

P.1

SAMPLE C

### Community Service Reflection Questions

1. What did you learn about yourself?

At the very beginning of this project, I was immediately taken out of my comfort zone. While I have always wanted to partake in a charitable organization, I always felt as if I did not have much to contribute. My first instinct was to find an organization that would allow me to work "behind the scenes." I believe this was my way to avoid feelings of guilt that I could encounter while helping a community in which many people are less fortunate. However, I could not be happier to have selected Word Up and to have experienced an environment that cultivates hope and inspiration.

When first researching Washington Heights and the demographics of the area, I was surprised to learn that this neighborhood had many problems with poverty that affluent neighborhoods just a train ride away did not deal with. It was eye opening to leave the Flatiron District and Baruch's neighborhood of Murray Hill with all the presentable businessmen and women from surrounding corporations, and arrive in a predominantly residential neighborhood that was populated with many school children. I really felt a sense of community upon my arrival at the quaint storefront of Word Up on Amsterdam Avenue.

My biggest learning experience was from encountering other volunteers and the people who are in charge of the organization. I was astounded to see the same people volunteer week and week again, despite leading busy lives. Two other volunteers I met were still in college; one was

pursuing a degree at the graduate center at CUNY and another was an upperclassman. Despite the work they had pertaining to their academic careers, they still found the time to actively participate and contribute to the organization. Seeing these volunteers balance charitable work at an organization they appeared genuinely passionate about with their hectic lives was truly a wake-up call for me. Consequentially, I now look at volunteer work much differently, and realize how important it is to open my eyes and become devoted to issues that I am passionate about, despite the possibility of not being directly affected by them.

2. What is the mission of the organization and how does it connect to the larger political, economic, social, and cultural forces that shape American society? Can you think of any alternative solutions for addressing the needs this organization serves?

The mission of Word Up Community Bookstore is to build a community in which “all residents help each other to live better informed and more expressive lives,” using books as an instrument of education and empowerment for the whole community. With childhood poverty being an issue that continues to plague American inner cities, Word Up seeks to enable low-income families in Washington Heights to provide their children with literature that can shape their outlook on the world. As funding for public schools and extracurricular programs decrease, Word Up plays a crucial role in enriching the education of the local children, and leveling the playing field between them and children from more affluent backgrounds.

Word Up also relates to the cultural forces of American society, as it celebrates diversity and the heterogeneous community of Washington Heights. In addition to its large selection of Spanish literature and events that explore the history of Hispanic people in the United States, Word Up also celebrates the local culture and music scene, with open-mic events that allow residents to express themselves through rap and hip hop. Through showcasing local authors and

hosting public events, Word Up strengthens the community and allows individuals to interact and share in their passions.

To better support the people in this community and similar low-income communities, the state and local governments should support programs that enable these students to have access to more literature in public schools, and invigorate local libraries. In addition, the state and local governments should invest more in extracurricular programs in public schools, where students can have the time and space to express their creativity. I believe that this solution will allow students to become more passionate about their education and building their communities up.

3. Explain whether you would engage in this community service again. How has this experience influenced how you will engage in your next service project?

After several volunteering sessions at Word Up, I definitely intend on remaining an active part of the organization and helping out in any way I can in the future. I firmly believe and share in the vision that Word Up has for the surrounding community. This experience has taught me that I would like to be more involved with the people impacted by my service, and that I would much rather be on the “front lines” instead of being “behind the scenes.” I plan on finding other organizations that I can share a vision with, as I believe that having a common vision for the future helps motivate me to partake more actively in the cause.

