running a healthy activity for the kids, so that they might continue a healthy lifestyle for the rest of their lives.

**Acoustic Cafe/ Pure Life Studios**

Music breeds community in a way unlike anything else - live music encourages people to stop, listen and respond to the performer, and creates a safe and creative environment for friendships to be established. Acoustic Cafe in the past has been an on-campus event for the LaGrange College students to showcase their talent, but the Hillside community wanted to provide a venue to encourage relations between the college and the neighbors of the community. Servant Scholar Angela Hutchins and Maggie McDonald, a resident of Hillside, worked together to get performers for every Friday night from 7 until 9, and as word got out the response was overwhelmingly positive. As the event grew in popularity, twenty to thirty people would be in attendance every Friday night, including neighbors, locals and college students, along with four or five musical performers. The Hillside community quickly responded by bringing more friends and creating a community-driven relaxed atmosphere. Because of the enormity of success from Acoustic Cafe, it became necessary to move to a permanent location, and Maggie agreed to move the event into her own business when she took over during the winter break. Acoustic Café became “Pure Life Studios Presents”, and is now a fully operational music venue and listening room. Maggie books all the bands and musicians, often nationally famed singer/songwriters, who come from all over the country, and caters to an audience of all ages among locals, which ensures its lasting place in the community.

**Fall Festival**

The first planned event for the Hillside neighborhood was the Fall Festival. This festival existed before the Scholars started serving in Hillside, but it was our first opportunity to introduce ourselves to many of the residents. Though the festival as a whole was led by the neighbors, the Scholars participated by collecting candy for various activities and creating games for different stations. American Red Cross also utilized a booth to endorse its fire safety campaign, with the help of Nicole Cato.

Our goal was to learn about the community as well as meeting everyone who participated. There were many activities added, such as storytelling, face painting, and putt-putting, along with assisting other pastimes the Fall Festival already had, such as the cakewalk, pumpkin bowling, and the bean bag toss. Every activity was a success with the kids of not only Hillside but also other nearby communities.

As a cohort, we made it clear that we were there to assist the neighbors and not to take ownership of something that was already present in the community. The whole idea was to promote community ownership of ideas and events, ensuring that they will continue to improve upon the ideas rather
than forgetting them after we leave -- the Scholars are only here for a year, but the community is there to stay.

The Fall Festival was one of the Scholars’ first major accomplishments with the Koinonia Project; the families and neighbors were appreciative of us, but we were more appreciative of them for allowing us to take part in their events and festivities. From this first event, it became clear that festivals and celebrations were a key part of bringing the community together. This was something that we took into mind when coming up with later plans for our project.

**American Red Cross Fire Safety Campaign**

During the Dignity Serves Workshop, Ben Wheeler learned of Scholar Nicole Cato's interest in working for the American Red Cross. It was at that moment on Friday, September 5, the first day of the workshop, that Ben offered to the Scholars the opportunity to help American Red Cross with their fire safety campaign. American Red Cross had very recently enlisted him to help them take the campaign into the Hillside community, and he willingly shared his leadership of the project with Nicole who was pursuing an internship with the organization at the time. Together, Ben and Nicole met with American Red Cross to become acquainted with the organization’s fire safety campaign, made a survey to collect information from Hillside residents who wanted assistance from the campaign, and canvassed the Hillside neighborhood, identifying residents who wanted help from the campaign and surveying them on their residential fire safety needs. After the surveys were printed, each Wednesday evening for a little over one month they went door-to-door asking residents if they had working fire detectors and if not, if they were willing to allow American Red Cross to come in and install them for free with the provision of free batteries.

The leading Scholar behind the campaign also enlisted the help of other Servant Scholars, as she herself worked to communicate with the Latino residents that may have needed fire detectors. Their work was important because American Red Cross had identified Troup County as a Georgia county with too high a percentage of fire deaths. Owing to their work, the local American Red Cross chapter visited more than one dozen Hillside homes to install free fire detectors for the residents on November 8. In the end, the work that the Scholars did in Hillside contributed to the sum of more than 200 smoke detectors that were properly set for fire safety in homes by American Red Cross’ campaign. The Scholars’ helped the American Red Cross with their goal to decrease fire death and injury by twenty-five percent nationwide within the next five years.

**Trees in Hillside**

Many components of project Koinonia have been fraught with large hurdles and mounting difficulties, and the addition of trees was no exception. This particular project became a struggle with the city of LaGrange, and
through a meeting with the local city planner, the Scholars learned that trees have a rocky history in LaGrange. The mighty oaks throughout the city have cost a pretty penny, and so a more economical and non-threatening tree type was necessary. We had contact with local arborist Sam Breyfogle who pointed us in the right direction; choosing the Crepe Myrtle. The city still pushed back because of the low power lines, but luckily Katie Baughman, a resident of Hillside and a partner in the tree project, did her research and found a species that doesn’t grow high enough to interfere with them. After researching the underground water and electric lines, we succeeded in complying with the city’s requests.

The positive effects on the community from planting these Crepe Myrtles not only satisfies a temporary desire, but will also go on to serve aesthetic and practical roles in the neighborhood for years to come. The initial planting of the trees provided a great opportunity for neighbors to work together as a group toward a common goal, strengthening bonds and creating a sense of unity among all who were involved. There are also many benefits that come with the trees themselves. Crepe Myrtles are flowering trees that will bloom beautiful red, pink, purple, and white flowers every summer. Having the streets lined with these can create a different sense of unity among residents and instill pride in the neighborhood. According to The Council of Tree and Landscape Appraisers, an adult tree has an appraised value of between one and ten-thousand dollars. A healthy tree increases energy efficiency, and produces a net cooling effect equal to that of running ten room-sized air conditioners for twenty hours every day (US Department of Agriculture). The Crepe Myrtles will also provide a safer environment for the children in Hillside to play. The shade produced by them will allow for a cool place to rest in the summer heat, and also encourage motorists to take time to drive more carefully due to the inability to immediately see all the way up the road. The positive effects of trees were our main motivation for pursuing tree planting; after learning about how trees influence community bonds, we fully dedicated ourselves to completing this project.

However, finding the funding for such a large project was a mystery to us, and so we contacted Laura Breyfogle, chair of the local Sierra Club chapter, about whether the Sierra Club knew how to fund such a project. She pointed us towards the local breakfast clubs and offered to ask around in her group about the possibility of funding, but fortunately we discovered that DASH had set aside $6,000 specifically for planting and purchasing trees in Hillside when the neighborhood was originally constructed.

Instead of wearing us down, the difficulties encouraged us to follow through with the completion of this project, and it helped that the neighbors themselves really latched onto this project. A few community leaders specifically took the tree project under their wing, and many of the difficulties were successfully maneuvered through because of their hard work. This project in particular succeeded because the neighbors took ownership, which connects
back to our earlier research, specifically when Vanier discusses how a healthy community can liberate individuals:

Mission is revealing to others their fundamental beauty, value and importance in the universe, their capacity to love, to grow and to do beautiful things and to meet God. Mission is transmitting to people a new inner freedom and hope: it is unlocking the doors of their being so that new energies can flow; it is taking away from their shoulders the terrible yoke of fear and guilt. (Community and Growth 86).

The true test of Servant Leadership, according to Robert Greenleaf, is whether or not the people one serves become autonomous and learn to serve others. The Hillside neighbors truly saw this project through, and hopefully this success will empower them and other members of the community to continue to pursue their own missions without fear.

**Our Daily Bread**

Once the previous cohort’s graduation was nearing, it became clear that if the soup kitchen (Our Daily Bread) were to continue fulfilling its need within the community, our cohort would have to take the lead. The task then became finding a means to incorporate the mission of Our Daily Bread into The Koinonia Project’s focus on community and fellowship. The Scholars decided to put an emphasis on building community within the soup kitchen’s guests, treating Our Daily Bread as a satellite to the Hillside community where our project was focused. Before the idea of The Koinonia Project had even begun to take shape, Our Daily Bread was already an integrated part of the community, both in LaGrange and within the college. The previous cohort founded Our Daily Bread off of the basis of filling a need in the community: to feed the hungry. Before Our Daily Bread, the hungry people in the community were served every lunch hour, Monday through Thursday, by local churches hosting soup kitchens. However, seeing as there was no one serving on Fridays, the Scholars took the initiative to meet this need and start Our Daily Bread.

As it turns out, many of the regular guests who attend Our Daily Bread are residents of the Hillside community. In addition to focusing on the Hillside community, the Scholars also turned their attention to the college community, aiming to make the soup kitchen a school-wide project, with students reaching out to serve, instead of a Servant Scholar specific project. This was accomplished by means such as allowing students from other graduating classes and other campus affiliations to serve in Our Daily Bread leadership positions.

In order to achieve our goals we set certain objectives to meet throughout the year-long project. In order to increase community within the guests and servers of the soup kitchen, we aimed to make meals more specific to the health and desires of the guests. We also set out to build stronger rela-
tionships with some of the more regular guests and meet the new and unfamiliar guests. To help strengthen and broaden the community responsible for running the soup kitchen, different outside student organizations were invited to visit and serve at the soup kitchen at least once a month. Leadership roles were also solidified within Our Daily Bread and organized the process of running Our Daily Bread, in order to make it easier to pass down to future leaders.

To address the choices of meals being served, we first spoke with guests. Simple conversation regarding allergies, digestive problems, and general preferences allowed the cohort to narrow down the meals that would be more ideal to serve. Then health was addressed; without proper nutrition the human body is more prone to disease, infection and fatigue. Many of the guests do not have meals regularly, much less balanced nutritious meals. Therefore, it became essential that in addition to simply providing food, Our Daily Bread must provide as much nutrients as possible within the budget.

Throughout the year we were successful in having outside student organizations serve at Our Daily Bread at least once a month, with organizations varying from departmental honor societies such as Delta Mu Delta, Greek fraternities and sororities, interim courses, academic departments, faculty, staff, and more. Each visit was a success, leading to some organizations returning and individuals within other organizations returning on their own. The atmosphere of fellowship over meals no matter the background or current circumstances of a person, truly offers a unique experience that attracts people from all areas of life.

Because of the nature of Our Daily Bread, which aimed to not simply serve the guests but also eat alongside them, building relationships came easy. Through these relationships that grew out of fellowship during a meal, we learned a lot about and from those we are serving. We continue to exchange stories and updates on our lives, and recognize when someone is not there one week, whether a volunteer or guest, so that we can make sure they are doing well the next time they come. Some guests who regularly attend have started to come early or stay late to help with the set-up or clean-up as well as telling each volunteer how much they appreciate the meal and sharing kind words of encouragement. Our Daily Bread has become a gathering place for fellowship that fulfills social needs as well as physical needs. As Vanier writes, “Community means caring: caring for people” (From Brokenness to Community 35).

**West Point Fund Grant**

In 2013, the first cohort of Scholars received a grant from the West Point Fund which allowed them to start the soup kitchen. Through the generosity of the host church, other church bodies, college fundraisers, and other sources, Our Daily Bread was able to stretch the funds two years. In 2015, we applied for the grant again. Impressed by the college-run soup kitchen, the West Point Fund board requested that a few of the Scholars give a presentation about they hoped to use the funds and to inform them more about the soup
kitchen in general. After a successful meeting, the West Point Fund again generously gave Our Daily Bread a grant of $1,500.

**Research**

A particular way that the Scholars had envisioned reaching the families of the Hillside neighborhood was through restoring one of the abandoned parks in town so that the kids would have a well-kept place to play. With this proposal, research was to be centered on the benefits of play for kids as well as the benefits of community playgrounds for kids. However, as mentioned previously, connector meetings with the residents themselves revealed that they didn’t want another playground constructed in the neighborhood. In years past, two playgrounds had been sponsored by the college for the neighborhood, and those parks were vandalized and demolished. During the first semester of the senior project, the residents proposed the idea of a basketball court to give adolescents an outlet. Research was started to investigate the benefits of a community having a recreational sports outlet for kids, in particular adolescents. However, continued conversation with the residents helped them to realize that a basketball court would be undesirable after all, due to its attraction of crime-related activity, such as drug trafficking and gang-related activities.

By the second semester, the residents had decided that the Scholars could really help them by planting trees in their neighborhood. As some Scholars led a tree-committee in efforts to get these desired trees in the ground, they also researched types of trees, looking for the best suited for the neighborhood. The latter entailed researching the benefits of each tree proposed, so that when they finally had the type of tree to plant selected, they would be able to advocate its planting to an even larger group of residents in Hillside.

Meanwhile, the senior project’s research-component committee decided to research whether or not parents and teachers in Hillside were interested in improving their relationship with one another, in order to better the futures of the children within the neighborhood.

Earlier in the school year, the Scholars had met with the resident teachers for a meeting that Ben scheduled to discuss the strengths and challenges of the Hillside community. During this meeting, the teachers said that a lack of a strong relationship between themselves and the parents was a problem -- a constant struggle due to the major factor of the busyness of the parents. Furthermore, in their research they had read articles from a plethora of educational journals trying to find different ways to best approach this dilemma.

They studied several journals to find out more about the educational benefits of kids interacting with kids, the educational benefits of kids interacting with parents, and the educational benefits of kids interacting with teachers and how this interaction can best take place. Simultaneously, they studied articles from issues of the *American School Board Journal* to determine ways to increase interaction between parents of students and teachers. In studying
how to better interactions that affect kids throughout their lives and as students, the Scholars hoped to discover pivotal information about how to better relationships that foster the success of students in order to give these students better futures thereby giving their communities better futures. In this way, they hoped to strengthen Hillside with their research.

Taking into account what they read, the Scholars created a survey that sought to find out whether or not both parents and teachers of Hillside feel committed to overcoming the problem of a lack of relationship with each other and whether they feel it can be done using technology. The survey was to be completed by parents at the Hillside Arts and Music Festival on April 18th. At this festival, several visitors to the Servant Scholar’s table were not Hillside parents and if so they rarely wanted to participate in the survey. For this reason, the survey did not obtain a big sample of participants. Thus, the survey is an example of the importance of three principles that the Scholars learned are important when serving a community, as stated in “The Solution” selection of the paper.

Solution

After working a whole school year to strengthen the community of Hillside, the Scholars have concluded that three principles are essential to strengthening a community. One: building personal relationships with the individuals therein. Two: embracing a long-term commitment to the community and those particular relationships within it. Three: actively listening to those within the community, especially those that one has formed a dedicated relationship with. By striving to become an embodiment of these three principles, a servant leader can be a transformative influence within a community.

Conclusion

Through seeking to strengthen community via various activities inspired by the three principles aforementioned (building relationships, committing long-term to community and the relationships within it, and listening to those in the community) the Scholars learned how to become servant leaders not only through the study of the leadership philosophy and principles but also by implementation of them. Moreover, the Scholars actively observed those whom they served in the Hillside community in order to determine if these individuals had benefitted from their servant leadership. The Scholars used the following test by servant-leadership-inventor Robert Greenleaf:

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the
effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived? (*The Servant as Leader* 15)

This project required steady involvement, work and observation from every one of the Scholars this year, who found themselves being stretched and tested as servant leaders to a whole new level on a daily basis. They successfully achieved Koinonia and shared their servant leadership values by serving nutritious meals at Our Daily Bread, inspiring and educating children in Hillside through the Scavenger Hunts, volunteering at both the Fall Festivals and Spring Music & Arts Festival, leading a running club, creating relationships through Our Daily Bread, and planting trees in Hillside. The senior cohort of 2015 would like to thank LaGrange College, Dr. Slay, Ben Wheeler, and the entire DASH staff and Hillside Community for their help with the completion of the Koinonia Project, which could only have been possible with their involvement. In conclusion, Koinonia has proved that there are great rewards for all parties involved in service (serving others and being served by them in return) and working to create a community that will continue to actively strive to become freer, more interconnected and more autonomous, as is the testament to true servant leadership.
Works Cited