Spiritual Activism for At-Risk Youth: 

_Compassionate Saint Augustine’s
Youth Academy Initiative, an Ethnographic Study_

“Just waking up on the wrong side of the bed can send you away for life. You can make the wrong decision and get incarcerated and never come home. So, meditation can stop somebody from throwing their whole life away – if you think about it for real. It’s serious. You never know what somebody wakes up with on their mind.”

~ Isaiah, 18 years old

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: This is an ethnographic study of two communities coming together to serve at-risk youth in St. Augustine, Florida. Compassionate St Augustine (CSA) is a non-profit organization grounded in the Golden Rule that promotes compassion-based practices in schools, businesses, faith communities, and government. The Youth Academy is a high-risk residential juvenile facility housing 70 boys between the ages of 13 and 19. The two joined forces to bring opportunity, healing and hope to these boys and over the last two years, CSA has had over 30 ongoing classes, programs, events and workshops at the academy – teaching everything from Qi Gong to how to properly butter your bread.

AIM: My overall aim is to study spiritual activism to inspire action and create a shift in collective consciousness. In this specific setting, I examined what spiritual and/or humanistic factors motivate transformation, what impact happens from the spiritual activism and how does it change the future?

THEORY: I examine these questions through the lens of spiritual activism, using ethnographic social science theory. In ethnography, it is important to present a full picture, to use description and quotations. It was important to me to give these at-risk young men their voice, to share their quotes and the pictures they took to give insight into their lives. After the inductive study of ethnography, I applied a deductive study to my observations through a framework of existential health theory, thus doing an abductive study of the spiritual activism and its impact.

METHOD: I spent five weeks doing participatory observation in classes, meetings and events. I conducted semi-structured interviews with students, activists and staff. The boys also participated in Photovoice, taking pictures to show aspects of their life and transformation.

RESULTS: I found the program components of meditation & Alternatives to Violence Program, music, art & etiquette, compassion & service and restoring health equity & social justice created changes the existential health dimensions of these young men. They received tools to transform their current life and their futures.

CONCLUSION: The goal of the CSA program at the Youth Academy is to help change the mindset of the young men and improve their quality of life. The overall goal of spiritual activism is to create an individual transformation in hearts and minds in order to create a collective consciousness shift in worldview. Both involve changing people existentially – changing how a person relates to themselves, to each other, to the world and to life. How we relate to existence determines how we define existence.

CSA is helping to fulfill the Youth Academy’s vision of offering these underprivileged young men a true academy – a learning environment filled with opportunities for growth, exploration and healing that will give these boys a new chance to define who they are from a place of wholeness. They are a clear example that restorative justice is what is needed to help heal these young men, to help bring more social justice to society in general and to bring health equity to future generations.

KEY WORDS: Spiritual; Activism; Social Justice; Juvenile Rehabilitation; Restorative Justice; Racism; Collective Consciousness Shift; Compassion; Ethnography
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INTRODUCTION

Compassionate St. Augustine’s Youth Academy Initiative started when Caren Goldman and Orvando Freeman first met and started to dream together of what they could do for the incarcerated boys at the high-security juvenile facility. Just a few months later, their pie in the sky dreams were made real and Compassionate St. Augustine (CSA) started their program of classes taught by their spiritual activist volunteers, beginning with Sue Fitzgerald training 12 boys in Mindfulness Meditation.

The little town of St Augustine in northeastern Florida was founded by the Spanish in 1565 and in 2015, for the 450th anniversary, Compassionate St. Augustine did a public art project featuring elaborately painted obelisks commemorating the concepts of freedom, democracy, human rights, and compassion. There was a children’s component called “Compassion Through the Eyes of Children” that CSA decided would continue, and Caren Goldman, the co-founder and executive director, brought the second variation of the theme to twelve different organizations for underserved and vulnerable children, offering them to design and build a sixteen-and-a-half-foot obelisk together. Eleven of the groups participated; the one group that didn’t participate was the local juvenile facility, the Youth Academy.

As Ms. Caren tells the story, “The director at that time refused to talk to us.” Not being one to give up, she said, “At that point I said, ‘ok, the next thing we do will be inside the Youth Academy.’ So, that next January, I went out there and Orvando Freeman had just come in, Sequel had just come in and the old company was gone. And so, Orvando and I sat down.” CSA had a program coming February of 2016: Gregory Bright, an innocent man who had been incarcerated for 27 ½ years in Louisiana before being exonerated, doing a performance of his life story as part of their month of forgiveness and compassion. “So, I asked Orvando, do you want me to bring him out to talk to the guys?”
Mr. Freeman had just started as the new Executive Director of the Youth Academy and he tells me
“When I first came, the culture here was, ‘You never put all 70 guys in one room together, they'll fight,
everybody is in a gang.’ And I said, ‘Nah, we can’t do that, I can’t live like that. If we do that, then that is
what we’re perpetuating.’ So, we had Gregory Bright here and he spoke to all the guys, all 70 guys in one
room and you could hear a pin drop. They were so attentive.”

Afterwards, Ms. Caren and Mr. Freeman went out to lunch with several of the staff and that was when
they started to dream together. What if CSA was to start up a program at the Youth Academy? Mr.
Freeman says he calls it doing “pie in the sky, what if, and Caren’s thinking, ‘what if we could help
you?’[…] And then I got a phone call from Caren and she said, ‘Hey, I want you to do me a favor. I
want you to come up with a wish list.’ I said, ‘hey, that is not a problem!’ I sat at home and came up with
this long wish list. And it’s amazing. I think we did everything that I asked. We had piano lessons, a
bookclub, etiquette, mindfulness. What better population to put it in? But who would have thought?”

At the end of June 2016, Sue Fitzgerald went live with Mindfulness Meditation and immediately after
other programs started, including Photography, Art, Piano and that fall Nancy O'Byrne taught the
Alternatives to Violence Program. Ms. Caren then found Sandi Galloway, who used to teach etiquette at
the Canadian Embassy, who immediately said yes and started teaching etiquette to the incarcerated boys.
In early 2017 KaZ Akers moved to St. Augustine and started teaching Qi Gong inspired Moving
Meditation. Over the last two years, CSA has had over 30 ongoing classes, programs, events and
workshops at the academy.

In her interview, Ms. Sue tells me about the very first CSA class at the Youth Academy. Sitting at her
comfortably middle-class kitchen table, she remembers her first day walking into the high-risk residential
facility: “I'll never forget walking in. I'll call it controlled terrified. I had no idea. I've never been in an
institution where you locked every door after you walked through it. So, I walked in, all prepared with
folders and papers and oh my goodness, I was very prepared for my hour and a half class for these kids
who were just going to soak this all up, or not.” Ms. Sue laughs at herself in hindsight. “I was working
with an entire pod, there were twelve boys. A few of them were contemplative, by that I mean they had
some kind of religious background. So, it wasn’t all foreign that there was a sacred self that resides in us.
I remember when I first sat there, and I looked at these faces that were looking back at me. Some of
them were in protective mode – slouched with their hands in their pants. Others, covered their faces
with their t-shirts. The leader would constantly say, ‘so-and-so, take down your shirt, lift your head up.’
And I was just thinking, ‘Lord, just stay with me, I'll be fine.’”

After the first class, Ms. Sue immediately felt more than just relief, she felt inspired. “The staff member
who was helping me said, ‘you know what Sue, I really think this is going to work.’ And it wasn’t long
after this beginning that the boys started gravitating towards wanting to have one-on-one sessions with me. And that is where some of the real work started to get done. Some of them were really ready, and when we can come to the table for those who are ready, then there we have everything! Most of the breakthroughs come when working with forgiveness of self and other, being ok with having compassion for yourself, understanding that you didn’t always have to ride rough with yourself and everybody else in order to make it in the world.”

Now Ms. Sue is a fixture at the Youth Academy. Mr. Freeman swears just her presence has a calming effect: “Sue can walk into a building and everybody calms down.” She walks the halls, sits in on events, and blends into the community. Ms. Sue told me, “I saw a boy that I hadn’t seen in a couple of months as I was out of the country. I had worked with him privately before leaving. So, I heard this voice from all the way down the corridor, ‘Miss Sue!’ and I wasn’t wearing my glasses, I can’t see who it is, so I walk down the corridor to discover that it’s this child I haven’t seen since February and he said ‘Are you coming to see me? I’m getting out on Monday, I need to see you!’ and he gave me a hug. And then another boy came, ‘Miss Sue!’ and gave me a big hug. It’s so beautiful. And it’s not about them hugging me, it’s about them being comfortable enough to give me that love.”

Ms. Sue’s eyes fill with the warmth I recognize from Ms. KaZ, Ms. Nancy, Ms. Sandi and the other activists touched by these boys. “So, it has been the love of my life, I never thought I would say this. I am so emotionally and spiritually connected to them, that my thoughts are now going way beyond the Academy. I hear myself thinking, ‘You know, Sue, this is lovely what you are doing, but the systemic change that needs to occur is way beyond any of us, but collectively whatever little bit we can do is moving us forward.’” Ms. Sue trails off, glimpsing a hopeful future that we all create together – activists, young people and all of us who are part of breakthroughs, pie in the sky wish lists, systemic change and consciousness shift. I was really touched by this story Ms. Sue told me, not just of how her presence at the Youth Academy has opened the boys up to forgiveness & compassion, but also how she herself has been transformed and the boys and the systemic change that is called for has become the love of her life.

2 **BACKGROUND & ASSUMPTION**

2.1 **Background**

Last Spring, I studied the spiritual activism of daily life at Alsike Kloster, a monastery outside of Uppsala where the nuns have sheltered refugees for the past 40 years. This Spring, I furthered my studies of socially engaged faith by continuing ethnographic study of this local chapter of the Charter for Compassion in St Augustine, Florida. Over the past 2 years, an entirely volunteer force of interfaith
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activists has put together a comprehensive program of over 30 classes for these at-risk youths. At the beginning of each semester CSA promotes the values of compassion to the entire Youth Academy community, inviting the approximately 70 young men to sign a compassion pledge. Then the CSA activists teach small groups of students a variety of classes, everything from art and bicycle repair to essential life improvement skills such as meditation and the Quaker developed Alternatives to Violence. The lives of the young men have noticeably improved and recidivism rates have declined. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice has noticed. I spent 5 weeks in St Augustine Florida, participating in classes, community activities and interviewing the Youth Academy students, staff and CSA activists. The following is an ethnographic portrait of the CSA Youth Academy program within the greater context of a spiritual activism overview, reviewing the program’s impact on the participants.

2.2 Assumptions

For better or for worse, my assumption is that people are, at their core, rooted in love. I refrain from using morally charged words such as “good” or “bad” as I am reminded that human beings contain both and have potential for acts of kindness and beauty as well as acts of greed and cruelty. However, I come from a world view that there is something fundamentally loving at the core of life, and given the chance, we will bend towards love and compassion.

In terms of the background and experience that informs my research – I grew up in a very secular household, yet somehow became an intensely spiritual teenager. I read about Gandhi & yogis and got in trouble for becoming a vegetarian and marching against nuclear submarines. Then I discovered paganism, Goddess traditions, Christian mysticism, Sufi poets, Buddhist teachers and radical Rabbis. Later still I grew to appreciate humanist passion for equality and dignity and the beauty of spiritual ecology. Never in all of my intersectional interfaith studies was I in an academic setting. It was always in the hands-on world of people praying, meditating, walking, talking, sitting, singing, acting (or not acting), and living.

As an activist, I started my very first petition at age 16 to have nonviolence classes taught at my high school and I almost got suspended from college for vehemently challenging the administration’s pathetic policies against date rape on campus. When I moved to California, I encountered a great many people who viewed their meditation as their way of ‘being the change’ without any form of activism that connected out to the community. While I do believe in the practice of prayer and I might even be fascinated by studies that have shown the power of group meditation to lower violent crime rates in
major cities, I became exasperated by spiritual people who pray for peace at night before they do their prosperity mantra. So many of the spiritual leaders that I admire taught that any authentic spiritual practice leads to action on behalf of others, and I felt that my beloved Gandhi’s most famous quote was being misused. Thus, I am pursuing a master’s degree in Religions in Peace and Conflict focusing on spiritual activism.

2.3 Ethnographic perspective

As an ethnographer, what has been most important to me is to give the boys of the Youth Academy a voice. My goal is not to produce a scientifically objective piece of research, but to invite the reader in to feel something, to get to know the boys and the community in a holistic way, not just mentally, but emotionally, socially and existentially. To be in the ethnographic tradition is to be giving a piece of the truth in a holistic way, not the whole truth in an objective way. And it is my contention that a strict Fordian facts and figures picture of the truth is not the whole truth, either. Perhaps some researchers would prefer findings to be reported in a more ‘boring’ manner, but it has been my intention to write a thesis that brings life to a very important story and it is in line with ethnographic research tradition to try to paint the reality, rather than trying to put reality into squares and figures. This is a conscious decision coming from my social research theory.

3 Definition & Interpretation of Key Words

Many of the terms that are used in this thesis are broad sociological or theological words that are difficult to authoritatively define and whose meanings are often debated. Therefore, in this thesis, it is inevitable that I will not only use these words in their literal definitions, but also in some form of interpretation. You will find key words and both their definitions and interpretations in Appendix A. This is being done so that the reader can understand the meanings of these words here, as opposed to the many other interpretations or definitions that can be found for the same words in other contexts.

4 History & Survey of the Field

As spiritual activism is the overarching theory that holds this ethnographic study, below I give an overview perspective for the purposes of this thesis. First, I give a brief synopsis of the history of spiritual activism, then a broader understanding of what spiritual activism entails. Then, I specify how

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1 Hagelin et al., “Effects of Group Practice of the Transcendental Meditation Program on Preventing Violent Crime in Washington, D.C.”
spiritual activism touches on the particular social justice issues of racism and mass incarceration, the issues most closely related to this ethnographic community. Finally, I give a brief survey of the field for both spiritual activism and for the intersection of social justice and existential health equity.

4.1 History of spiritual activism

We have always had spiritual activists in our world: from medieval St Francis initiating communities of friars to live among the people, to 19th century Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Transcendentalism declaring that in nature “I am part or particle of God”, to 20th century Gandhi building revolutionary ashrams, to the 21st century Standing Rock Sioux tribe establishing Oceti Sakowin Camp in North Dakota to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline and inspire the world. We have always had people among us who have led the struggle for a more loving world.

Often, these leaders used our very own religions as the basis of their radical activism. A general review of humanity’s religious, spiritual or even humanistic traditions show that our faiths have always generally leaned towards a just and peaceful world. Jesus was a force for social justice who preached “Hope for the lowly […] and judgment for those who trample the helpless.” According to the Christian tradition, through Jesus’ ministry and incarnation, “God’s love for the world produced social action. God didn’t just sit in a great theological rocking chair and muse about loving the world. God acted. God entered social affairs—in human form.” Buddha renounced his princely palace to find and then share the alleviation of human suffering, which Ken Jones describes as a “restoration to our true nature,” which is “compassion, deep fellow-feeling for […] humanity and all living things.” Muhammad taught that all humans were entitled to the same rights and privileges, and from the beginning of Islam to the Arab Spring 2000 years later, there have always been Muslims standing up for justice. As Mona Eltahawy writes of her experience during the Egyptian protests in Tahrir Square and Sheikh Emad’s passion to join almost every sit-in and demonstration before he was shot to death by the army, “God is definitely on the side of the Revolution, […] my God does not rub shoulders with dictators and their enablers. I worship the God of Bread, Liberty, and Social Justice.” Religion was meant to be the opposite of the opiate of the masses, it was meant to change society at the root. For the originators, it was not just

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2 Before St. Francis began his new order of Friars Minor, Monks were always sequestered in monasteries away from the world. The Friars Minor instead lived among the people and helped the poor. Even though St. Francis never challenged the authority of the Pope or the Church, this was in itself a revolutionary act.
4 Oceti Sakowin, or Seven Fires Camp, at its peak had around 10,000 water protectors and Native peoples from as far away as the Maori in New Zealand traveled to join the sacred protest. (Reuters)
5 Kraybill, The Upside-Down Kingdom, 16.
6 Kraybill, 28.
about feeding the homeless or giving alms to the poor but changing the society that creates homelessness and poverty.

4.2 Connection between spirituality, activism & worldview

Spirituality is often seen as a lofty realm of soul, prayer, angels and after-life, or as theologian and key figure in spiritual activism, Walter Wink puts it: “Science was handed physical reality, and religion kept as its preserve a spiritual world that has no interaction with the everyday world of matter”. For many people the term spiritual activism simply means when one’s spirituality supports one’s activism. This is Rabbi Weiss’s straightforward definition: “acting on behalf of an ‘other’ from a spiritual outlook”. And while spiritual activism can often start out this way, once you travel along the spiritual activist path you discover that there is something much deeper going on.

Figure 2 ~ Martin Luther King Jr. & Thich Nhat Hanh at their first joint press conference in 1963.

This something deeper was expressed by both spiritual activist giants Thich Nhat Hanh and Martin Luther King, Jr. They first met in 1966 in Chicago where they held a joint press conference and Dr. King spoke out for the first time against the Vietnam War. As Thich Nhat Hanh shared: “That was the day we combined our efforts to work for peace in Vietnam and to fight for civil rights in the US. We agreed that the true enemy of man is not man. Our enemy is not outside of us. Our true enemy is the anger, hatred, and discrimination that is found in the hearts and minds of man. We have to identify the real enemy and seek nonviolent ways to remove it.”

11 Photo: Plum Village Website
12 Hanh, At Home in the World: Stories and Essential Teachings from a Monk’s Life, 72–73.
As artist and activist, Jesse Maceo Vega-Frey explains: “It seems important to offer the possibility that activism as a way in itself actually avoids challenging some of the fundamental unhealthy assumptions that underlie the prevailing order we are trying to change. In fact, spirituality’s gift to activism is to provide an understanding that it is within the realm of love that we may most clearly evolve our understanding of what functional and radical ways of being in the world can really look and feel like”.  

So, much more than simply taking on political or social action from a spiritual motivation, spiritual activism is about a consciousness shift in society. As Vega-Frey puts it: “Reclaiming our humanity is the truly revolutionary act”.  

As we can conclude from the quotes above, what distinguishes spiritual activism from other forms of activism is that it focuses on creating a change in “the hearts and minds of man,” in the spirit of the systems and structures in society that create injustice in the first place. Getting to the root of the problem is what our times call for. We are living in the beginning of the sixth major extinction event in the history of the earth, one brought on by humans. As we face the existential threats of climate change, environmental decline and nuclear annihilation amid an increasingly unstable economic and political system, we are in need of radical solutions and revolutionary new ways of being. Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone describe this spiritual activist shift: “In the Agricultural Revolution of ten thousand years ago, the domestication of plants and animals led to a radical shift in the way people lived. In the Industrial Revolution that began just a few hundred years ago, a similar dramatic transition took place. These weren’t just changes in the small details of people’s lives. The whole basis of society was transformed, including people’s relationship with one another and with Earth. Right now, a shift of comparable scope and magnitude is occurring. […] It involves the transition from a doomed economy of industrial growth to a life-sustaining society committed to the recovery of our world.”  

### 4.3 Spiritual activism, racism & criminal justice reform

An important aspect of spiritual activism is that it asks the deeper questions that sometimes can be overlooked in other merely materialistic approaches and it asks us to relook at all our societal systems. The societal system most obviously on display in this ethnography is the institutional racism intertwined in the American criminal justice system of mass incarceration and the ‘War on Drugs’ that has been fought in poor inner-city African American and Latino communities since the 1970’s. As Michelle Alexander explains, “In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race,
explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don’t. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color ‘criminals’ and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind. Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans.”

As I will detail below, the young men that are incarcerated at the Youth Academy almost all come from these low income, inner-city neighborhoods that are the front line of America’s racial War on Drugs. Changing the Youth Academy from a punitive pipeline into the adult prison system to a rehabilitative academy of opportunity to escape from these socio-economic trappings is a revolutionary act of spiritual activism.

This call for spiritual activism in the African American community has become personal and visceral – it is not about policies but about saving lives. As Barbara A. Holmes, Professor of Ethics and African American Religious Studies at Memphis Theological Seminary, writes, “Another generation is on the rise, and they are confronting police brutality and advocating for black lives through the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLMM), its contemplative activism and deeply spiritual resistance.”

Whereas the Civil Rights Movements (CRM) of the 1950’s and 1960’s was more focused on passing legislation and securing voting rights, the BLMM is about the sanctity of each individual black life. “The CRM assumed that once the impediments to inclusion were removed by legal mandate, African Americans would take their place as full citizens. The BLMM makes no such assumption. They assume that the fear of and aversion to dark people and dark bodies will not abate anytime soon, and so the demand is ‘stop killing us.’ The demand goes beyond the state-sanctioned murder of innocent black Americans during police actions; it also includes mass incarceration, economic and educational marginalization, and the macro- and microaggressions that contribute to the dissolution of families and personal health. The demand is not to include us but to stop killing us.”

In this way, the BLMM carries on the spiritual activist non-violent tradition of the CRM to stand up against the structural racism that is still prevalent in American society. Pancho Ramos-Stierle is twenty-six years old and was arrested at Occupy Oakland while meditating. He puts it quite simply: “It is time for the spiritual people to get active and the activist people to get spiritual so that we can have total revolution of the human spirit. [...] Then you can build the alternatives to a collapsing system built on structural violence.”

19 Holmes, Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church, 141.
20 Holmes, 148.
4.4 Survey of the field: Spiritual activism

4.4.1 Spirituality & compassion as foundation for change

Dr. Lynn G. Underwood is an Epidemiologist who has done extensive research on the role of spirituality and altruism for the National Institutes of Health and the World Health Organization. Aside from finding that selflessness has a beneficial impact on health and aging, her research also shows that a large part of the population has a belief in God or a spiritual interconnectedness. The General Society Survey (GSS) that she worked with covered theistic elements such as ‘I feel God’s presence’ as well as non-theistic statements such as ‘I experience a connection to all of life’ and “in response to ‘I feel God’s presence,’ 88% of the population reported experiencing this anywhere from once in a while to many times a day” and that number only increased with a nontheistic ‘connection to all of life.’

Dr. Underwood’s research also looked altruism: “In the GSS, a number of specific questions were asked, including: ‘I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.’ 62.4% of people agree with this statement. This should be encouraging to us in terms of the desire to help others that is present in the general population.” One could say that this Epidemiologist’s research has discovered that humanity is at heart compassionate. As Underwood defines it: “‘compassionate love,’ as used in the many research projects funded by the Fetzer Institute under their science research initiative in 2002, was ‘a love that centers on the good of the other, self-giving love.’” And this compassionate love is the defining characteristic of spiritual paths that call for action and social justice.

Dr. Underwood might not have done her research directly in the name of spiritual activism, but it does show that a large percentage of the population believe in our interconnectedness, and we are not as selfish or greedy as we have been taught to believe. Thus, speaking of spiritual elements to change our society may not be as farfetched as it might seem.

4.4.2 Spiritual activism is for activists

Alistair McIntosh and Matt Carmichael literally wrote the book on Spiritual Activism, or one such book. Alistair McIntosh has, in fact, written several, and they are both active in academic, social justice and climate change activism circles in the UK, Europe and extending out around the globe. In my interview with Matt Carmichael for this thesis, he told me that in his experience, most of the writings in the field of spiritual activism is not done in an academic setting, “It’s for ideas to be used on the ground, writing for congregations, for activists. It’s not usually written for an audience of theologians or scholars. There

23 Edwards and Post, 137.
24 Edwards and Post, 134.
are some good books from very clear thinkers, but they don’t usually appear in journals and as papers.” This rings true to my own research over the past two years of focusing on spiritual activism; I found several good books and not many research papers published in social science journals.

At the same time, spiritual activism offers a fundamentally important theoretical approach that other materialistic social change approaches can overlook. There are plenty of examples throughout history where revolutionaries rise up against an oppressor only to take their place as new oppressors. As McIntosh and Carmichael point out, “We may perceive, for instance, how easily the French and Russian revolutionaries slid into their oppressive ways without a spiritual underpinning that carried a deeper sense of purpose, meaning, values and tenderness. Victor Hugo, who lived through the aftermath of the French Revolution, observed that; ‘revolution changes everything except the human heart’.” 25 To truly change our systemic problems and find solutions that are long-lasting, we must change the collective consciousness, and this is exactly what spiritual activism aims to do – to change our worldview to one rooted in love and connection. As UC Berkley professor in Latino feminist decolonial spiritualties, Laura Perez writes: “Art, spirituality, and traditional popular wisdom rooted in timeless truths remind us that love is the source of all life, and its lack the source of error, psychological, somatic, and social suffering, and illness.” 26 And still, in our modern times, we are somehow convinced that all this interconnectedness stuff is just superstition, that our interdependence with each other and with nature is just delusion or fantasy. Perez continues: “swept away are the ancient cross-cultural imperatives to know ourselves, to be true to ourselves, and to care for others as our own selves. Discovering ourselves, nonjudgmentally, is dismissed as useless navel gazing rather than the indispensable road to respectful coexistence with others.” 27 This is exactly why the tools that spiritual activism offers are much-needed on all fronts of our political, social and ecological revolution.

4.5 Survey of the field: Social justice of existential health equity

Enshrined in the constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) is the human right to “the highest attainable standard of health.” 28 In order to promote this human right for all world citizens, the WHO set up the Commission on Social Determinants of Health to study what can be done to promote health equity. While this ethnography and the spiritual activism herein is not directly related to the field of healthcare, it is directly related to the existential health and quality of life of the boys at the Youth Academy and the changing of the societal factors that impact their health as well as their education,

25 McIntosh and Carmichael, Spiritual Activism: Leadership as Service, 3.
27 Facio and Lara, Loc 845-851.
28 Marmot et al., Closing the Gap in a Generation, 26.
work, living conditions and life expectancy. As the WHO Commission concluded: “Social justice is a matter of life and death.[...] Within countries there are dramatic differences in health that are closely linked with degrees of social disadvantage. Differences of this magnitude, within and between countries, simply should never happen. These inequities in health, avoidable health inequalities, arise because of the circumstances in which people grow, live, work, and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness. The conditions in which people live and die are, in turn, shaped by political, social, and economic forces. Social and economic policies have a determining impact on whether a child can grow and develop to its full potential and live a flourishing life, or whether its life will be blighted.”

In the United States, especially in the Southern United States where this ethnography takes place, much of this health inequity is based on race. As was reported in a recent New York Times article, “Black infants in America are now more than twice as likely to die as white infants — a racial disparity that is actually wider than in 1850, 15 years before the end of slavery, when most black women were considered chattel. Education and income offer little protection. In fact, a black woman with an advanced degree is more likely to lose her baby than a white woman with less than an eighth-grade education.”

This social injustice continues after birth through economic and social policies that create unequal living conditions, educational opportunities and social marginalization. This sense of being pushed out and voiceless also adds to the inequality, as the WHO Commission concluded: “Being included in the society in which one lives is vital to the material, psychosocial, and political empowerment that underpins social well-being and equitable health.”

In order to work with these multi-layered aspects of well-being and public health, Cecilia Melder and Catrine Kostenius presented a model for understanding “the relationship between different dimensions of health, such as the physical, mental, social and existential” at the World Conference for Health Promotion in 2016. For this model, they developed eight aspects of the existential dimension, inspired by the existential items in the trans-cultural survey connected to health-related quality of life developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). The eight aspects are: spiritual connection, meaning and purpose in life, experience of awe and wonder, wholeness and integration, spiritual strength, inner peace, hope and optimism, as well as faith.

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29 Marmot et al., iii.
30 Villarosa, “Why America’s Black Mothers and Babies Are in a Life-or-Death Crisis.”
31 Marmot et al., Closing the Gap in a Generation, 18.
33 Melder and Kostenius.
The transformation of the young men at the Youth Academy towards an improvement in their quality of life, social well-being and overall existential health is a step towards the global demand for social justice that the WHO is calling for on behalf of these American youths.

5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

5.1 Ethnography

Ethnography as defined by the Royal Anthropological Institute as “the recording and analysis of a culture or society, usually based on participant-observation and resulting in a written account of a people, place or institution”. The research method is based on “broad ethnographic description…in pursuit of what Mead enthusiastically endorsed as ‘grasping as much of the whole as possible.’” The responsibility of the ethnographer is to be a participant-observer and to pay attention. Only after open minded observation, you analyze and describe.

Anthropologist and ethnographic writer Kirin Narayan describes ethnographies as “accounts that closely document and try to gain insight into people’s lives as they unfold in particular situations and corners of the world.” In the ethnographic field, particularly more modern humanistic forms, it is important to paint a full picture with description and quotations giving the reader a more complete sense of meeting

34 Melder and Kostenius.
35 Royal Anthropological Society Website
36 Wolcott, Location 473 (Mead quote from 1970:250,ff., quoted from Sanjek 1190:225)
37 Narayan, Alive in the Writing : Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov, Loc 97.
these people. Thus, to make these boys alive for the readers, it is important to give them their voice, to share their quotes and photovoice pictures to give insight into their lives and their transformations.

Given that I have done previous ethnographic research in spiritual activism and I have specific queries regarding my research topic, I do have an aim and research questions. For the purposes of the structure of my study and formulating questions for the semi-structured interviews, I used my research questions. It was equally important for the neutrality of my ethnographical field work that I put these questions in the background when I was a participant observer. From my own experience of ethnographic study at Alsike Kloster, I found that with open-minded observation of the community, there were both questions and answers that came forward that were beyond the limits of my original research question, and had I only been looking through that lens, there is much I would have missed.

5.2 Abductive study – Analyzing inductive study with deductive theory

I have started with an inductive study of ethnography, beginning with a blank slate of observation. After compiling all of my field study notes and interview transcriptions, I analyzed my observations by applying a deductive study through the theoretical framework of existential health. Therefore, I am doing an abductive study of the spiritual activism and its impact on the boys of the Youth Academy in order to understand the factors of transformation and the impact of action.

6 Research Aim & Questions

The overall aim of my thesis research is to examine the factors in using spiritual and/or humanistic faith to inspire action in the local community towards creating a collective consciousness change.

To reach this aim, I have developed research questions for the different parts of the process:

1. What spiritual and/or humanistic factors motivate the individual receivers and activists to transform their life?

2. What impact happens on the receiving end of the action, both on an individual and a community level, in the current state of life?

3. What is the result of the spiritual activism process for both activist and receiver and how has the future been changed?

4. What obstacles are there for spiritual activism to have impact?

38 Narayan, 3.
7 PROCESS & METHODOLOGY

For an ethnography about spiritual activism studying Compassionate St. Augustine’s Youth Academy Initiative, I will be using qualitative social science research methodology based heavily in Ethnographic field work, borrowing from Action Research and Participatory Action Research (PAR), and drawing from an interfaith literature review.

7.1 Ethnographic field work

As anthropologist Harry Wolcott explains the viewpoint of ethnographic research, “Fieldwork is a way of seeing, and fieldwork is the foundation of ethnography.” 39 For this reason, I spent time as an “empathic participant/observer” 40 in as many CSA classes and events at the Youth Academy as I could during my time in Florida. I also participated in CSA planning meetings, lectures or outreach events and community actions that took place during my field work.

7.2 Action Research & Participatory Action Research

Action Research and PAR are both closely related to Ethnography in that they are all carried out in the field. Rather than manufacturing a research environment, they observe the world the way it naturally is as it is happening. Andrew Johnson points out, “Action researchers observe messy, real-world events in which humans are mucking about. These humans are inherently and wondrously unpredictable and not at all inclined to exist in hermetically sealed worlds.” 41 PAR in ethnography is “Ethnographic research conducted in partnership with members of the community or organizations serving the community, or both, with the specific purpose of bringing about structural or cultural change.” 42 This ethnography does fall into the PAR category in that by documenting the impact of the CSA Youth Academy program, it could be used to promote the program’s expansion to other juvenile facilities.

I further borrow from PAR two important aspects. The first aspect is that I am committed to incorporating participation into my research reciprocally, where “researchers and participants engage in all of [the research] steps as partners.” 43 The second aspect of PAR I borrow is its unabashed bias against unbiasedness. As Kindon, Pain and Kesby passionately argue, “Indeed a PAR-inspired understanding of social justice suggests that it is in fact unethical to look in on circumstances of pain and

40 LeCompte and Schensul, Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: The Ethnographer’s Toolkit, Book 1, 71.
41 Johnson, A Short Guide to Action Research, 92.
42 LeCompte and Schensul, Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: The Ethnographer’s Toolkit, Book 1, 99.
43 LeCompte and Schensul, 106.
poverty and yet do nothing.” 44 I am not a clinical scientist attempting to do research that is completely unbiased or value-free.

7.3 Research tools

The following is a list of specific tools and research techniques that I will use in my process:

7.3.1 Field notes / Research journal

Using Evernote (synced between phone, iPad and computer), I took abbreviated field notes 45 of my observations, people’s conversations with me or with each other, things I notice or my own thoughts. I did this only when there was a break or lull in activity, so I was as unobtrusive as possible. I used my phone so that I did not have any kind of notebook or computer with me. It is normal to have a smartphone, so it looked like I was sending a text. That way, my role as “researcher” was less disruptive. Each evening, I filled in my brief notes while my memories were fresh with as much detail as possible.

7.3.2 Photovoice

I used photovoice as part of my ethnography. As Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris write: “Photovoice is a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique. It entrusts cameras to the hands of people to enable them to act as records, and potential catalysts for change, in their own communities. It uses the immediacy of the visual image to furnish evidence and to promote an effective, participatory means of sharing expertise and knowledge.” 46 Using photovoice, I asked the student participants to take photos of things that they feel are important before their interview:

- I provided a digital camera to Mr. Winslow Wheeler, my staff contact person, who would then go get each student to take photos before their interview.
- He gave the student a simple sheet of guidance (Appendix D) to help them focus their pictures on the process of change, taking pictures that hold meaning for them of what they felt like before and during their CSA classes, and what they feel about the future.
- Mr. Wheeler would walk around with the student while they took pictures, and with the exception of one of the students, they were allowed to also go outside of the facility gates, accompanied by Mr. Wheeler.

45 LeCompte and Schensul, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: The Ethnographer’s Toolkit, Book 1*, 144.
46 Wang and Burris, “Photovoice,” 369.
Mr. Wheeler would then send me the pictures and delete them from the camera, so the next student could not see the others’ photos.

When I interviewed them, we began by using their photos as a way for them to share with me what is important to them before I ask my questions and tell them what is important to me.

The Photovoice pictures are published throughout the text of the thesis below in order to give a deeper understanding of what the boys are saying in their quotations. The Photovoice pictures are found within a frame along with the explanation the boys gave me of their photos (photos that are not inside of a frame were not taken by the boys). Photovoice was an important tool for the boys to open a door and show us their world.

7.3.3 Semi-structured interviews

To gain more in-depth understanding of the communities, I conducted semi-structured interviews. As incarcerated boys might be less likely to open up in front of each other, I felt this one-on-one open narrative interview was most appropriate.\footnote{Kindon, Pain, and Kesby, Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place, 90.} I prepared a list of questions individualized to the category of interviewee, both to gain more insight about the community itself and to get a glimpse into the transformation process of the individual. I used the questions as a guide but allowed the interviewee to share whatever they wanted to share. I made sure to cover the most important questions but did not always cover them all. With permission, I recorded the interviews to fill in the typed notes afterwards, letting them know no one else would hear the recordings.\footnote{Squirrell, Evaluation in Action: Theory and Practice for Effective Evaluation, 44.} I researched the best free transcription software and found ExpressScribe to be very useful.

- **SSI’s with the resident students in the Youth Academy** - The principal subjects of my interviews were the students at the Youth Academy. These young men are the ones whose health and well-being are of primary concern to both the program itself and to my research. To select students for interviews, rather than asking CSA teachers or Youth Academy staff to select subjects, where they might choose only “well-behaved” or “model” students, I decided to simply ask for volunteers from the two classes that I was sitting in on: Moving Meditation and Etiquette. That is how I reached my sample of the Youth Academy population to interview:\footnote{LeCompte and Schensul, Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: The Ethnographer’s Toolkit, Book 1, 131.}
Ten students volunteered ranging in age from 15 to 19.

One of the students who was scheduled to be interviewed on one of the last days of my field study was not allowed to come to his interview as Mr. Wheeler said he was “having some troubles” on that day. Thus, I interviewed nine students: Big A, Age 15; Eli, Age 16; Flame, Age 17; Isaiah, Age 18; JJ, Age 17; John Doe, Age 17; Key’shun, Age 17; Skyler, Age 19; William, Age 18. Only one of the boys had never been in a juvenile detention center before, for some this was their fourth or fifth juvenile program. For more detailed information, see Appendix B

Given the racial demographics of the Youth Academy and the incarcerated population of the United States in general, my very small sample seemed fairly representative: 2 students were white, 1 student was Hispanic/Haitian and 6 were African American.

During the interviews, I brought along my PTSD trained service dog, Peachy, so the boys could pet her and have her in their laps if they wanted to. This helped break the ice, alleviate any anxiety or stress and create more openness.

SSI’s with spiritual activists of CSA – I also asked for volunteers to interview the CSA activist teachers. There was a great deal of interest in my project from this stakeholder group, so I conducted eight verbal semi-structured interviews and one email interview: Executive Director of CSA, Caren Goldman; Meditation Teachers: KaZ Akers & Sue Fitzgerald; Compassion & Alternatives to Violence Program teacher: Nancy O’Byrne; Etiquette, Art & Music teachers: Sandi Galloway, Jackie Rock, Amber Hall, Warren Clark; Compassion teacher & Tutor: Ervin Bullock.

As this is not the primary stakeholder group for the program, these interviews are used as support for understanding the process of the student stakeholder group, as there are many stories shared of the impact and interactions with students. While all of the interviews contributed to my understanding and analysis, I did not use citations from everyone.

SSI’s with staff at the Youth Academy – In order to get a more complete understanding of the program, I interviewed Youth Academy staff. With 70 young men to care for full time at the Youth Academy, the staff are busy, and this stakeholder group was the most difficult to schedule. I conducted four staff interviews: Executive Director: Mr. Orvando Freeman; Therapist: Dr. Martine R. Wallenberg, MA, MS, RMHC; Transition Specialist: Mr. Joe Warren; Assistant Facility Administrator: Mr. Winslow Wheeler.

Johnson, A Short Guide to Action Research, 78.
Again, these interviews are to support the understanding of the student stakeholder group’s health and well-being.

Quotations from the SSI’s are one of the most important aspects of this ethnography, to give a full picture of these young men’s lives. The quotations in the body of the text are summarized in tables as they relate to the research questions.

7.3.4 Triangulation

As Johnson points out in his guidelines to Action Research, “Triangulation means looking at something from more than one perspective...[It] ensures that you are seeing all sides of a situation. It also provides greater depth and dimension, thereby enhancing your accuracy and credibility”. 51 To add a broader dimension to this ethnography, I intended to also conduct interviews with officials from the FL Department of Juvenile Justice. However, during my entire field research period I was never able to reach the appropriate officials who oversaw the Youth Academy or to get on their schedule. Given the richness of material I accumulated during my field research for the limited scope of a master’s thesis, I decided to omit the triangulation interviews.

7.3.5 Literature review

To bring in a broader context to the subject matter, I did a literature review 52 of spiritual activism in general as well as social justice background perspectives to fully inform the framework of the ethnography. The focus of my thesis is the ethnography of these youths in this community, not a broader study of research literature; however, to illustrate some aspects of the community and the aspects of spiritual activism I found there, I will bring in a connection.

8 ETHICS

8.1 Ethics for safety of the community

Compassionate St. Augustine works with young men between the ages of 13 and 19 in a juvenile detention center. These young men’s criminal records are sealed and if the care and hard work of the program participants has the desired effect, when these boys become free men, they will not return to a life of crime. Their past needs to be kept sealed so they do not face discrimination in the future. In my first contact with Compassionate St. Augustine, this was the main concern of the directors of the

51 Johnson, 93.
52 Johnson, 52.
program. I assured them that I would work with them to assure that ethical guidelines would be followed and that was of highest importance to me, as well.

Therefore, I was very upfront and conscientious going over ethical guidelines to make sure I did not do anything to jeopardize the safety of anyone involved. These were the ethical issues that we had to consider:

- For the student residents at the Youth Academy, I use only first names. As the students rarely have any freedom of choice, I allowed them to choose what name they would be called in my thesis. It might be their actual first name, a nick name or a fictitious name of their choosing. This way, when they read my thesis, they know who they are when I am referring to them, but their identity is protected.

- For the students’ Photovoice pictures, if they take any photos that include their faces, Mr. Orvando Freeman, the Youth Academy director, told me I could use them as long as I blur their faces, so they are not recognizable, and their identity is protected.

- Likewise, for my photos, I took them only of buildings, rooms, signs or property. In my thesis, I will only use photos of people that are already posted publicly on line or in media, or where the identity of any of the resident students is obscured.

- For the CSA activists and the Youth Academy staff I am using their full names. Most of them are public figures and they do not have any negative impact from me using their real names. I did ask them as part of their interviews if for any reason they would like me to not use their full names, and no one wanted their identity kept private.

**Use of names in this thesis:** Within the Youth Academy community, everyone is referred to by their last name with a Mr. or Ms. in front of it, as a sign of respect for both the staff and the young men. So, the residents refer to the director as Mr. Freeman and the director refers to a resident as Mr. Smith. The CSA teachers get called Ms. or Mr. and a first name. For this thesis, I’m referring to the staff and CSA teachers the way the youths refer to them, as Mr. Freeman or Ms. KaZ. For the young men, however, I am simply referring to them by the first names that they chose, not using a prefix. This is not showing a lack of respect for them. On the contrary, during one of the Moving Meditation classes, Ms. KaZ told the students she would call them by their first names if they wanted her to. They were visibly moved to have this personal recognition from her. JJ said to her “That means a lot.” To them, being called a personal name, a first name of their choosing, is a sign of respect for their humanity.
8.2 Ethics for my personal field work

There were also ethical concerns involved with me inserting myself into the lives of young juveniles who are already vulnerable and who have trust issues involving adults abandoning them or not being dependable. I did not want to be disruptive or intrusive, or for anyone to feel that I was prying, investigating or in any way causing harm. These are the ethical guidelines I established for my field work:

- I introduced myself at the beginning of each class that I was a part of and explained to them what I was doing there and allowed them to ask questions.
- I told the young men how long I would be involved in their classes, and then I made sure that I showed up for each class, so I showed them they were important to me and that I would show up when I said I would.
- I allowed conversations to be natural and was sensitive to how much people wanted to share with me about their own stories. Sometimes people want to be heard, to share their story with me to have a voice. Sometimes people are shy or scared. Both are ok.
- For the interviews, I went over the informed consent to be sure they feel clear and safe. I told them they could share as much or as little with me as they felt comfortable. I explained the purpose of my thesis and assured them that I had no preconceived judgement or bias about anything they shared with me.
- I explained to anyone participating in my thesis that they could end their participation entirely at any time for any reason, up until the date that I would turn my finished thesis in. I also made sure they knew that if they did, there would be no negative consequences on their treatment in the CSA or Youth Academy programs.
- I did not impose my own value system on anyone. I did my best to remain neutral, except for being compassionate, of course. I did not tell people what I believe or what religion I come from, unless asked.

I also felt that the less disruptive I was, the more natural, accurate and objective my observations of the community could be.

8.3 Informed Consent forms

I created Informed Consent forms to be used for the interviews, one for each stakeholder group. This gave me a clear organized way to go over with each person the ethical issues of confidentiality, anonymity as well as the purpose of my research, how I will use the information I gather, who will have

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53 Squirrell, Evaluation in Action: Theory and Practice for Effective Evaluation, 44.
54 Squirrell, 45.
access to the data in its different forms and how the data will be stored, where the end result will be published and who will have access to it. As a starting point, informed consents need to be gone over with each participant to make sure they understand what they are signing, not as liability coverage for me or the organizations, but as a means of building trust and safety for the participants. As Few et al reports, “A standardized approach to informed consent is not only important ethically but also serves as an introduction to the subsequent interview and can improve trust. Participants need to understand what they are being asked to do, by whom, and why.” 55 It is also important that each person understands that they can opt out in full at any point and they can choose to not participate in any activity or question for any reason. The informed consent forms can be found in Appendix C.

The student participants fell into an interesting category in terms of signed informed consents, as several of them were under the age of 18 and their parents were located in other parts of the state. Given that they were under the legal care of the Youth Academy, Mr. Freeman felt that participation in the interviews was covered as part of the program itself. Therefore, he signed the student consent form on their behalf. However, I still went over the consent form with each student who volunteered and got their verbal consent before each interview, so they were clear on all the parameters and options.

9 SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM THEORY, OBJECTIVITY & EMPATHY

During my ethnographic field study, I participated and helped out any way I could. In my past ethnographic work, the issue was raised if me “helping out” would interfere with the objectivity of me as a researcher, and I have found the opposite is true, which is why ethnography is based on participant-observation. 56 Participating in community activities helps me observe the community objectively and as LeCompte and Shensul point out, my “understandings [become] informed by the researcher’s personal experience in interaction with the study participants.” 57 Me participating helps me blend in and observe people as they naturally are. If I was there as a researcher with a clipboard passively observing, my presence would be more disruptive to the community, people would be self-conscious and alter their behavior because of my presence and I would not be able to get an objective picture of their process.

I am also not attempting to be scientifically objective. First, with living breathing human beings, that is impossible, and even if it were possible, I believe that it would be wrong. Second, I contend that it is not even desirable. As Robert Coles explains, Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor did not try to assert any kind

55 Few et al., Contribution to Change: An Approach to Evaluating the Role of Intervention in Disaster Recovery, 48.
57 LeCompte and Schensul, Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: The Ethnographer’s Toolkit, Book 1, 71.
of “value-free” research as they humanized the effects of the Great Depression. “They were, rather, a man and a woman of unashamed moral passion, of vigorous and proudly upheld subjectivity, anxious not to quantify […] but to notice, to see and hear, and in so doing, to feel, then render so that others, too, would know in their hearts as well as their heads what it was that happened”. I do not subscribe to a Fordian belief that clinical objectivity makes research better. Passion, compassion and empathy are natural to human beings and are a natural part of any social science research. It is my experience that compassion helps me to see other human beings not only with my eyes or my brain, but also with empathy, and there is more to be understood in ethnography with empathy and therefore I contend that my passion for humanity is an asset in my research. I can pay attention to smaller nuance and hear more layers of life experience if I listen with empathy than if I simply listen with my ears.

Yet, there are those who feel that by doing research with empathy, not fully objective, that I am taking it personally. And to that I say, I am, and it is a conscious choice. From the point of view of spiritual activism, injustice is personal. If we actually love our neighbor as our self, that means that when injustice happens to our neighbor, it happens to our self, so to take it personally is actually what one is supposed to do. But this is not the same as a traditional bias, as when someone believes that “this is how I was raised, this is how it has always been, this is how it should be.” A spiritual activist’s form of ‘taking it personally’ comes from years of study and spiritual practice. In fact, from the perspective of spiritual activism, standing back from injustice and suffering and saying, “that is not me” and not taking it personally is part of the problem. The point of spiritual activism is to take injustice personally, as Laura Perez describes, it is “founded on the knowledge that we are made of the same stuff, resonant in the Mayan concept of In Lak’ech, tú eres mi otro yo: you are my other me,” also echoing the Lakota tradition of “Mitákuye oyás ’i, all my relations. We are all connected through spirit.”

That being said, I have certainly entered the research project with an open mind, searching in earnest to find simply what is, not what I hope to find. As Johnson points out, I will “fairly represent all aspects of what [I am] studying.” Here I am also following his advice: “Any biases you are aware of should be stated up front so that readers of your report are able to take this into account”. So, I am stating clearly up front: I care about these incarcerated young men at the Youth Academy.

58 Coles, Doing Documentary Work, Loc 1252.
60 Johnson, A Short Guide to Action Research, 144.
61 Johnson, 67.
10 SOCIAL CONTEXT: WHERE THESE BOYS COME FROM

Isaiah, one of the young men I interviewed, told me about the neighborhood he grew up in: “I grew up in a rough neighborhood. Miami is kind of crazy. Some people only know about Miami Beach and South Beach, but on the other side, it’s a lot going on, a lot of murders, a lot of gang violence where I grew up. My mom worked two jobs, there is a lot of poverty and a lot of gangs going on in the projects and the HUD housing over there.” Staff members told me that this low-income neighborhood background is typical of almost all the kids incarcerated at the Youth Academy. Their racial make-up is also reflective of the same socio-economic forces: walking through the hallways you are immediately struck with the fact that the largest majority of boys at the Youth Academy are African American, many are Hispanic, and only a small minority are white, despite the fact that the demographics of the overall US population are 13% African American, 16% Hispanic and 64% white. This racial disparity is no accident. These inner-city low-income ghettos were created through explicit racist housing policies that perpetuate a cycle of institutional discrimination connected through income inequality, mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline. These are some of the Social Determinants of Health that the World Health Organization (WHO) have studied in their mission to promote equality of health and opportunity both between and within countries worldwide. This chapter gives a brief context of the importance these social justice factors play in the lives of the young men at the center of this ethnography.

10.1 Racism and income inequality in America

In the 1930’s, Roosevelt set up the Federal Housing Association (FHA) to regulate home mortgage loans and help create homeownership after the Great Depression. The major problem, however, is that the policies of the FHA were explicitly racist. The FHA created color coded maps to indicate the potential risk of providing a loan for various neighborhoods. “Redlined” neighborhoods were deemed too risky for any mortgage support; listed under “detrimental influences” that would get a neighborhood redlined was a “concentration of Negroes.” Criminal Justice professor Bridget Diamond-Welch writes, “The FHA Underwriting Manual gave race as a stated reason to deny loans...between 1934 and when this practice was made illegal in 1968, the federal government underwrote loans for 120 billion dollars. Less than 2% of these loans went to minorities.” So, during this period of blatant racial housing discrimination, the wealth gap between the African American communities and the white suburban

62 Cole, “What You Need to Know about the School to Prison Pipeline.”
63 Marmot et al., Closing the Gap in a Generation, iii.
64 Diamond-Welch, “Same as It Ever Was.”
communities grew exponentially. “Most of us gain and maintain our wealth through paying off a mortgage and owning a home.”

Adding to this cycle of inequality is the fact that public schools in America are funded, for the most part, through property taxes. Therefore, poor neighborhoods where property is worth less will have less money and resources for their schools than rich (white) neighborhoods where property is worth more. A school that has less revenue coming in from local property taxes will have less money to hire quality teachers, they will have larger class sizes and less funding for electives or Advanced Placement classes. So, regardless of the legal desegregation of schools, the racist housing policies have drastically affected the quality of schooling and the opportunities for higher education and scholarships for areas with a “concentration of Negroes” in America. This has subsequently affected job and income opportunities for these communities, cycling back into lack of opportunities for homeownership or the accumulation of equity and wealth. This is the cycle of systemic racism and income inequality as it is built into the American infrastructure that this ethnography takes place within.

10.2 Mass incarceration as systemic racism

Since Nixon first started the heavy criminalization of drugs in the 1970’s, to Reagan declaring a “war on drugs” and the Clintons getting tough on crime and going after “super predators,” the prison population has exploded in the US over the last 40 years. As Michelle Alexander writes: “The United States now has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, dwarfing the rates of nearly every developed country, even surpassing those in highly repressive regimes like Russia, China, and Iran.” The heaviest burden of the prison boom has fallen on people of color, especially on African Americans. “The United States imprisons a larger percentage of its black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid. In Washington, D.C., our nation’s capital, it is estimated that three out of four young black men (and nearly all those in the poorest neighborhoods) can expect to serve time in prison. Similar rates of incarceration can be found in black communities across America.” Arrests and convictions for drug offenses has contributed more to the systemic mass incarceration of people of color than any other factor, and the vast majority of cases are for minor offenses. Four out of five arrests are for possession while only one out of five is for drug sales. Non-violent marijuana possession accounts for the majority of drug arrests and it is disturbingly racially disproportionate. In Cynthia Nixon’s gubernatorial bid, she is supporting

65 Diamond-Welch.
67 Diamond-Welch, “Same as It Ever Was.”
69 Alexander, 6–7.
70 Alexander, 60.
legalizing marijuana mostly because of its use for the incarceration of black and brown people. She states that 80% of New Yorkers arrested for marijuana are people of color, despite the fact that whites use marijuana at slightly higher rates and make up a much higher percentage of the population. “We have to stop putting people of color in jail for something that white people do with impunity,” she said.  

Mass incarceration is not only about black people being in jails. Even upon release, due to their criminal record they face discrimination in employment, housing, and many basic services. People convicted of felonies may not apply for food stamps or seek certain kinds of assistance and in several states, felons lose their right to vote. This is why Michelle Alexander has come to call mass incarceration the new Jim Crow. She explains, “In some states, black men have been admitted to prison on drug charges at rates twenty to fifty times greater than those of white men. And in major cities wracked by the drug war, as many as 80 percent of young African American men now have criminal records and are thus subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives.” Professor Tricia Rose talks about the lifelong impact this systemic racism has on communities of color in America and the Ban-the-Box movement that is fighting this discrimination. On most applications for jobs, housing, loans or other opportunities, there is a box that you have to check if you have ever been convicted of a felony. This one simple box will get most applications automatically rejected, no matter what the current circumstances of the applicant, and this is part of the way that mass incarceration imitates Jim Crow. There are initiatives in many states to pass legislation that makes this type of box illegal discrimination, banning the box in order to fight the continued racial control system of mass incarceration. 

### 10.3 The school-to-prison pipeline

Another factor to fill in the background of many of the young men at the Youth Academy, is in understanding the aspect of American systemic racism known as the school-to-prison pipeline. After Congress allowed the Reagan-era assault weapons ban to lapse in the early 1990’s, there was a deadly spate of school shootings. Instead of addressing this problem with gun control laws, the issue of school safety was dealt with by implementing “zero tolerance” policies mandating harsh punishments for students guilty of both minor and major infractions, leading to a severe increase in suspensions and expulsions. As sociologist Dr. Cole writes “over a four-year period, expulsions [increased] by nearly 32 times after zero tolerance policies were implemented in Chicago schools. They jumped from just 21 expulsions in the 1994–95 school year to 668 in 1997–98.” When these young people are denied an

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71 Wang, “Cynthia Nixon Puts Legalizing Marijuana Front and Center of Campaign.”
73 Rose, “How Structural Racism Works.”
74 Cole, “What You Need to Know about the School to Prison Pipeline,” 2.
education, they are instead sent back to the troubled neighborhoods many of them come from where they are more likely to fall into a criminal environment. As Dr. Cole points out, “Many students who express behavioral issues at school are acting out in response to stressful or dangerous conditions in their homes or neighborhoods, so removing them from school and returning them to a problematic or unsupervised home environment hurts rather than helps their development.”  

The second “solution” to school shootings was introducing School Resource Officers (SRO’s), meaning schools had a permanent police presence on campus. Rather than protecting children from lone gunmen, what this policy actually ended up doing was transferring the handling of regular school discipline issues to police, often escalating minor infractions and leading to an increase in arrests of children under the age of 15 and referrals to the juvenile courts. Dr. Cole concludes that there is over a decade of empirical research that proves that “zero tolerance policies, punitive disciplinary measures like suspensions and expulsions, and the presence of SROs on campus have led to more and more students being pushed out of schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. In short, these policies and practices created the school-to-prison pipeline and sustain it today.”

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75 Cole, 4.
76 Cole, 3.
Dr. Cole also reports “data from across the U.S. that illustrate punishment and school-related arrests show that the racial disparity in incarceration begins with the school-to-prison pipeline […] Black students are more than three times as likely to be suspended than their white peers. Troublingly, this disparity begins as early as preschool. Nearly half of all preschool students suspended are Black, though they represent just 18 percent of total preschool enrollment.” 77 Dr. Cole goes on to detail how evidence shows that the overly harsh punishment of Black students is concentrated in the southern states, where slavery, Jim Crow and a long history of violence against Black people is part of the racist legacy evident in everyday life. “In many of the school districts located in these states, Black students comprised 100 percent of students suspended or expelled in a given school year.” 78 Given this racial bias in simple school discipline and given what we already know about the systemic racism inherent in the American prison system, Dr. Cole states, “it is no surprise that Black and Latino students comprise 70 percent of those who face referral to law enforcement or school-related arrests.” 79

11 SAINT JOHN’S YOUTH ACADEMY

11.1 High-risk residential facility

The Youth Academy is a high-risk residential juvenile facility. It is not maximum-risk, for the boys who have committed the most serious of crimes; it is one step below. When you read the description on the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice website it says: “High-risk residential facilities are hardware-secure with perimeter fencing and locking doors.” 80 The experience of walking into the facility for the first time is daunting. The fencing is twenty feet tall, topped with coils of razor wire. There is an outside gate that you have to get buzzed in through by the 24-hour receptionist sitting in the control room with TV monitors of the entire facility. As you walk down the fifty-foot outdoor fenced corridor, you hear a loud clang as the gate closes behind you. There is an outdoor recreation area to the left that is sometimes full of young men playing basketball or just standing outside in the sun. One wall faces the parking lot and there are usually a row of young men leaning up against the wall just looking out over the cars. One day as I arrived JJ was standing there with some friends and he was yelling “I love you” to passersby. Ms. Brown, who was recently promoted from being in the reception booth, was leaving and he yelled “I love you, Ms. Brown.” She answered, "Do you now? Then let me hear you shout louder." And he shouted

77 Cole, 5–6.
78 Cole, 6.
79 Cole, 7.
80 “Residential Facilities | Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.”
louder, “I love you, Ms. Brown.” It was very sweet at the same time as they were divided by two layers of 20-foot fencing and razor wire.

When you get into the building there is a lobby with a couch and a couple of chairs, a guest bathroom and a window with a tiny slot into the reception control room. They have made an attempt to make it inviting for family members visiting, but it does not quite feel comfortable. You have to sign in at the reception window. If you are going into the residence halls or classrooms you have to leave your cell phone and car keys, go through a metal detector and have your bags looked through. To go into the next room, you go through a big metal door that is locked with a key that is at least 3 times the size of a normal house key on big key chains that have several of these oversized keys. The boys mention these key chains to me; they are a big symbol of control in their lives. You cannot move from one area to another without them. When you walk through the door, it slams shut behind you with a loud bang, as if to emphasize that you are locked in. It slams fast and hard and loud and serious. There is a small hallway where you go across to the administration offices or through the metal detector to the residence wings, classrooms and counselors’ offices – again needing an oversized key for either door, again hearing them shut resolutely behind you. The banging shut of heavy doors is something that can be heard throughout the day wherever you are in the facility.

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81 Photo: Shanti Grafstrom
11.2 Five dorm wings become home to 70 boys

The Youth Academy houses a maximum of 70 residents at one time. The staff refer to the young men there as “residents” or “youths,” not wanting to give them criminal or delinquent labels. The residents are organized into five different dormitory wings, which they refer to as “pods,” where each youth gets his own room. The rooms have a metal toilet, a cement slab bed with a mattress on top and two narrow windows. They have their names on the doors, not just numbers, and they can decorate the walls with pictures and put a few books on the window sills, but the “rooms” bear a striking resemblance to “cells.” When the young men arrive, their hair is cut, they receive Youth Academy issue clothing and hygiene products and are given an introduction concerning dress code and hygiene practice, daily schedules, food, grievance procedure, emergency procedures, performance planning, staff advisor or youth groups, and access to the Florida Abuse Hotline. There are visiting hours, though for many of the youths they are far away from their home counties. Some get visitors, some might not. Every three months the Youth Academy have a family day with a cook-out and events out on the field. Isaiah told me his mom drives up from Miami, five hours each way, to come up for family day.

The Youth Academy recently organized the pods so that the boys progress through the pods as they journey through the program. One pod is for the new arrivals so that, as Director Freeman explains, “the new youths don’t have to impress the youths who have been here a while,” and then the boys progress through the pods based on their growth through the program, as measured by certain standards

“This picture is a picture of keys, to me I took picture of the keys, cause the staff is controlling your life, you can’t leave without them opening a door for you, you’re controlled.” ~ Eli

Figure 6 ~ Photovoice: Eli. Mr. Winslow’s keychain.
of behavior set by the Youth Academy, until they move into the independent living pod where the boys reside for their final weeks before they graduate and leave the program. This pod has a living room with a TV, these young men get to wear their own clothes and, as Eli describes it, “The staff are more slack on us.” They also get to start leaving the Youth Academy for outings into the community. During one of the Moving Meditation classes, Key’shun shared about his first outing. He said he’s been at the Youth Academy for almost 24 months and he had gone to the fast-food restaurant Wendy’s with Mr. Freeman for lunch. He said it was the first time he had been outside without shackles and “it felt weird.” He was very unsure and asked Ms. KaZ, “Isn’t that bad though if you haven’t been out?” and Ms. KaZ just said, “It’s an adjustment. It’s ok.” The independent living pod is the Youth Academy’s way of helping the young men to adjust to being free, allowing them to leave for supervised job interviews, college tours and family visits to help them transition into a better life on the outside.

“Figure 7 ~ Photovoice: John Doe. St. Johns Youth Academy sign, deliberately put up by Mr. Freeman for arriving students. “That’s what I see when I first got here, I was out there like dang, I’m going to another program. And then when I seen the sign, it ain’t seem like a bad program. All my other programs, they ain’t have sign like that. It made me realize, oh, it’s a football team or something, home of the Eagles. I could probably join that, that’s my sport I like and I’m very good at that. So yeah. So, the sign made me feel like maybe this would be a home instead of craziness.” ~ John Doe

11.3 Educational services

As you drive up, the sign reads “Youth Academy, Home of the Eagles.” This is similar to most any high school in America that claims to be the home of its sports mascot. The Director, Mr. Orvando Freeman, put this sign up on purpose when he took over two years ago in order to make the place feel more like a school and less like a juvenile prison. When I interviewed John Doe, he had taken a picture of the sign
and according to him, Mr. Freeman’s plan had worked: “That’s what I seen when I first got here, I was out there like dang, I’m going to another program. And then when I seen the sign, it ain’t seem like a bad program. All my other programs, they ain’t have sign like that. It made me realize, oh, it’s a football team or something, home of the Eagles. I could probably join that, that’s my sport I like and I’m very good at that. So yeah, the sign made me feel like maybe this would be a home instead of craziness.”

The Youth Academy program provides educational services through the St. Johns County School District. They provide six classes of instruction a day, five days a week in English, Math, Science and Social Studies with classes from morning until late afternoon. They also have one elective course, though it is typically used to provide additional reading assistance to needy students or vocational training, and there are no school system resources offered for electives that are offered at a regular school (which is where Compassionate St Augustine comes in). Youth receive credits for education and career classes completed, and depending on the student’s age and future plans, they can either transfer their class credits to finish high school when they leave, or they can receive their GED, General Education Diploma or high school equivalency, on premises before they leave.

In the afternoon the residents have recreation time until 6pm when they return to their own rooms until lights out at 9pm. The afternoons can be spent either outside, as each pod has their own fenced in rec area with a basketball hoop, or inside with weight lifting and gym equipment. True to the sign, the Youth Academy also has sports teams in American Football, Basketball and Track. The teams practice after classes and the teams even compete against other schools. John Doe did get to be on the football team, as he shared with me, “I got to be on the football team and the track team. I get to be on the track team again, next week they are fixing to take the track team out to race against some people. Last track team I was on we came in first place, and the football team, too.” The first day I came to the Youth Academy with Caren Goldman, the Compassionate St Augustine Director, she bumped into a young man she knew in the hallway who was getting ready to get out, going to college on a football scholarship. For many of the young men here, sport is not only a pastime, but one of the only ways out into a better future they can see. So the “Youth Academy, Home of the Eagles” sign speaks deeply.

11.4 Vocational services

The Youth Academy also offers vocational planning and training. If the young men do not go back to school, the goal is to help them find jobs when they leave so they avoid criminality and a return to the adult prison system. They offer job-related training, including being certified as a safe kitchen worker in order to help get employed in restaurants, or training towards a truck driving license which can make decent wages. They also get help in writing up resumes, cover letters and practicing for interviews.
Mr. Joe Warren is in the newly created role of “Transition Specialist” to help the students in their transition as they leave the Youth Academy and find their place out in the world. He counsels each student in the weeks before they leave in order to define their goals and their next steps and help them achieve them. He helps the students apply for college or for jobs. He helps the students practice in role playing job interviews, then drives them to the real ones, making sure they are “dressed for success” in a shirt and tie. Mr. Warren told me, “The last 3 or 4 months I’ve had about four kids actually get hired before they left here. They got requests for interviews, I take them to their interview, they dress for success, and they get hired. One guy is with UPS, one guy is with a landscaping outfit. Another kid is going to be working with the Department of Transportation, the crew who cleans culverts, and that crew, if he commits to them for 18 months, they are going to pay for his education and commit to him for 4 years and he will have a degree.”

“That’s a stressful part of the day…at 6 o’clock, that is when you are sitting down and thinking. I took a picture of that to represent, at the end of the day we are still incarcerated, basically. That is a slab. You can look out the windows and reminisce.” ~ Isaiah

11.5 Mental health services

The Youth Academy also provides mental health services with group, individual and family counseling, including anger management, empathy and compassion development and substance abuse recovery. There are several in-house licensed counselors, like Dr. Martine Wallenberg, that meet with the students regularly. Dr. Wallenberg says she sees herself as an activist of thought, helping the young men to change
their patterns of thinking: “I kind of look at myself as if I am trying to find out who is this individual and what happened? And then in there, to try and help him figure out exactly the patterns and what has caused him to be the kind of person that he is and to have gotten into the trouble that he’s gotten into and to help him understand that his pattern, there can be change in his pattern.” Many of the students I interviewed would mention things their counselors had talked to them about. The facility contracts out for psychiatric services and many of the residents are on medication for various psychological conditions. During one of the classes I sat in on, the resident nurse knocked on the door to say it was time for medications, and several of the boys stepped out one by one to take their pills.

As part of the curriculum they also offer life skills development classes, including a program called Impact of Crime, where both perpetrators and victims of crimes come in as speakers to help teach the youth empathy. They have a program called “Thinking for a Change” which is designed to help them change thought patterns, make better decisions and change their future choices. Mr. Warren, along with his transition services, offers an anger management group for the more volatile young men. As a new program, attempting to keep them from throwing chairs, punching walls or getting into fights, he has given them all a “volcano pass” that says “Think first…Don’t erupt… See Mr. Warren.” If they feel themselves starting to boil over, about to erupt, they can give the pass to any staff member and be escorted to Mr. Warren’s office, to talk it out with him instead. Mr. Warren also sends out reminders to all the staff members on positive behavior management, starting with “Always treat youth with respect and preserve their dignity,” and ending with “Catch kids being good…..A LOT, and let them know that you appreciate it!!!”

11.6 Statistics and reality

In researching the sociology statistics for racism and mass incarceration, the numbers and policies on the page had real life faces. I can see the boys I learned to know in the Youth Academy. I wasn’t just reading about the school-to-prison pipeline. I could hear Flame telling me how he got expelled, speaking longingly of having a locker, of how much he used to like school. All of these boys were referred into the juvenile justice system at an early age. Of the nine boys I interviewed, there was only one who had never been locked up in a juvenile facility before, and that was Big A, who is 15 years old. Many of these boys are smart, Isaiah and John Doe both mentioned how they got good grades in school but out of school, they fell in with the wrong crowd in their neighborhoods. Isaiah told me “I fell in the wrong category and got in trouble, but I always had a lot of respect, I had A’s and B’s in school, but when I got out of school, my environment got me in trouble.” If schools had handled discipline with more tolerance, offering more options or assistance instead of expulsion to some of these boys who might be
acting out for a variety of reasons, many of the boys I met might never have ended up going down this path at all.

Photovoice proved to be a good way for them to guide me, for them to have their own voice without my questions telling them what is important. Through the photos, the young men were able to show me their everyday reality. The student was the first one to decide what to show me, and they interpreted the photos as they understood them. Through the digital camera they were able to show me much more of their life at the Youth Academy than I would otherwise have had access to. This is especially an important technique when working with a vulnerable population such as the boys at the juvenile center, where it might be harder for them to open up to an outsider and where it is impossible for me to spend a lengthy amount of time with them.

"That gives me a sense of I’m not in a place where I need to be forever. That barbed wire, that’s not supposed to be there, that’s not for me. Gives me a sense that I need to tighten up with my life and go home cause this is for real.”  ~ JJ
12 COMPASSIONATE ST. AUGUSTINE’S PROGRAM OF CLASSES

12.1 Coming together of two communities to serve at-risk youth

When Caren Goldman reached out to the Youth Academy in January of 2016, Mr. Freeman was able to make a wish list of what it means to him to truly be an academy. Due to the real estate value-based funding of the American school system, the mostly low-income youths incarcerated in this facility have scarcely had the opportunities to partake in full-fledged art or music programs at their regular schools before they ended up at the Youth Academy, so for Mr. Freeman to be able to expose them to piano lessons, drumming, photography, sculpture, and painting would have truly seemed like pie in the sky dreaming. But everything that he put on his list, Ms. Caren went out into the community to find.

At first Ms. Caren announced the Youth Academy Initiative to the extended network of Compassionate St. Augustine. As Ms. Sue explains, “I’m a retired teacher, and mindfulness had made such a beautiful impact in my own life, so I wanted to spread it and share it wherever I could. When Caren said, ‘we’re going to do this initiative at the Youth Academy,’ I said, ‘I have these skills in mindfulness, I don’t know if that would be needed.’ And Caren looked at me and said, ‘Sue, that is one of the things on their list!’ So, I was the first class.” Ms. Caren also called on local artists who taught classes in several mediums, including anime storytelling, jewelry making, and photography culminating in a photography exhibit at a downtown gallery. Music classes took the form of piano, drumming, and guitar. Ms. Sandi’s professional organization had collected over 200 teddy bears for the St Augustine first responders to hand out to children at emergency scenes, and when the police officer asked for her card to send a thank you note and found out that she teaches etiquette, he passed on her information to Ms. Caren. Ms. Sandi told me, “Before you know it, the phone was ringing from Compassionate St Augustine saying we want to talk to you. Etiquette was one of the things that Orvando had wanted in his program, along with the mindfulness and the other things he wanted for the kids. So, when I got introduced to Caren, it was a perfect fit. So, we’ve been working this program together.” CSA has brought in programs for building bicycles, making box guitars donated to a children’s hospital, and designing tiles for a public art installation honoring African American Civil Rights history. Eli, one of the boys I interviewed summed it up this way: “They try to make this program more fun than it is, they try to bring things to us so that it doesn’t feel like we’re locked up. Ms. Caren tries to bring opportunities to us and stuff.”

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32 Rose, “How Structural Racism Works.”
12.2 Growing volunteer program of classes

The CSA classes happen in the afternoons or early evenings after the standard curriculum classes are done. The volunteer teacher will arrive, get buzzed through the gate, sign in and give the list of students for the class either to the receptionist or to a staff member, if they have one who is assigned to their particular class. A staff member goes and rounds up the students from their pods and brings them to the classroom – sometimes the conference room in the administration building, sometimes a staff breakroom, sometimes a big multi-purpose room. The volunteer teacher waits while the students are gathered, which hopefully takes 10 or 15 minutes, but one evening Ms. KaZ and I waited for 50 minutes. Then the class commences and when the teacher is done, it’s time to let a staff member know it’s time to escort the boys back to their pods again. After class, I would spend some time waiting with some of the boys outside the conference room while Ms. KaZ talked privately with a couple students, so they could all be taken back to the pods together, and a couple of the boys who possibly had attention deficit issues paced the hallways, played with the paper shredder, looked through the staff fridge and had a hard time keeping their hands still.

In our interview, Ms. Caren told me of the experience of developing this program on the ground in real time: “Basically, what we’ve done with an all-volunteer core of people, is something that hasn’t happened in Florida before. And just when we think, we have this under control, something happens. There is nothing predictable about working with the juvenile or the adult system. It’s so outdated. We’re all learning along the way.” The logistics are sometimes a bit shaky, but the dedication to the at-risk youth overcomes the obstacles and the visible benefits over the last two years keeps the staff and the

83 Photo: Compassionate St Augustine Website
activists not only moving forward but wanting to expand and grow. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) and Sequel, the private company who also has other juvenile facilities in Florida and other states, are both noticing the results the Youth Academy is getting through mindfulness, art and music. Ms. Caren told me, “And as far as the DJJ is concerned, it’s been a game changer. They would like us to be introducing this in all the facilities in the state. That is not going to happen. We’re volunteers. But we can create a template, so that their communities can use this in a sense as a model.”

At a CSA planning meeting I attended the Youth Academy activists talked about their desire to create a CSA program resource room attached to the library that the CSA book club is setting up. They brainstorm ways to smooth out the logistics, to propose ways to help the Youth Academy make the program better and more sustainable. They talk of Mr. Freeman and the staff’s commitment to the kids and the results they’ve all seen the last couple of years and Caren says, “Right now, this IS the gold standard. But this isn’t enough. I’m not ok with homeostasis.”

Mr. Freeman told me of his holistic vision of the Youth Academy: “The big goal down the line is to truly be an academy. When you think of academy, I think of a highly functioning learning environment, not just scholastics, but life learning, so kids can come here, and you really see it as an opportunity, and you take full advantage of that. And that every program you go through, you take a piece. And it starts to fill those voids, fill those empty places inside of you. And you come out a truly healthy well-adjusted young man.” This is the vision that CSA is helping to create through all the resources, classes and compassion they can rally – to fill in the voids, to bring healing, to give tools and opportunities to help these boys become well-adjusted young men.

“That is rec, that is the basketball court. That is the one place where we can go outside, chill out, get fresh air and stuff, it makes me feel good. You can see the camera.” ~ JJ
13 Factors of Motivation to Transform

The first research question is “What spiritual and/or humanistic factors motivate the individual receivers and activists to transform their life?” In the interviews, I asked about the factors of transformation, and of course, for the different stakeholder groups the transformation is different. For the main voices of this ethnography, the boys at the Youth Academy, transforming their lives is about them changing their mindset, their behavior, and their futures. For the activists and the staff, transforming their lives is about them changing their spiritual or humanistic faith into action and service for others – though as most of them also told me, this changes their own lives just as much as it changes the lives of the young men.

13.1 Spiritual factors for Youth Academy students

In the few short weeks that I was a part of the lives of the young men at the Youth Academy, I am sure that I did not earn the level of trust needed for them to let me in to their deepest spiritual motivations. However, in their interviews they shared spiritual factors of transformation ranging from existential self-identity, to growing, to recognizing life is short, to answered prayers, to simply saying yes.

13.1.1 Eli – care & self-identity

Eli had less than two weeks left at the Youth Academy when I arrived at my first Moving Meditation class and he was the first one to volunteer for the interviews. His face was open and smiling during the whole class, he participated whole heartedly, he asked to borrow the book that Ms. KaZ read from, he was thirstily drinking everything in. After the class in the hallway he came up and immediately asked me, “What is a soul?” Not satisfied with just that knowledge he then asked me about God, and we started talking about God as love. Later in our interview, he brought it up again and said, “Yeah, God is love, a wise person. That’s big. If he is real, he does have love for all of us more than all of us combined with all the love we have. I feel that is true. I feel like he loves us a lot. How I think I feel about a girl, that is how he feels about me.” When we talked about factors that motivated him to transform, he told me he was able to learn from the meditation class because it seemed like Ms. KaZ cared. About all the CSA teachers he said “If nobody cares, they care. That’s how I see it.” And their care motivated him to learn. A bit later when we talked about life changes, he told me, “Another reason is for myself, cause I don’t want to keep coming to places like this. And I don’t want to keep being labeled a person that is not going to make it in life, a person that is not going to do nothing.” Then he smiled, almost happy, like he didn’t mind people thinking he wasn’t going to make it, “That is motivation, though, I’m going to do better because they thought I wasn’t going to do better.”
13.1.2 Flame – defining self & making the most of God’s gifts

Flame is a gentle, quiet young man. He told me he used to be homeless, he was expelled from school because he has anger issues, but all I could see was his sweet side and it was hard for me to imagine him ever being violent. He also shared this existential self-identity motivation. In his Photovoice, he had taken a picture of the neighboring adult county jail (like many of the boys did) as a symbol of what he wants to avoid. He told me, “That’s the jail, I’m not trying to go there, you know what I mean? I want this to be my last stop, you know what I mean? I don’t want to reoffend. I don’t want to be labeled as a criminal no more.” Defining the “I am” is a profound spiritual motivation. He also shared that he feels “God does things in mysterious ways, and everything I do I try to get something out of, you know what I mean. So, when I go in, I try to do everything she tells us to do, cause it’s going to help me.” He also shared with me that he had prayed for help just before he got put in the Moving Meditation class and he feels this was an answer to his prayer, so Flame has a sense of God working in his life, so he is motivated to respond and participate and make the most out of everything that God brings his way.

13.1.3 Skyler – changing his own mindset

Skyler was a few days away from his 19th birthday when I interviewed him, just a couple of weeks away from going home. He is what one would call “chill” and seems very laid back. He told me he hadn’t gotten in any trouble, then he paused and said “lately.” He was also very quick to laugh, smile, and get excited. He and William had gotten to be very close friends in the Moving Meditation class. Skyler told me that in the regular classes you can’t really make friends very easily, but in the meditation class, he was able to connect with people and now he and William are best friends and they both opened up very easily. After just 5 weeks when I was leaving they were both saying, “Love you, Ms. Shanti,” not one bit like hardened criminals. He had been in Ms. KaZ’s class for 5 months and when I asked him what factors had made him able to change he said, “I mean, I wanted to say it’s the class, but it’s a big part of me, since I’ve been here. Growing up, I was always young, so I don’t care if I get in trouble, when you’re young, it ain’t nothing. [...] I’m done with all that. It’s done clicked in my head. Plus I’ve matured as I’ve been here. I’ve grown up some.” At first he was going to say his cause for transformation was factors outside of himself, but then he realized it is because of himself, his own growth, and his change of mindset.

13.1.4 Isaiah – life is short

Isaiah is an 18-year-old who is quiet and quite serious. If I didn’t know he was a resident at a juvenile facility I could easily see him as a manager at a cell phone store. He had only been to a few Moving Meditation classes but applied what he learned in a transformative way. He missed several classes
because he was volunteer cleaning the pods, sometimes working until 9pm, in order to impress the judge. Isaiah also shared how his mindset changed as he matured, and how he got motivated to change when he realized that life is short: “I used to have an anger problem but as I got older I realized you know life is so much more than just this in and out of jail world. I had to sit back and think, there is so much going on, so much you could do. Life is short.”

13.1.5 Big A – saying yes

Big A is just 15 years old, and not particularly big at all. His name starts with an A and he says Big A is a nick name, so I’m thinking he must have a little brother whose name also starts with an A? He is quiet and says he tries to just keep to himself. This is his first time in juvenile detention and from all of his answers, from his mannerisms and body language I get the sense that he just wants to get out and stay out, as if it’s just a big mistake that he’s here and he just needs to get back home. All things considered, that is not a bad attitude to have. His whole demeanor reminds me that he’s just a boy, younger than my little nephew. For Big A, his motivation was very simple. His answer was that he was able to change because Mr. Warren asked him if he wanted to participate in the CSA classes and “I said yeah.” Sometimes, that is all the spiritual motivation you need. It can be a beginning, or it can be everything – saying yes.
STUDENTS: What spiritual factors motivate the individual receivers to transform their life?

| “I used to have an anger problem but as I got older I realized you know life is so much more than just this in and out of jail world. I had to sit back and think, there is so much going on, so much you could do. Life is short.” | Isaiah |
| “Another reason is for myself, cause I don’t want to keep coming to places like this. And I don’t want to keep being labeled a person that is not going to make it in life, a person that is not going to do nothing. That is motivation, though, I’m going to do better because they thought I wasn’t going to do better. That is how I see it.” | Eli |
| “God does things in mysterious ways, and everything I do I try to get something out of, you know what I mean. So, when I go in, I try to do everything [Ms. KaZ] tells us to do, cause it’s going to help me.” | Flame |
| “I wanted to say it’s the class, but it’s a big part of me, since I’ve been here. I was always young, so I don’t care if I get in trouble, when you’re young, it ain’t nothing. I can do what I want when I want, there ain’t no major consequence. But now when I’m 18 and stuff, I look at that county [jail] over there and I’m like nah, you don’t want to go up in there. So, you just gotta chill when you get out. […] I’ve matured as I’ve been here. I’ve grown up some.” | Skyler |
| “Mr. Warren, asked if we wanted to do the class and I said yeah” | Big A |

13.2 Humanistic factors for Youth Academy students

13.2.1 Key’shun – not wanting to see his family stressing

Key’shun is 17; his body looks like he could be in his twenties but his face looks much younger, he has the eyes of a teenager desperately trying to figure things out. Key’shun has a harder time opening up or connecting right away, or at least he has a harder time making eye contact. He has spent almost two years at the Youth Academy, which is much longer than the average of 9 to 12 months. When I asked him what it is that helped him be able to change he told me, “My grandmother and my sister helps motivate me to change. They just like, I don’t want to see them stressing over something that I can change. So, I don’t want to be in trouble no more because most of my family members are in prison, are incarcerated. So, I don’t want them to see me go down the same road as my uncles and my cousins. I want to change.”

13.2.2 William – being a good father to his 2-year-old daughter

William, who is Skyler’s best friend, William says they are like brothers, is also motivated by family – his own daughter. He is 18 and has a two-year-old girl and while I was there he asked me if I could print a picture of his girl and his baby mama for him to hang up in his room as motivation. He only had a few days before going home on the day of our interview and when he was talking about changing he said, “Don’t do it again, stay out. Not to reoffend. I got a daughter. Really, I just really want to get out and be with her, do what I gotta do to raise her right. That’s the main thing I’m gonna be focused on when I go home.”
13.2.3 Eli – his mom, his family

When I asked Eli what it was that helped him to change or learn, he didn’t even hesitate: “My mom. My mom, I put her through so much, it’s crazy. I can’t believe we still have a good relationship. In here, we rebuilt our relationship. When I was out of here, I never used to call her, when I came to jail, I never called her. I used to, but then, I don’t know. That was one reason I was able to change, to do better for her.” Then he talked about his self-identification and how society is daring him to prove them wrong, then he returned to, “Another reason is my family, that is another thing. My family. That’s really it, my reasons to change.” Eli was full of dreams for his departure into the world just three days after our interview and he smiled when he thought about his mom arriving to pick him up. “I’ve changed a lot. My mom is going to be like, what?? When I get home, when Monday comes, she’s going to have a big talk in the car, like always. She coming to get me.” So, given how changing for the sake of loved ones was a theme among my small sample of boys, having a stabilizing family member is also an anchoring motivational force.

13.2.4 John Doe – living up to his potential for the sake of loved ones

John Doe was the kid in the etiquette class who was always cracking jokes with a mischievous (and cute) smile on his face, so I wasn’t entirely surprised when he grinned and chose the name John Doe for my thesis. At the end of the etiquette class, Ms. Sandi and Mr. Warren takes the boys out to a nice dinner at an Italian restaurant, and I sat across from John Doe as we all practiced using our proper forks and table manners. He and the boy next to him were sitting thought out the dinner looking around at the other...
guests in the restaurant making comments like, “Hey, look at that couple, he didn’t hold the chair out for her.” His eyes are bright, and he loves to learn things. In his Photovoice John Doe took a picture of the wall in his room, covered with certificates. He explains, “I got my certificates. I’m very talented and as far as education, I love school. I like to keep my certificates up, when I’m in my room I look at them and I think, why am I doing the things I’m doing, I’m a smart kid, I shouldn’t be in this type of predicament.” On his wall, next to the certificates are a lot of photos of people and he goes on, “And then I have my pictures of my family. The top one there is my brother, I call him my brother cause I see him as a brother, and he died. I came in here and he had a month left, and he left and then he died while I was in here. And I got his picture up. And then I got my other family, I just look at them, I miss them and stuff and be waiting to come home to them. They are my motivation to do good in here.” Living up to his full potential for the sake of his loved ones probably falls in both spiritual and humanistic categories, however, his human connection to his brother who had died and to his family was the most palpable.

“I got my certificates. I’m very talented and as far as education, I love school. I like to keep my certificates up, when I’m in my room I look at them and I think, why am I doing the things I’m doing, I’m a smart kid, I shouldn’t be in this type of predicament. And then I have my pictures of my family. The top one there is my brother, I call him my brother cause I see him as a brother, and he died. I came in here and he had a month left, and he left and then he died while I was in here. And I got his picture up. And then I got my other family, I just look at them, I miss them and stuff and be waiting to come home to them. They are my motivation to do good in here.” ~ John Doe
### STUDENTS: What humanistic factors motivate the individual receiver to transform their life?

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### 13.3 Compassionate St. Augustine activists

Compassionate St Augustine is part of the international Charter for Compassion, founded by Karen Armstrong. It is an interfaith organization that affirms that “the principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves.”[^84] The Charter and CSA urges us to focus on our commonality of compassion rather than fighting over our differences, in order to create “a just economy and a peaceful global community.”[^85] CSA is a prominent local organization that advocates for “compassion-based practices in our schools, businesses, faith communities, and government”[^86] in St Augustine through participation in interfaith efforts, public art projects, civil rights history, city council participation and much more. The activists involved with CSA are dedicated and have accomplished much.

#### 13.3.1 Ms. Caren Goldman

When I first asked Ms. Caren what spiritual or humanistic faith helped to motivate her transformation into an activist, she looked somewhat shocked and told me, “I really need time to ponder that question. It’s a question that spawns more questions than answers.” We had a bit of a discussion about how some things are so internal that there are no words, so eventually I rephrased and asked when she is being an activist, where is her motivation coming from? She looked straight at me and said, without hesitation,

[^84]: Armstrong, “The Charter for Compassion.”
[^85]: Armstrong.
[^86]: Goldman, “About Compassionate St. Augustine.”
“That part is quite simple, is it the right thing to do? And the right time and the right place? Part of it is the dance or the balance of, are you going to sit and ponder it forever, or are you going to move forward?” For Ms. Caren the mystical spiritual reasons or her the dignity she sees in her fellow human beings is too deep for words, but the call to right action is clear.

13.3.2 Ms. Nancy O'Byrne

When I asked Ms. Nancy the same question, she answered with a moment of specific revelation: “I really do remember the day I was sitting in mass and the gospel was read, Matthew 25, and I had heard that gospel many times before because I had converted to Catholicism when I was 26, but this time it was different, and it was spoken directly to me. It was like there was a light shining directly on me, and I hoped no one else saw it, and it convicted me. I had probably gone to bible studies for 10 years, just soaking up the scriptures and all that and I guess God decided it was time to do more. So, Matthew 25, when did I see you hungry and not feed you? When did I see you in need of shelter? When did I not visit you in prison? So, all these convictions came, and I thought, boy, I’ve got to get to work.” Sitting at her kitchen table, she tells me about her very clear directive and how she followed it directly. “I started studying Catholic social teaching. So, it was Mathew 25. So, I really was very intentional. I wanted to be involved with the poor, with the homeless and with prisoners. So, I started doing that, to be involved in those areas.” We talk about how Catholic social teaching goes back to the late 1800’s and how popes
since then have spoken out about the need to help the poor, welcome the stranger, how Jesus always loved the outsider and stood up for social justice. Yet Ms. Nancy has had a hard time in a very conservative Catholic church trying to be an activist, speaking up for Matthew 25. She tells me about some of the good things in the Catholic church, including a refugee settlement program in Jacksonville. “It’s part of Catholic Charities, most Catholics don’t know it, and it’s probably good because they might try to stop it,” she says and burst into laughter for a good long while.

13.3.3 Ms. KaZ Akers

Ms. KaZ teaches the Moving Meditation which is a program she has designed using Qi Gong, Tai Chi, and meditation using Tibetan singing bowls. She is a Zen Buddhist, which she considers a philosophy more than a religion. She says her motivation for transformation into action is natural: “Faith and action walk hand in glove, they are one and the same. Buddhism is not without its drawbacks, but the central tenets of caring for others, being compassionate, feeding and clothing and allowing them to live the life that they desire to live without being impeded – to act on it was just natural.” Later on in our conversation, she also shares that her motivation is heart based: “I’ve always had a very very soft heart, my mother said I would sit and sob at Lassie reruns. I don’t want to suffer, and I don’t want to see others suffer and I want to help relieve their suffering by being of service however I am able. It’s all about the suffering, period.”

13.3.4 Ms. Sue Fitzgerald

Ms. Sue teaches Mindfulness Meditation to the young men at the Youth Academy. She is a retired school teacher, and when I ask her what factors motivated her to transform into action, she surprised me with a name, “Frank Kiniglieri.” He was a boy in her 8th grade class who had been isolated and neglected by everyone else in school, and she couldn’t bear it. She did what she could to include him, sit with him, ask him to sign her yearbook, and even though they didn’t become friends, she learned something about herself. “I just knew that once I had the courage once to step outside the comfort zone, I’d never lose the courage to act on other’s behalf. I’ll never forget him as long as I live. […] I was always the person who not only came to the rescue of the underdog but believed that I was setting an example for others to be inclusive.” From there she became a teacher in order to be a kind teacher, in order to grow up and change what she experienced in her strict Catholic school upbringing, “I chose middle school when I became a teacher because that, to me is such a beautiful time of life where the subject matter was not that important, and I was not interested in subject matter. I was interested in helping children to come to the edge of themselves, to understand who they were, the beauty that they had, what they could do to bring that forward in the world. So, to me that is what I personally mean by activist.”
13.3.5 Ms. Sandi Galloway

Ms. Sandi was approached by Ms. Caren to teach etiquette and she said yes and now she is a fierce activist and advocate for these kids, even though she doesn’t consider herself an activist in life. She explains, “I feel like these kids probably have never had a chance, and I was raised where I had a lot of chances and parents who really took a lot of time with me. Knowing that half the kids’ parents are on drugs or they are single parents or whatever their challenges are, yeah, I did want to make a difference.” Ms. Sandi tells me she’s at a place in her life where she doesn’t have to worry about working for money anymore, she has had a long successful career and she’s at a place now where she feels it’s her time to give back. “They just asked me, and I was at the right place. I just feel that God moves you where you need to be, and this was one of the places and when this came up I just felt the need inside of me and felt that this was the right thing to do, so you just take those opportunities.”

13.3.6 Ms. Amber Hall

Ms. Amber teaches African drumming, and she was also approached by Ms. Caren. She shared, “Caren called and asked if I’d be willing to be of service to the community and at first I said no that I didn’t have time. Within 24 hours I changed my mind because spirit commanded that I was meant to help.” When asked what motivated her to transform into an activist she stated, “How can anyone be alive in the current time and NOT be! This Paradigm is on its way out and I was born to help lead the charge!”
She has always been part of the counter culture. When I saw her, I could tell she was a force, a down to earth blond wild-haired big-hearted hippie walking around loving these young incarcerated youth with passion. “Fighting for the rights of other humans or life forms on this planet and even the planet Gaia herself is our responsibility as humans. […] Ubuntu. I am because we are. In other words, we’re all in this together.”

| ACTIVISTS: What spiritual and/or humanistic factors motivate the individual activists to transform their life? |
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| “I was always the person who not only came to the rescue of the underdog but believed that I was setting an example for others to be inclusive… I was interested in helping children to come to the edge of themselves, to understand who they were, the beauty that they had, what they could do to bring that forward in the world. So, to me that is what I personally mean by activist.” | Ms. Sue |
| “Faith and action walk hand in glove, they are one and the same. Buddhism is not without its drawbacks, but the central tenants of caring for others, being compassionate, […] to act on it was just natural. I don’t want to suffer, and I don’t want to see others suffer and I want to help relieve their suffering by being of service however I am able.” | Ms. KaZ |
| “It’s quite simple, that part of it, is it the right thing to do? And the right time and the right place? Part of it is the dance or the balance of, are you going to sit and ponder it forever, or are you going to move forward?” | Ms. Caren |
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| “I really do remember the day I was sitting in mass and the gospel was read, Mathew 25, and I had heard that gospel many times before, but this time it was different, and it was spoken directly to me. […] When did I see you hungry and not feed you? When did I see you in need of shelter? When did I not visit you in prison? So, all these convictions came and I thought, boy, I’ve got to get to work.” | Ms. Nancy |
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13.4 Youth Academy staff

When I interviewed Isaiah he told me, “I’ve been in lock up since I was 14, so I actually know what is going on and how some people, you know who is here for the money and who actually cares.” And the boys are really sensitive to both the CSA activists and the staff, and they really respond to people caring about them. Mr. Freeman knows this, too, and takes that into consideration in his hiring practices to help build a culture of rehabilitation and compassion. And it starts with him: “I always tell new hires, if I was a rich man, I would do this for free. It’s a part of you. It’s a job, it’s a career, but it’s who you are.
You can work 10 hours or 12 hours and still come back the next day and just keep giving, because it’s just who you are.”

### 13.4.1 Mr. Orvando Freeman

When I ask Mr. Freeman what motivates him, he answers, “I do what I do because, this is going to sound so crazy, but I do what I do because of who I am and because of the things that I experienced at a younger age. I didn’t have a lot of opportunities and exposures, but my grandmother was a real stabilizing factor in my life. So, I thought, ‘hey, give things back to make communities better, to make kids safer, to give kids opportunities and exposure.’ That is why I do what I do. […] What I pull from, ‘to whom much is given, much is required.’ And I have really been afforded opportunities to be with some unique people in life and they have poured into me and I would be less than if I didn’t pass that along. That is my mantra, ‘to whom much is given, much is required.’ If I stay focused on that, you’re going to want to give back. That’s what you do.” He shares more about how the example of his grandmother helps motivate him: “I came from a very homogenous community, all one race, very small, everybody knew everybody. My grandmother and my mom, they both had what we call great big hearts, so if someone was struggling, you know, we didn’t have much, but whatever we had, they had. So, we would have, at any given time, we would have 14 or 15 kids at our house. There wasn’t a foster kid system in place, there wasn’t a juvenile justice system in place. Your grandmothers were that! All of it, the police, everything! So, that’s where it started. My grandmother’s yard was the place where all kids felt safe. We always had someone in our house. A girl was kicked out, I don’t even know how, she was pregnant, and she was staying with us until she graduated high school. And another friend of ours that stayed with us. That’s just what I know. My grandmother, she was always the person that fed everybody. Come to our house, stay all night if you needed a place. Whatever she had, if you needed it, it was yours. So, that is where it started. That is my foundation.”

### 13.4.2 Mr. Joe Warren

Mr. Warren retired from the school system where he started out as a biology teacher and worked his way up into county administration. Along the way he became the first African American principal at the poorest school in the poorest county in Florida and transformed the school from a D- to a B+ rating. When I ask Mr. Warren what motivates him, he answers, “That’s easy. For me, it’s a passion. All my years in education, teaching, then I got to administration, I’ve always been drawn to those at-risk youth. Those are the ones I gravitated towards, build a rapport, build their self-esteem and let them see they can be just as successful as that dean’s list student or the student on the honor roll, the kid that don’t think that they can do it. After 30 some odd years I retired from the school system. I don’t fish, I don’t hunt, and I don’t play golf, so I figured I needed something to do.” Mr. Warren started searching and found
the Youth Academy. A job popped up and he applied, but after his interview, Mr. Freeman said they would love to get him on board, but he was overqualified. “So, I said, ‘just let me be a direct staff, just let me work the floor.’ And he looked a little astonished and he said, ‘you would do that?’ and I said yeah. And he was tickled, and he said ok. And I did it for 10 months and after those 10 months he came to me and said he would create this spot, he thought I’d be good at it, the transition piece. And I said, that is wonderful, get them ready to go.” Now Mr. Warren helps the youth find jobs, get into college, line up financial aid and plan for their futures so they are ready for their next steps before they even leave the Youth Academy.

Dr. Martine Wallenberg

Dr. Wallenberg is a therapist that works with the youth individually and in groups. When I ask her about her motivation she explains how she is fascinated with adolescent development and helping the boys understand their patterns of behavior. “I want to help the boys, each of them, to become a better person, but to be that better person I need to know these adolescent boys and to know how each of them is developing. I know I cannot change them, but through therapy, I can help them start the healing process and impact them in a positive way. I can help them to see that in whatever is going on personally in their lives, they can get the help needed to start the healing process.”

13.4.3 Dr. Martine Wallenberg

“Cages. Just like, you know how you are like an animal, it’s like you’re locked up and no freedom. It’s the same thing, it’s just like, when you get out, one day eventually, I don’t want to stay here forever, they can’t hold you forever. That’s what this is.” ~ Key’shun

Figure 17 ~ Photovoice: Key’shun. Picture of fencing, feeling like being caged in like an animal.
about community and connectivity, she adds, “I believe that God lives in all of us and because God lives in all of us, I believe we have a responsibility to take care of each other. We’re all responsible for each other. I told one youth, you’re my son. I don’t care how you look at it, you’re my son.” She continued to explain to him that if she doesn’t take responsibility therapeutically in his growth and development, as with every youth in her care, she will have failed to help him, and others like him, to get the healing and growth he needs. And it is her responsibility to take care of him.

13.4.4 Mr. Winslow Wheeler

Mr. Wheeler is the Assistant Facility Administrator and he is a busy man, always getting called upon to respond to situations, attend meetings or take care of anything that is needed. When asked about his motivation, he answered, “Well you know, from the very beginning, it’s about helping the youths, make their individual lives better. A lot of the other pieces to the pie are all the sets of team work that we go through here with co-workers. Specifically, with the boys, knowing where they are coming from, in terms of what happened in my life, I use that to relate to helping them problem solve and helping them not spend their lives incarcerated. It sounds kind of simple, but it is what it is.” I tell him that simple is good, there is no need for anything else. “It doesn’t get too much more in depth than that: just wanting to be there for them and help them get through this phase, make a better life for themselves.”

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<td>“That’s easy. For me, it’s a passion. All my years in education, I’ve always been drawn to those at-risk youth. […] After 30 some odd years I retired from the school system. I don’t fish, I don’t hunt, and I don’t play golf, so I figured I needed something to do.”</td>
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<td>“What I pull from, ‘to whom much is given, much is required.’ And I have really been afforded opportunities to be with some unique people in life and they have poured into me and I would be less than if I didn’t pass that along. That is my mantra, ‘to whom much is given, much is required.’ If I stay focused on that, you’re going to want to give back. That’s what you do.”</td>
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<td>“It doesn’t get too much more in depth than that: just wanting to be there for them and help them get through this phase, make a better life for themselves.”</td>
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14 IMPACT: COMMUNITY SHIFT IN BEHAVIOR

14.1 Compassion pledge halts violence for a month

At the beginning of each school year, Compassionate St Augustine comes out to do a presentation about compassion to the entire Youth Academy community. All 70 students gather in an assembly, Nancy O’Byrne and other CSA activists as well as therapists from the Youth Academy speak about the meaning, value and power of compassion. Mr. Freeman shared about the assembly this year: “First Fancy Nancy, we call her Fancy Nancy, she actually talked about this young man who started this whole push for the whole world for one day to have no violence, and she tells his story to these guys, shows a video. First of all, Nancy is very powerful and compassionate, and it oozes out of her, so the kids catch on to that. Then she goes on a little further, ‘you guys can be like this one person.’ And they actually have some guys come up and talk about what compassion looks like to them, in this place, what does compassion look like to them in here, and on the outside. Some guys did a drawing or a poem.”

At the end of the presentation they invite the boys to sign a compassion pledge. It is a voluntary pledge to be compassionate to others and to yourself, to do acts of kindness and to not do any acts of violence. Ms. Caren describes it this way: “Basically, they pledge that they are going to be thinking, eating,

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87 Photo: Compassionate St Augustine Website
breathing compassion over the week and that they are buying into what is going to be happening, the focus on compassion. It’s a pledge to become a more conscious emotionally intelligent individual.” If they choose to participate, they are given a bracelet with the word ‘compassion’ on it, black on one side and white on the other, and each time they consciously choose to perform an act of compassion, they flip their bracelet from one side to the other, a visual reminder to themselves that they are being compassionate. The first year they did this, it had a bit of an effect. The second year, as reinforcement to this presentation Mr. Freeman explained, “every therapist, every group, the whole week, was about compassion. So, everybody was speaking the same language for a whole week.” Compassion was the word of the week.

The result after the second presentation was astounding to the staff members, as Mr. Freeman told me, “We almost went a month without any kind of altercation. Do you know how rare that is in a place like this? There is going to be some kind of altercation every single day! But the guys talked about it, and we went almost a month without any kind of fights! And I thought, man, what if we can turn one month into two months and three months! Who knows. It was really amazing.” There was not one altercation, outburst or chair thrown. I talked about this month when I interviewed John Doe, an 18-year-old who had been at the Youth Academy for 14 months, a bright eyed young man in the etiquette class who always liked to make everyone laugh (thus wanting the name John Doe). He had been to 3 other youth detention centers before this one, starting at age 12 and he had never experienced anything like the compassion pledge program. I asked him if he noticed a difference afterwards on the pods: “Yes, I noticed a difference, nobody was fighting during that week, or longer. Everybody was being respectful, trying to watch the colorful language and help staff out on the pods and stuff, trying to clean up the pods. They had a prize at the end, whatever pod did the compassion week, if they went without no problems and all that, the facility administrators were going to walk around and view what was going on and the one pod that had the best compassionate week, they were going to get a prize at the end. And it ended up being everybody. Cause everybody did it. We went a month. They had a poster board in the hallway, we’d look at it every time we changed classes and it would be number of days we went without fights and they marked it every day, seeing how long we went.” Mr. Freeman shared the lesson of extending this month-long achievement into longer and longer periods of time: “I think the thing we have to capture, is like the old saying, when you make the fire, put the ashes around the fire to keep it warm, I think the struggle for us is to keep it always at the front of everybody’s mind: compassion compassion.”
14.2 *Quaker Alternatives to Violence Program pod impact*

The Alternatives to Violence Program (AVP) was developed in the 1970’s by the Quakers in conjunction with the New York State prison system in order to help reduce violence in the prison population and Nancy O’Byrne, in her years of activism working with prisons, has become a facilitator of the technique. She offered AVP to a group of students as one of the first CSA classes at the Youth Academy in a series of three-day weekend workshops, with the help of two other AVP facilitators, one from Miami, the other from Tampa. The first weekend is the basic training; the second weekend is advanced and the third weekend is to train facilitators. Ms. Nancy told me, “Six of the boys became facilitators, and they were so proud.” She explained that AVP “works on communication skills, respects for self, respect for others, non-violent conflict resolution skills, de-escalators and it gives them a chance to practice them with a lot of role playing. We came up with scenarios that are pertinent to them.”

Ms. Nancy remembered that they ended up working with the most volatile of the pods: “We had been told prior to the class that Orvando was going to invite for this first time probably the eagles, the leaders. The ones who are excelling in a lot of areas. We thought we would be dealing with the cream of the crop and they would be inspired to be really engaged because they were going to pave the way for others to do this program. So, when we got there on Friday, Orvando met with us just briefly before the boys came, he said to us, ‘oh, by the way, we’ve decided we really should do this program first with the pod that needs it the most. The most volatile pod, the pod we’ve been having the most trouble with.’ We said ok. At that point, what can you do, you just accept it.” Ms. Nancy laughs at the memory and shrugs her shoulders. Oddly, when Mr. Freeman tells this story, his recollection is, “Nancy said, ‘if we are really
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going to do this, let’s do a dorm that is really hot,’ you know, one with a lot of issues.” However the pod was chosen, they started with the pod that was having on average 17 violent incidents per week.

Ms. Nancy told me, “After the first basic AVP weekend with the boys from the most volatile pod, I checked in with Orvando about a week later to see how things were going, and he said that pod had not one violent incident that whole week. They soon became known as the Peace Pod, and they really worked at maintaining that designation from then on while that group of boys remained together through the Advanced AVP and Training for Facilitators workshops and slowly as they one by one were released.” Key’shun, who had been at the Youth Academy for 22 months, was the only student I talked to who had been a part of the AVP class. He is a young African American man, about to turn 18, who is usually quiet and even a bit withdrawn and he doesn’t readily look you in the eyes. He admitted to me he can be a “hothead” and he was a part of the most volatile pod that turned into the Peace Pod. About the first AVP class he told me, “At first I thought it was boring. But when I got the concept of it, it wasn’t really boring, it was alright. It changed my mindset a little bit, even though I still had those thoughts in my head, in the back of my head, it changed my mindset.” And even though Key’shun’s transformation was gradual and included not just AVP but also Mindfulness and Moving Meditation, the group dynamics of the Peace Pod changed enough that all the hot tempers found other outlets. The boys helped each other overcome struggle and they intervened when they saw each other start to get upset.

Of course, the AVP class was not perfect and there are always issues. Ms. Nancy told me “There was one boy and the other boys seemed to point their negative comments towards him a lot.” Eventually, one of the boys confided in one of the facilitators that that boy had snitched on somebody, so he was being ostracized. On Sunday, at the end of the first weekend, everybody puts their name on a poster and everybody writes a note or a positive attribute about that person and they do a graduation ceremony for completing the basic workshop and everyone receives their poster and their certificate. Ms. Nancy continued, “When this particular boy received his poster there were some negative things on it. So, he crumbled it up. The other facilitator who knew what the issue was about, she talked to him and said, what would make this better for you? She suggested, can we just make a new poster for you? So, he agreed that would be ok. And everybody then had to write something positive, and they agreed to do this. And in the group the sense was, ‘we’re sorry we did that, we need to make amends. So, everybody write positive stuff.’ So they did.” So, through a simple poster graduation ceremony, AVP taught the students of the Youth Academy many complex lessons about human relationships. Ms. Nancy talked about the AVP facilitators, “We tell the boys, each of them, we see the goodness in you. And we are supporting you and we are here for you.”
STUDENTS: What impact happens on the receiving end of the action, on a community level, in the current state of life?

“Yes, I noticed a difference, nobody was fighting during that week, or longer. Everybody was being respectful, trying to watch the colorful language and help staff out on the pods and stuff, trying to clean up the pods. They had a prize at the end, whatever pod did the compassion week, if they went without no problems and all that, the facility administrators were going to walk around and view what was going on and the one pod that had the best compassionate week, they were going to get a prize at the end. And it ended up being everybody. Cause everybody did it. We went a month.”

John Doe

“We were sitting there and they were talking about compassion and stuff. […] I can’t remember what they said word for word. It made me think like, you got to be compassionate, be kind sometimes cause it could really help a person a lot. Just one person to be kind to you, it made me feel a lot better.”

Skyler

“Compassion pledge, I was here but I wasn’t allowed to go. For a month and a half, I noticed a difference. I mean, kind of, but it didn’t, it got forgotten, it just disappeared.”

Key’shun

ACTIVISTS & STAFF: What impact happens on the receiving end of the action, on a community level, in the current state of life?

“We almost went a month without any kind of altercation. Do you know how rare that is in a place like this? There is going to be some kind of altercation every single day! But the guys talked about it, and we went almost a month without any kind of fights! And I thought, man, what if we can turn one month into two months and three months! Who knows. It was really amazing.”

Mr. Freeman

“After the first basic AVP weekend with the boys from the most volatile pod [17 incidents per week average], I checked in with Orvando about a week later to see how things were going, and he said that pod had not one violent incident that whole week. They soon became known as the Peace Pod, and they really worked at maintaining that designation from then on.”

Ms. Nancy

“I think the compassionate process along with processes the director has put into place have kind of meshed, you can see the culture beginning to change. This is a difficult population, a lot of them are uneducated poor kids that have not experienced a whole lot of success and it’s hard to convince them that they can be successful and do it the right way, get them out of the criminal mindset. But I can see the change, yes. It’s gradual, but I can see it.”

Mr. Warren

15 IMPACT: INDIVIDUAL SHIFT FROM MEDITATION

15.1 Moving Meditation class

The first class that I attend as an ethnographer is Ms. KaZ’s Moving Meditation class. She has 7 students, they first gather in a ‘respect circle’ and bow to the circle, to each other, to the teacher and the teachings and then finally to themselves. As Ms. KaZ plays some instrumental tribal music, she leads them in flowing Qi Gong exercises, encouraging them to breath in and breath out with their movements. During the movements, Ms. KaZ introduces a new Qi Gong exercise called "Man Rides
Horse Shooting Bow and Arrow" where it’s like you’re shooting a bow and arrow to the side, then smoothly turning to the other side and shooting a bow and arrow in the other direction. The young men kind of laugh, some of them are having trouble getting the new movement down at first, but they are all trying in earnest. As the movements continue, the boys pop in and out of participating. Sometimes someone will sit down for a few minutes, put their t-shirt in his mouth, exposing their stomach and kind of hiding their face. Then they get back up and join back in. I notice that no one is making fun of anyone else, there is no pressure or negative attention towards the other boys. They just let each other be and do what they do. It’s just a flow. After the movements, the boys go into a meditation while Ms. KaZ plays the Tibetan bowls for them. Afterwards, Ms. KaZ talks to the boys a while, asking them what is going on. JJ comments, “Wow, that was coming to me and nobody else.” Flame asks about chanting, Ms. KaZ talks about the Om, how astronauts say it’s the sound the universe makes out in space. Flame sounds really surprised and says “That’s the sound that bowl makes,” pointing at the Tibetan bowl. Eli is excited to be going home in two weeks, he’s beaming. Another student is leaving on the same day, but he’s more shut down than usual, slouching, not talking. Ms. KaZ explains to me later that happens a lot. The boys get nervous about leaving, nervous the judge might deny their release, nervous about what awaits when they get home. The boys ask Mr. KaZ questions about meditation: is it true you can use it to travel anywhere you think of in your mind? Is it true you can use it to be free? How do you use it to help with fear? Ms. KaZ guides them through a breathing meditation technique that helps with fear. It’s clear from the questions they are asking that they are using the meditation as a tool to cope with the realities of being here – both to help them stay calm and deal with anger or fear, but also as an escape, as a way to deal with the feeling of being locked up.

**15.2 Meditation as invaluable life skill**

**15.2.1 Eli – controlling anger, feeling calmer**

Later, when I interviewed these boys, they told me in no uncertain terms how much it helps them on a day to day basis, how much of a direct impact it has on their anger issues. Eli told me at first he thought it was weird: “It was kind of weird my first day, cause I had never heard of this. I was kind of slack and I sat down, it was weird and I didn’t feel comfortable. But I came back the next Monday and I started getting comfortable and I started liking it because it seemed like she cared about us. It seemed like she really cared. Then I could control my anger more. I used to get angry easily. And it just made me calmer. That is why I really wanted to go. It made me calm. I wouldn’t get angry as quick. I wouldn’t do the impulse thinking, I wouldn’t do things without thinking as much. I spent time with myself more, that’s really what it is.” Eli has been part of the Moving Meditation class for nearly 11 months and has had a significant transformation. He left just two weeks after I started my field study and he had spent the last
several months reading books by Thich Naht Hahn, Martin Luther King, Jr. and was filled with hope and calmness.

15.2.2 Isaiah – choosing greatness instead of destructiveness

Isaiah articulated of this life changing key to avoid anger, stress and negativity when you’re faced with hardship out in the world: “I think it would be smart to expand this program, a lot of kids need meditation. […] Even when you’re out, you can still wake up, you might be stressing, you might have had a loss in your family or you lost someone important. So that would be very important, instead of losing it, running around and doing whatever I want, I’d have to do a meditation and stuff like that, to heal my mind. Breathing skills, alternative ways to avoid anger, avoid stress and negativity. That is something that can take over somebody’s life, so it’s very important to learn, that is something that can lead you to greatness instead of destructiveness.” Isaiah sees the benefits of meditation and how these techniques are a lifeline for him, to help him out of making bad, destructive choices. “I’ve learned that just that an hour a day, just one hour out of the whole 24 hours of the day can change your whole vibe, your whole perspective of how you look at things, sitting and breathing, clearing your mind. Basically, like that can change your whole perspective, what are you going to do today.”

Figure 20 ~ Photovoice: Isaiah. A bird sitting on the top of the barbed wire fence.

“That one right there, if you look closely I tried to get a picture of the bird. That is something else that symbolizes freedom. And you see, even though the fence has barbed wire, that is a bird, it represents freedom. Sometimes I feel like I’m the bird, I just can’t wait to be free. It will fly away so fast.” ~ Isaiah
15.2.3 Key’shun – finally, help to not be a hothead

Key’shun is the young man I interviewed who has been at the Youth Academy the longest. When I was in the Admin hallway with him and a few other boys, someone was asking him about how long he’d been there, and he said how he used to throw stuff and get in fights before he realized he needed to stop it so he could get out of there. The other boy said “You’ve been here since 2016? Man, you missed all of 2017.” Key’shun said, “Oh hell yeah. I just missed the whole 2017.” Key’shun had been part of the most volatile pod that Ms. Nancy took through the AVP training, and back then she had found out that Key’shun’s family had disowned him. In our interview he talks about his grandmother and sister, so it seems he has been able to reconnect. Key’shun doesn’t really look you in the eye too often when he speaks, and having my dog, Peachy, in his lap during his interview seemed to really help. He shared with me his process of working through first the AVP, then Mindfulness Meditation and then finally, finding his way to the Moving Meditation class. He said the AVP “changed my mindset a little bit, even though I still had those thoughts in my head,” and then the Mindfulness “kind of did help me, but I didn’t feel changed. I mean, I still had a temper, it like changed my thought process but if someone bad came to me, I still blew up.” After working through the first two classes, he told me the Moving Meditation worked: “It really did help me be less of a hothead. Finally, I did find I could hold my anger. If I hear somebody say something the wrong way, I can think about what Ms. KaZ has said.” So, even for this self-described hothead, meditation is working to help him control his anger and change his behavior.

15.2.4 Flame & Skyler – calming down quickly

Flame is a young man with a very quiet gentle demeanor, but according to his own admission, he has trouble with anger, which is what got him expelled from school. But Flame has found in meditation something that helps him with his anger: “I never did meditation a day in my life until then, never. But it is its own high. Like drugs give you a high, but this gives you a natural high where you feel good. When I’m going through something, when somebody is trying to make me mad, I can do the breathing, the meditation, everything I learned, I can do it and I’m right back in the calmness, so I appreciate that.” Several of the boys I interviewed use the tools, especially the breathing techniques, in daily life situations. Isaiah shared with me, honestly: “I use the breathing skills; the breathing skills work the best for me. I’m not going to say I use the dancing, but the breathing skills, they work for me.” Skyler on the other hand says the movements really help him calm down quickly: “When I came into class I kinda thought it was funny at the time, the exercises. I liked it though. She’s a great lady. Every time she comes, she makes my night better. And when she leaves, it’s like daaang. I love Ms. KaZ, she’s great. After a few weeks I thought it was great. It opened my body up. When we were doing the 12 treasures, and stuff, it made me think. And then, when I go to my cell, sometimes I get mad and I need to calm down really quick, and
then I do them and get my energy out and then I sit down on my bed with the lights off in my cell and I just think, I just sit there for like an hour and just close my eyes and then just nothing. It’s like I just channel into another world.”

15.2.5 JJ – knowing he has help if he needs it

JJ is a 17-year-old who has been at the Youth Academy for 7 months but has only been in the Moving Mediation class for a few weeks, this time. He had started it before but because of an outburst on the pod where he threw some chairs his privileges were revoked, and he got pulled from the class (though seeing as meditation is what helps them control their temper, that policy might be worth revisiting). Now Mr. Freeman has been working with him one on one to help him stay focused on better behavior, on a one-day-at-a-time basis, so he is back in the class. He’s starting to see meditation as a tool, he’s starting to see how it can be helpful to him, even if he’s not quite using it yet. “It’s helped me, I can do that if I’m mad or something. I never really give it a try, but I know I could if I want to. If I’m ever in a stressed out or mad situation, I probably could do that. But I’ve never tried it though. I’ve never tried it yet, but I know I could if I wanted to.” Controlling anger and controlling impulse behavior for these boys can make all the difference in the world.

Mr. Wheeler told me about the impact he has seen on the boys overall, “There has been some kids that have participated that have been pretty aggressive and what it has done is give them some calmness and

“A tree. I took a picture of it cause I like the woods, I like the wilderness, I’ve always felt when I’m out in the woods that I’m at peace, it’s just relaxing, I like little streams and the woods and leaves and stuff, nature.” ~ Skyler
some purpose, looking forward to the class and understanding that it’s there to help them. I think it helps them learn how to rationalize better when they are calmer, helps them think through things and problem solve in a better way.”

15.3 AVP for individual transformation

15.3.1 Kahlil – remembered as one of the worst kids to a star

During my interview with Ms. Nancy, she showed me a picture and said, “This is my very special guy, this is Kahlil.” Mr. Freeman has a framed picture of Kahlil in his office, as well, as he’s on his way to speak to middle schoolers at the Boys and Girls club, and he shared with me, “There is this young man named Kahlil. Kahlil,” his voice gets a little bit choked up, “it’s hard to say, he died. When he first came to us, he had been in several programs and he was going to fight everybody, kick everybody’s butt, just horrible language, filthy mouth. So, he was in the first group to go into AVP. And at that time, it was really hard to just get Kahlil to sit down and focus. But Kahlil bought into it, he immediately bought into this, and he began to change that dorm. They went from having a fight in that dorm every day, after that one session of AVP, to having no fights. And Kahlil was really really instrumental. And he went so far, he became a facilitator and he was so instrumental in helping kids end struggle. He went on to become an eagle, which is our highest status on campus, he was one of the eagle kids. He was in DCF (foster care) custody, and he had a chance to leave or he had a chance to stay an extra month and when he got out go to go to a group independent living home and he chose to stay here an extra 30 days. He was such a good kid.”

Ms. Nancy also told me about his turn around, smiling, “He was our star, he was the one that had started going around doing speaking engagements at the Boys and Girls Club and all that, and really was on a wonderful path. He had started college courses and had started influencing boys around where he was living up in Jacksonville.” Kahlil had left the Youth Academy, he had a job, an apartment and was going to college, and he had started going around speaking to younger at-risk youth, trying to help them to not go down the road he traveled. He gravitated to Ms. Nancy and always credited AVP for turning his life around. Ms. Nancy remembers the first weekend of AVP training, “Kahlil one day said, I have a role play, so he set up the whole scenario and he picked who he wanted to do it with and so they played it out beautifully and I just remember how eloquent he was in talking to the other person and coming up with a negotiated resolution. It was something about his sister and a bicycle and the guy I think stole the bike from his sister. And we wondered, is this based on any fact, if he went through this. But anyway, he used all of the ‘I messages’ and all of the tools that we had talked about and came up with this solution, and we just looked at each other in amazement that he got it, that he got it all and put it all into this scenario that he came up with.”
15.3.2 In his short life, touched a lot of people

Kahlil also became a peace keeper among his peers in real life on the pod. Ms. Nancy told me, “Kahlil had intervened in his pod when somebody else was starting to get in trouble, he could sense it, he went over to him and sat on the couch next to him and started playing with a pillow with him and just tried to distract the whole situation and it worked. So, yeah, he got it. But he had leadership qualities already in him. And he was probably using those leadership qualities just in a bad way, not in a healthy way, putting up roadblocks for himself. I think he realized that over time.” Ms. Nancy reminisced about him beginning to take a leadership role to inspire younger kids: “And boy, when he was asked the first time to go speak, this was before he got out, to go speak to the girls and boys club, about his experience with AVP!” Ms. Nancy trails off but finishes the meaning by beaming remembering how happy Kahlil had been, and how proud.

Mr. Freeman remembers him with pride, as well: “He just had an untimely death. He was in a car with some friends, he got upset with them and wanted to get out, the car was still moving, he went to get out, his feet tangled, and his head hit the curb and he never regained consciousness. But he was a wonderful kid. AVP changed him, that was the first turn around for him. Nancy loved him to death. She spoke at his funeral service. AVP turned him around, gave him a chance to really be impactful to others in his community. His life was short, and I had something that he wrote where he said he wanted to be an inspiration to others, and he did that. Even though his life was cut short, he touched a lot of lives, here and outside. He was one of our success stories.”

15.4 Mindfulness changes, big or small

Ms. Sue is the teacher who has been at the Youth Academy the longest. She calls her program ‘SHIfT Happens!’, as she explains, “Because if you take out the F, that is what often happens in life.” For the most part, attending her class has been voluntary, “So, the buzz of the program was perpetuating itself, kids would see me in the hall, ‘Hey Miss Sue, I want to be in your class.’ So, there was a lot of roots growing. And it was great.” The SHIfT Happens! class is a six-week program to teach Mindfulness skills, and after attending the class, some boys also ask for one-on-one sessions. Sometimes Mr. Freeman will suggest one-on-one sessions for boys he feels might benefit.

15.4.1 Matthew – becoming soulful

Matthew was in the first SHIfT Happens! class in 2016 and then approached Ms. Sue as she was walking by his pod picking up the kids for her second class. Ms. Sue remembers, “I see him knocking and he just beckons me with his finger, and I go over and he said, ‘do you think we could have one on ones?’ And I said, ‘sure, Matthew, I would love that.’ And we started and this child, all he really wanted was somebody
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to listen and someone to accept him on his terms exactly as he was and not tell him he should be any different, and from there work it out. And what he really needed to work out was forgiveness in his family, and we started first with self-forgiveness. And I found something online that I now give to kids when I know they are leaving, it’s a little card called Ego vs. Soul. And it’s just a little reminder when we are acting from ego versus soul. Because, really, mindfulness and mediation are all about the soul and about letting go of the ego. And when he read this, he was welling up with tears, because he was able to look and see where his ego was engaged and where he was finally soulful.”

15.4.2 John – from deep trauma to ‘God is everywhere’

John was a boy that Orvando asked Ms. Sue to work with one-on-one at the beginning of the CSA programs. Ms. Sue told me, “Orvando asked me ‘Sue, there is somebody that I’d really like you to meet, he’s one of the angriest youth in the institution, he’s constantly fighting, constantly in trouble, constantly being held down, he’s fighting all the time.’ And later Orvando tells me, ‘You know I was a little skeptical about all this mindfulness stuff, but after Sue was with John!’ it was really great.” Mr. Freeman told me he had asked Ms. Sue because “I said, let’s try it, we’ve tried everything else.” When John came in to see Ms. Sue, she sat across from him and Mr. Freeman stayed with them and sat slightly behind John “just in case.” He remembers Ms. Sue coming in, “She’s a little bit older, white lady, with very little experience with this population, and I could tell she was a little apprehensive at first. But man, she came in and talked to one of our worst kids at that time. Sue came in and sat in front of him. He didn’t like to have people to get anywhere close to him, he had been abused, and everybody knew that. Sue got really close to him, though. And he had his head down and she came up to him, strategically, but one time, and I never forget, she took her hand and lifted his face. And I thought, oh my God, here we go, he doesn’t like to be touched, so I was getting up and getting ready to respond. But he never did anything, he responded to her. And he started to talk about more intimate things.” Ms. Sue told me the same story of gently lifting his face up and him opening. “I looked back and forth with Orvando and we recognized that this child is carrying a lot of burden that is coming out in anger and fighting and this and that. And so, I worked pretty intensively with him to just get him to be comfortable with who he was in the moment, to not deny any part of him, that all of it should be there. And I discovered that he knew about God, he used to go to a Tuesday night religious session. And one day he said, ‘you know Miss Sue, do you know that God is everywhere?’ He’s 17 years old, he says, ‘no no, I mean everywhere!’ And we had this entire conversation and it lit up his universe. So, ever since he figured out that there was this power, and I would connect it to the Divine power that I was always talking about, that this power was within and without and that was his breakthrough. So, it was a combination of what was going on in the religion class and the mindfulness class and the two of them all of a sudden clicked that it was the same thing. And it made a tremendous difference in his demeanor and his openness. And then he became this
beautiful amazing open young man.” Mr. Freeman told me about his transformation, “After a while, he actually taught mindfulness to a group from the Department of Juvenile Justice, they came out to do a tour and he was talking about mindful walking. And he did that so seriously. Sue turned him around.”

15.4.3 Andy – simply becoming more open

Ms. Sue tells me of another boy named Andy who chose to be in her class, “but he was very very angry and very shut down and very delightful in the same moment. His main mantra was ‘no one is going to tell me what to do,’ and I said, ‘you’re absolutely right, no one is going to tell you what to do.’ So, for 6 weeks, I’d see him listening, as he knew he really needed it, but he could not open. That was it, that’s all he could do.” Then after the class, he asked Ms. Sue if they could do one-on-one sessions. He opened up and talked about his anger, that he didn’t even know where it came from, and Ms. Sue just accepted him and helped give him mindfulness and meditation tactics, “to help him to soften to the idea that there are many things that are bothering him and if he doesn’t allow them to surface and he keeps pushing them away, they are never going to change.” So, Ms. Sue kept working with Andy, using gratitude, acceptance, meditation and mindfulness. “By the time Andy was leaving, I’d say he was more open, and that is all you can ask for a child who was really really angry. He was more accepting, ‘ok I’ve got some stuff.’ And sometimes that is all it can be.” But as Ms. Sue and Mr. Freeman recognizes, that is also a success. It doesn’t have to be a dramatic breakthrough to make a big difference in a young man’s life.

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<td>“It really did help me be less of a hothead. Finally, I did find I could hold my anger. If I hear somebody say something the wrong way, I can think about what Ms. KaZ has said.”</td>
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<td>“I never did meditation a day in my life until then, never. But it is its own high. Like drugs give you a high, but this gives you a natural high where you feel good. When I’m going through something, when somebody is trying to make me mad, I can do the breathing, the meditation, everything I learned, I can do it and I’m right back in the calmness, so I appreciate that.”</td>
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<td>“When we were doing the 12 treasures (Qi Gong), and stuff, it made me think. And then, when I go to my cell, sometimes I get mad and I need to calm down really quick, and then I do them and get my energy out and then I sit down on my bed with the lights off in my cell and I just think, I just sit there for like an hour and just close my eyes and then just nothing. It’s like I just channel into another world.”</td>
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<td>“It was kind of weird my first day, cause I had never heard of this[…] Then I could control my anger more. I used to get angry easily. And it just made me calmer. That is why I really wanted to go. It made me calm. I wouldn’t get angry as quick. I wouldn’t do the impulse thinking, I wouldn’t do things without thinking as much. I spent time with myself more, that’s really what it is.”</td>
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“I’ve learned that just that an hour a day, just one hour out of the whole 24 hours of the day can change your whole vibe, your whole perspective of how you look at things, sitting and breathing, clearing your mind. Basically, like that can change your whole perspective, what are you going to do today?”

Isaiah

“Yes, it changes my thoughts. I don’t know how to explain it, but it do. Before I was aggressive. Now I don’t think like that no more, I’m more calm. I used to be like really anxious. Now when I feel like I’m fixin to get anxious, then I start breathing. And then, people used to talk, like jumping me, and I don’t let it get to me like it used to.”

William

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<td>“There has been some kids that have participated that have been pretty aggressive and what it has done is give them some calmness and some purpose, looking forward to the class and understanding that it’s there to help them. I think it helps them learn how to rationalize better when they are calmer, helps them think through things and problem solve in a better way.”</td>
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<td>“By the time Andy was leaving, I’d say he was more open, and that is all you can ask for a child who was really really angry. He was more accepting, ‘ok I’ve got some stuff.’ And sometimes that is all it can be.”</td>
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<td>“[Sue] came in and talked to one of our worst kids at that time. As far as worst, up here, in his head, oh my God he was having so much trouble. I said, let’s try it, we’ve tried everything else. […] After a while, he actually taught mindfulness to a group from the Department of Juvenile Justice, they came out to do a tour and he was talking about mindful walking. And he did that so seriously. […] I don’t know if she knows how big of an effect she had on him, but she turned him around.”</td>
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<td>“Kahlil had intervened in his pod when somebody else was starting to get in trouble, he could sense it, he went over to him and sat on the couch next to him and started playing with a pillow with him and just tried to distract the whole situation and it worked. So, yeah, he got it.”</td>
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16 IMPACT: INDIVIDUAL HUMANITY IN THE HUMANITIES

16.1 Giving underprivileged children the chance to explore

One of Mr. Freeman’s big keys for success with these at-risk youths is “exposure and opportunity.” As Ms. Sandi pointed out in her motivation for working with these kids, she realizes they have not had the education or opportunities that she grew up with and that is part of why they find themselves inside of a facility like the Youth Academy. Unfortunately, when looking at budgets for low-income area education, arts and humanities are often seen as a luxury and are the first to be cut, and they are not even attempted at juvenile justice education. Flame became quite animated about the limits of education in our interview: “Every detention center has school. They only have reading, math, that’s it. They don’t even do history. That’s crazy, they don’t even do history.” He was looking at me as if he fully expected that I wouldn’t believe him. And indeed, the humanities, music and art are an important part of childhood
development and it is important that these underprivileged children are also given the chance to experience these aspects of creativity and humanity.

![Photovoice: Isaiah. Multiple layers of fencing, gates and razor wire as seen from one of the rec areas.](image)

“Everywhere you go, you’re surrounded by gates. Everything is a mind thing, the way places like this are set up. That has all to do with trust. Basically, we committed crimes, so we go to court and depending on your charges, they will send you to a low risk program where it’s not really gated and this is a high risk program and there is barbed wire everywhere, so I wanted to take a picture of that. It’s not something you want to see all day.” ~ Isaiah

### 16.2 Etiquette class: Much more than manners

On the surface, Ms. Sandi’s class is about etiquette. She has designed a notebook for the class called “Dude, That’s Rude! Why Manners Matter” where she goes through civility, personal ethics, first impressions, personal image, professional style, how to tie a tie, shaking hands properly, job interviews and dining etiquette. John Doe described his first day walking into the class, “It was Valentine’s day, I saw her little set up, bags of candy, her handbooks and all, I was like, ok. I like that lady. I respect her cause she goes out of her way to try to teach us things that we don’t know and make sure that we use them when we get out and stuff. I respect her for that, I ain’t have anybody teach me that. I ain’t even know what that meant until she showed up. […] The setting was very nice, she was very proper. I think she has OCD, cause everything is in the right place, so perfect.”

### 16.2.1 Developing a two-part program: civility and etiquette

Ms. Sandi has fully invested herself in these young men and thinks about how to improve what she offers them, how to help them grow and develop. One day as we’re setting up the room before class she
say to me, “They try to act tough, but they are just kids.” She keeps developing the etiquette class and is working on breaking the class into two parts: “I started out teaching manners to the young men. In working with them I realized that manners and etiquette are how to do things, but what they are missing is the why. So, I have now realized that they need civility training, and then they need manners training. So, I started swapping some of the stuff out and adding more civility into it. Now I’m getting ready to do two programs. I was working mostly with the kids that were getting ready to leave and go out on their own. And I realized that to get them to that point, it’s going to take more than the 5-week training program I have. So now I’m going to work with the group that is before they get to go, not brand new, but the middle group. Then do another program for the kids that are ready, so it will be a two-step program.”

John Doe talked to me about the civility parts that Ms. Sandi has already started covering, “I learned a lot of stuff in that class, manners, and it’s more than just manners. It’s a lot more to it, and I learned that too. She covered civility and all that. This sheet in my handbook, one paper that had kindness and trustworthy and honest and a whole bunch of other words that goes with etiquette and she wanted us to write what we thought that meant to us and we had to stand up and present what we wrote down.” And Ms. Sandi does work two components: the civility and ethics that helps build character and respect for self and others and then the practical manners of how to behave in the world of business interviews and success. And this opens up a third very important key.

### 16.2.2 Expecting success

Participating in the class, I witnessed Ms. Sandi, a very well-dressed successful business woman, speaking to these young men on a regular basis saying things like “Soon you will be in the world of business” or “When you’re introducing an important CEO to someone new…” For these young men, this might be the first time that someone like Ms. Sandi is treating them as if she fully expects them to be successful. For someone coming from a school-to-prison pipeline that pushed them out of classrooms and into a juvenile facility, the power of an authority figure expecting you to succeed cannot be underestimated. Mr. Warren explained, “I think it’s all about self-esteem and realizing that they can do this and be successful. They walk out of there with their chest sticking out a little further.” At the etiquette class graduation ceremony, where they all get a certificate, Ms. Sandi gave a teary-eyed speech about how proud she was of all of them. Mr. Warren gave a powerful talk: “You all are way too smart to be in a place like this. The only thing you have in common is that everybody here made a mistake, including me, including Ms. Sandi, including Ms. Shanti. We make mistakes somewhere along the way, that is not the end of the world. The thing that, excuse me, pisses me off, is that John Q Public out there thinks that you’re delinquent and trouble, just trouble makers. But they don’t know, they’re not trying to get to
know you. All they know is that you’re locked up and they see the razor wire out there. Take that as fuel, put that in your tank. They got you all wrong. [...] Every one of you in here are bright, young intelligent young men that bring something different to the table. [...] I’m proud of you. Keep it going. Put all that negative stuff in the rear-view mirror and just take off.”

16.2.3 Manners and nurturing

Ms. Sandi is also able to give them something else that they need, that no one might realize is being given: mothering. In being a kind female presence who is teaching them manners, telling them to pull up their pants and sit up straight, Ms. Sandi also becomes a nurturer. In our interview she tells me, “I know at the end of my very first class, the kids were leaving and one of the kids came up to me, the first one and he says, ‘can I give you a hug?’ And I looked at Orvando and he nodded his head yes, so I gave him a hug. And then they all lined up and they were like, ‘can I have a hug, too?’; and I didn’t realize I was allowed to hug them. And that was a huge change for me.” Ms. Sandi starts wiping away tears, “You’re going to make me cry. I realized how badly they needed it. They are so dying for human touch. These are still little kids. They need affection. So, I’m able to give that. And now I find the kids that are out of my class, they see me and wave and come running up to me and just give me bear hugs. It’s that type of stuff, man, it just makes my day.”

16.2.4 Big A building confidence

Sometimes I found that even when the boys focused on the minutia of the etiquette, they were still receiving confidence. Big A told me, “I’m not even going to lie to you, I know I’m not going to eat like that, I’m just going to use one fork.” But at the same time, his vision of the future is affected as he later admitted in our interview, “When I go out to eat if I’m with my boss, or if it’s an important meeting, if I know how to eat and how to carry myself, for a job interview or a very important job, that’s good.” He was grateful to feel confident that at a special occasion or a nice restaurant, he wouldn’t be “the only one” to not know what to do. Big A, who is not particularly big and is only 15 tells me “This is my very first time being locked up in my whole life.” He took the class to pass the time. He says he hates it there and he is “just ready to go home.” He’s been with his current foster parents for a year or two and his mom has a job lined up for him at a local grocery store and he’s going back to high school and he plans on going to college to become either an architect or an engineer. He says of Ms. Sandi, “She cares about us, she wants to help, so we know how to carry ourselves, so we can get the job.” And perhaps his change is not huge, but he has big plans; he has a vision for his future.
16.3 Music & art for confidence & hope

16.3.1 Piano blossoms at the academy

Despite his vision of a true academy with music and art classes, Mr. Freeman admits to having doubts how receptive the young incarcerated boys would be: “With the piano thing, I remember saying, ‘I don’t know Caren, piano lessons, these guys, I don’t know how many of them can sit down and focus to play the piano.’ She said, ‘let’s give it a whirl.’ And this beautiful lady, Felicia, came and did it. They had electric pianos, one in my office and one in another office, but the guys wanted to practice, and they had headphones, so I couldn’t hear them; I was doing my work and they were just practicing. So, this one boy, he said, ‘Oh sir, I want you to hear this.’ So, he was playing Amazing Grace, and he did a good job, too. And he said, ‘My mom will be so proud of me to see me doing something positive.’ So, I thought, there might be something to this.” Before long, they had a wait list, and everybody wanted to be in piano. Mr. Freeman’s doubts vanished as these kids who otherwise had a hard time focusing blossomed given the opportunity to do something creative and musical. Mr. Freeman continued, “And then Felicia took it a step higher, she started to take them down to the Lightner Museum in downtown St Augustine and the guy let them play on the oldest piano in town. That was pretty cool. That was wonderful.”
16.3.2 Skyler, William & John Doe – art for confidence and opportunity

Given the chance to do something expressive and to explore their talents also helps to boost the boys’ confidence. Not all children excel in traditional academics and going through school with electives and options helps us find what we are good at, whether it’s science, pottery, graphic design, journalism or performing arts. Skyler lit up when he told me about his art and drumming classes: “I love art class cause you could just be you and just create what’s on your mind. Drum class, I’m really good at drum class, I’m the best at drum class. People use their hands, but I use my fingers like. One time, the drum dude came here, and he’s letting everyone do solo, and then when it got to me and I did my little solo, when I was done he looked around and he said, ‘woah, what was that?’ He was so excited. I was like, yeah.”

William shared that art is not just creative but therapeutic, “I love to draw, so art really helps me when I’m mad, I just draw.” When we talked about the DJJ expanding the program to other juvenile centers he said, “I mean, that’s good cause most of the kids that be locked up, they really need that. I mean, to experience new things, you can have a kid that knows how to draw, and another kid who doesn’t know how to draw but if he starts he’ll be very good at it and he’ll like it.”

John Doe tried to every class he could. “When I see an opportunity, I took it. A lot of other kids, they say, ‘oh that will be boring,’ but you ain’t going to know until you try it. As far as I know, I like every last class.” He took both art and photography, and it helped him discover where his talents lie, and even what he could potentially do for a living: “Art class, I really can’t draw, so I quit after 3 days cause I can’t draw for nothing. Photography, I like photography. It made me realize that is something I can do as far as my career, I can try to make it as a photographer in weddings and stuff and if I’m really good at it, then I can do that and make money and stuff, that is a goal for me. It made me realize I have a long-term goal.”

16.3.3 Ms. Jackie – Art for healing & transformation

Ms. Jackie taught art, bringing in easels or sketch books. At first, she thought she would be helping them to prepare portfolios, the way her high school art teachers had, but soon she realized that these kids needed a safe compassionate space to talk, to create and to explore. Art became a way of expression and healing for many of her students. She told me about one who stood out in her memory, “I had one student and he was 14 when I met him, and we came a really long way. He ended up doing a beautiful masterpiece. He lost his brother, his brother was 8 years old, he was epileptic, and he had a seizure and he suffocated at night and we got through that together. So, he did a beautiful water color of his mom with his deceased brother and the newborn child that had just come into their lives. It was gorgeous.”

Ms. Jackie also shared how important it was for the kids just to have someone who accepted them, who encouraged them. And a few students really found their talents. “A student that stuck it out with me long enough, the last lesson I taught him, I gave him my copy of 1500 color mixing recipes, we did the
Spiritual Activism for At-Risk Youth

lesson of primaries and secondaries and all that, and he caught on and he loved it and he was eating it up, and I could tell when he was looking around the room, he was seeing with an artist’s eye.”

16.3.4 Ms. Amber – Music as a tool to come together

Ms. Amber teaches African drumming and also brings in musicians to perform to the young men, exposing them to different types of music and culture. I attended a concert of a touring artist who did looping of different instruments, including a big chain he recorded as he crumbled it up, the metal clanging as part of the rhythm. The young boys gasped with their eyes wide open every time he used the chain and I could see their minds open and their creativity expand. At one-point Ms. Amber took the mic and talked to the boys, “I’m a single mom, I worked three jobs to raise my kid, I’ve worked three jobs most of my life, I was working three jobs when I started teaching here. And I got to the point where one of my bosses told me that I was going to have to stop teaching these classes, he said I couldn’t take off of work to come here every other week anymore. So, it was either stop coming here to teach you guys or quit my job. And can you guess what I did?” She looked out at their faces and a couple of them quietly said “Quit your job.” She said, “That’s right, I quit my job. Cause it’s about taking care of each other.” For any of the boys who let that in, they would feel that someone valued them. Amber tells me later how drumming can really help bring a feeling of community and entrainment to these boys, and how they can use it to work on their issues together: “Sometimes boys who don’t get along so well are brought in within the same group session and I’ve seen them be mature enough to put that aside for the common goal. I’ve seen them embrace the possibility of musical expression being a tool or outlet for their feelings in a safe setting. Many of them have never had those tools to deal with their emotional issues.”

16.3.5 Flame – Regaining hope

Flame spoke directly about how realizing that you have more options gives you hope. “The youth are the future, you know what I mean. Have you ever heard that?” When he asked me this question it sounded like he had discovered something truly precious and was sincerely wondering if I had ever heard it. “The youth are the future. So, it’s a good percentage of people locked up, but if you can just get us off that mindset of stealing and robbing and all that and just doing something. People lose hope, they don’t feel that they can do nothing but that. You feelin me? That’s all they’ve known. But nah, you can get a job, you can help somebody out.” For Flame, as for many of these boys, to believe there are options for the future is life changing. Mr. Wheeler shared how he can see the classes beginning to give the boys optimism: “First of all, they really, despite their big bravado, they are really kids at heart, as their ages tell you. So, they really show their youthfulness just in terms of wanting to participate. Maybe in the beginning saying, aw, I’m not going to do all that, but once they get started, they really enjoy it. […] The
Spiritual Activism for At-Risk Youth

art, the etiquette classes, they really haven’t been exposed to those things, exposure there opens up a lot of doors for them.”

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17 RESULT: A DIFFERENT FUTURE

17.1 Hope away from violence & mass incarceration

17.1.1 Eli – doesn’t know how long he’ll live

During my first interview with Eli, a 16-year-old bright faced young man who was going home in 3 days, the reality of growing up as an African American male in America hit me in the gut. He was showing me his pictures and he had photographed two different roads, one long and one short. He explained that they represented two different paths for his life, and that he didn’t know how long he would live, but that he wanted it to be a long time and he wanted it to be a good life. For years, I have studied racism and I have railed against the death of young black men at the hands of gun violence and police brutality, but all of a sudden, I was face to face with how REAL that is for him – a young black boy, in poor neighborhoods, carrying around the heavy burden that he could die at any moment. When he said it, he wasn’t even being particularly serious or grim, he was just being matter-of-fact, like he didn’t realize that I didn’t carry the same thought with me everywhere I go. But now Eli has hope. He is going home, and he is filled with happiness and dreams of the future. He told me how much it meant to him that Ms. KaZ has hope for all of them, that she thinks they can do anything with their lives. “That I could do a lot of things. I could do anything I want, that’s how I really see it, everything I want, I just have to put my mind to it…That is how it has changed my future. It gave me hope and wisdom.”

![Figure 24 ~ Photovoice: Eli. Two paths in life, a short life or a long life?](image)

“This is a road, and another picture of a road, there are two paths to life, that road and the long road, so that is what that represents. And I don’t know how long my road is going to be, my life, but I hope it does last a long time. So, to me this represents the path, a life, the path that I’m going to take.” ~ Eli
17.1.2 Flame – homeless & can die at any moment

Flame said something similar to me in passing, “So many people dying around you, you can die at any moment.” He and his mom were homeless, and he told me “I used to be reckless, I’m not even going to lie, I used to fight, I used to get mad, I used to not care about stuff.” Juvenile detention and prison were not a deterrent for him, living on the street with death looming over him, he had no hope for his future and when I asked him about future volunteer work, he even spoke about prison as a place for homeless people to get a free meal, “So if I had money, I’d rather go invest in homeless shelters and homes than invest in jails, cause there are already jails and prisons. There are a lot of people out there homeless that would like a free meal a day instead of being locked up to get a free meal.” So, Flame came from a world where he was expelled from school, he ended up on the street where people were dying all around him. In our interview, he is warm and caring, he noticed when I needed to blow my nose and went across the room to get me a box of tissues, and he was pouring out affection to my dog. He told me “I’m kind of in love with your dog. I haven’t seen a dog in so long. I used to have a dog named Cinnamon. She was a Bull Terrier and she used to go everywhere with me, you feel me? Like following me like crazy.” He tells me how after the meditation classes and work to help him build himself, “as a man, my character,” he really wants to get his life together, “I’ve been trying to be more positive everyday, just live in a positive mindset.”

17.1.3 Isaiah – Gang violence, murders, these kids don’t expect to live past 20

Isaiah told me “it’s a lot going on, a lot of murders, a lot of gang violence where I grew up.” It was true for several of the boys I spoke to, that they came from violence, they didn’t used to care, they ended up in juvenile detention because they didn’t care what happened. Dr. Wallenberg confirmed most of these boys come from neighborhoods where they expect to die before they turn 20. “It’s a common theme among the young people in here that I’ve come across […] if you make it to 20 you’re an old man. […] They want to live in the now, they want to have everything now.” If you don’t think you’ll make it to 20, it doesn’t matter. But now, they want to live longer, they want to live a good life. Not only do they have techniques that can help them overcome anger and develop emotionally, they can also see options, they can see a future. Dr. Wallenberg spoke to me about how the “compassionate people” are coming in, giving these kids a parental caring that many of them have never experienced. “Somebody from CSA said, they were not taught to be compassionate, and why would they be if they are in this rough environment. In a rough environment, there is no compassion.” And they now have not only staff who show them care and respect, but they have volunteers come out to spend their free time teaching them, investing in them, believing in them, and that has given them confidence and hope. In this way, the CSA
program has had a huge impact on the students and their vision of the future, helping them get free from the past of violence and a possible future of mass incarceration.

17.2 Reducing recidivism: Meditation to save lives

17.2.1 Isaiah – Meditation to stop you from throwing your life away

When I was sitting talking with Isaiah, an 18-year-old African American young man from Miami who has been in and out of juvenile programs since he was 14, I learned just how serious something like meditation can be for these boys. Isaiah was telling me how Ms. KaZ has taught him “how important meditation can be to anybody in this world, no matter who you are.” He seemed very thankful that he had learned already and said, “Some people don’t learn about it until when they are older, grown folks.” He explained how important just a 10 or 15-minute meditation can be, that it can change your way of thinking, help put you in a more positive frame of mind, help you “get outside of the craziness.” What he said next floored me because I had never thought about meditation in this context: “Nobody wants to have a bad day, but you can wake up on the wrong side of the bed, there is no telling when. Just waking up on the wrong side of the bed can send you away for life. You can make the wrong decision and get incarcerated and never come home. So, meditation can stop somebody from throwing their
whole life away – if you think about it for real. It’s serious. You never know what somebody wakes up with on their mind.” The skill he had learned from Ms. KaZ was for him literally a life or death skill. Meditation for him means not making choices that can get him locked up for life or even killed.

I asked Isaiah if he had any thoughts about giving back, and he gave a long elaborate answer, showing he had clearly given it a lot of thought, “I mainly want to speak with troubled youth, see what’s going on, ‘there is a way out. This is not where it’s at. There are so many things you can be.’ I feel like it would be positive. I would take my time out, go talk to the kids and just, they need it sometimes. They need somebody who has experienced what they are going through to come and let them know, ‘listen, I’ve been through what you’re going through, you’re not the only one.’” He continued, and I realized how much he had thought about how he was in a unique position to help, “A lot of people in the building, it’s not their fault, but they haven’t really experienced this, and they can’t really relate to this. So, from someone who has experienced this, it can probably open their eyes and help them listen.” Isaiah then spent a good amount of time talking about how he could help other kids, how they could ask him questions and he could help steer them in the right direction.

17.2.2 Flame – Meditation is an answer to his prayers for help

Out of my 9-student sample, Isaiah was not the only one to express this sentiment. Flame has only been at the Youth Academy for two and a half months. This is his fourth detention center; he says he was homeless as a teenager and then went in and out of the juvenile centers “and all that.” When I ask him how he thinks Ms. KaZ’s meditation class will help him in the future, he tells me it’s an answer to his prayer: “From meditation, in the future, it will probably help me because I used to be reckless, I’m not even going to lie. I used to fight, I used to get mad, I used to not care about stuff. Before this I wanted to get myself together, honestly, I wanted to get myself together. So, I started just wanting to live positive. So, to be thrown in this class, that’s why I said God does things in mysterious ways. Oh yeah, take advantage of being here, learn how to control my anger. One night before I joined this class, probably my second or third week, I prayed to God, I asked him, can you help me control my anger, so if somebody says something or came at me the wrong way I wouldn’t be trying to fight, you know what I mean. And then a couple of weeks later I ended up in the class. And I was confused of what was going on, but then I was like, oh yeah, it was a blessing. So, yeah, this might help me in the long run be calm and if it ain’t too serious in the long run, just walk away from it.”
17.2.3 William – Breathing and meditation to get out and be with his daughter

William also spoke about how much the meditation has helped change his thoughts and behavior and helped prepare him for a new life on the outside. He told me how much the breathing and meditation techniques has helped him be more relaxed, calmer and less aggressive, to control his anger and his reactions, sometimes even more than he thinks it will. “So, the other day, a kid kept annoying me, so I didn’t know what to do, so I don’t feel like breathing is going to help me, but I tried it. I blocked everything out, I even did the little thing with my hands, and it really did work.” William has a two-year old daughter and he is very grateful to have these tools to help him stay calm and stay out. “I got a daughter. Really, I just really want to get out and be with her, do what I gotta do to raise her right. That’s the main thing I’m gonna be focused on when I go home.”

William also added that he’d like to help other kids learn from his experience, to benefit from what he has not learned: “I’d like to be able to do the same thing I was taught, teaching meditation, art, photography, all that, at Boys and Girls Club or something. Really like, I’ll tell them how I grew up, I’ve been locked up most of my young life, really, don’t make the mistake I made.”

Figure 26 ~ Photovoice: Flame. One day he’ll be in front of the gates, free. He asked me to print this for him, as a vision or goal.

“That was me in front of the gate. I try to talk to people cause there are people that have been here longer than what they are supposed to, so there are people that have it in their mindset that you can’t get out of this, you can’t do 9 to 12, you can’t do 9 months. But if you believe in yourself and you just stay dedicated to doing your time and getting through your treatment, you can be in front of that gate one day. So, I took a picture of that. One day I’m going to be there.” ~ Flame
17.3 *Reducing recidivism: Options & mindset*

“St John is an opportunity, not a punishment, that is one of our core norms. At first, it was very punitive.” Mr. Freeman is very clear about the change in focus he is implementing for the Youth Academy, and how big of a part of that Compassionate St. Augustine is playing. During my field work multiple people told me about the changes he made when he first arrived and how not all of the staff who used to work there were on board with being less punitive, more restorative. Mr. Freeman continues telling me about his vision for these kids, and his passion is palpable, “I like to believe that it is more an opportunity, that kids have opportunities here. That they are exposed to different people; the more they are exposed, the better off their life will become. Like any of us. You can’t grow into your potential if you just do the same thing. Who would have thought these guys are as talented as they are, who would have thought that they love to read, who would have thought that they could be mindful?” Mr. Freeman firmly believes that the key to giving these boys a better future is giving them better options for their future and he takes any chance he can to give them new experiences. “There was a guy who wanted to take them out on a boat, and man, they were like, ‘oh my gosh, we've never been on a boat before.’ It's little things that we just take for granted. It was wonderful.”

*Figure 27 ~ Photovoice: Flame. Adult prison located right next to the Youth Academy juvenile center.*

“That’s the jail, I’m not trying to go there, you know what I mean. I want this to be my last stop, you know what I mean? I don’t want to reoffend. I don’t want to be labeled as a criminal no more.” ~ Flame
17.3.1 Eli & John Doe – Putting their opportunities to good use

The students reflected this sense of opportunity as helping to reduce recidivism and change the future in their interviews. Eli told me, “It gets people more opportunities, because if they don’t know what they are going to do when they get out, you’re not going to do nothing, you’re going to do the same thing.” He has thrived in the music classes and was a star in the Moving Meditation. He was looking forward to trying to make it in music, and he said that his time at the Youth Academy has made him realize that he needs to work hard at his goals, that things won’t just come easy, but that he can reach his full potential if he focuses. He has spent his time meditating and reading books by Martin Luther King and Thich Nhat Hahn and he says the end result for his future is “Being more wise. That is the end piece, it made me more wise, more calm, more mindful. That’s the end result.”

John Doe also recognizes all the opportunities he has received while at the Youth Academy, and he not only sees how they can help his future, but it helps motivate him to not let them go to waste: “The program here is making me realize that there are greater things than just stealing and committing crimes, there is stuff out there for you to do to make right money instead of making wrong money. I mean, it also made me realize, if I go back out and start committing crimes again, the things that I was good at in here when I was in the groups, that will just fly out the window, cause I didn’t try to put it into effect when I got out.”

17.3.2 Isaiah, Key’shun, Flame – New experiences as a way out

Coming from neighborhoods and economic circumstances where the future does not seem to have a lot of options, being exposed to more possibilities can have a transformative effect on mindset. Isaiah talked about his “rough neighborhood” in Miami and how now he realizes that “kids feel like there is not a way out, but there is a way out.” Key’shun tells me most of his family members are incarcerated and he doesn’t want to go down the same road as his uncles and cousins, so he needs to know there are other options; he needs to be exposed to other futures. He tells me meeting the activists from CSA has helped him because “You can just learn from other people’s experiences and then change yourself with their experiences.” Taking art, meditation, AVP or even going out on a boat helps to expand his reality and change his attitude. He tells me, “It’s going to be different if we were grown up. If I still had the same attitude, I probably might go to county. But if I change it, I won’t be in that predicament, or that situation. [And it’s because of the] different types of skills, meditations, breathing, movement, all that different types of stuff that is going to help. If you let yourself do it, open yourself to new experiences.”

When your world consists of most of your family being in prison, opening yourself up to new experiences is vital. And as Flame also points out, the meditation, therapy and other classes at the Youth Academy changing his mindset is what will change his future: “There are different things, helping me
build character, they want you to think before you react, because your way of thinking is what got you here, basically.”

“..."

17.3.3 Juvenile rehabilitation & restorative justice

Ms. Amber volunteers to help sow the seeds of change for these young men through opportunity. She explains, “When you change the fertilizer at the roots the health of the plant changes. This is what our judicial system needs. How can we lock people up in cages without any intervention and expect reformation?” Mr. Freeman is clear that restorative justice, opportunities and options is what will make the difference, and he tells me the research agrees: “There is more to juvenile justice than this. This is only a small piece. Programming is everything. Razor wire is not it. If I really want to get away, I can get away. If you give them programming, they won’t want to escape, they will want to do better. This is not a deterrent. Obviously, look at prisons. If razor wire was a deterrent, how many prisons would we have? That does not work. Research shows it. Remember a long time ago, maybe 6 years ago, the big push was boot camps. Studies showed [...] there were no real long-lasting changes. Scared straight does not work. You can’t get a kid who has been traumatized from birth until 8 or 13 and expect to make any quick changes in 30 days, even a year is tough. [...] We’re not where we are supposed to be yet. But the kids don’t really want to run away, we don’t have them trying to escape. They still know it’s better here than it..."
Spiritual Activism for At-Risk Youth

is out there.” I heard from Ms. Caren, Ms. Nancy and Ms. KaZ about how the Youth Academy is a home for a lot of these young men, and even though they want their freedom, for many of them, they have more stability here than they do where they come from. And many of the boys I spoke to recognized how the Youth Academy had helped them get on track, get their GED and their jobs lined up. When I interviewed Eli just 3 days before he was going home he told me, “I’m actually thankful for being here, in a way. Yeah, in a way. For all these opportunities that I had, all these people that care about me, that I know care about me.”

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18 OBSTACLES, CHALLENGES & THOSE WHO DO NOT CHANGE

Before I analyze the positive impacts of the CSA Youth Academy program, I will first honor the obstacles, challenges and those boys who do not change, as in analyzing the impact of a program it is important to acknowledge that there is also lack of impact at times.

18.1 Obstacles & challenges for impact

18.1.1 No challenges identified by the boys

In my interviews, I did ask all the boys about what challenges, difficulties or obstacles they experienced in the program, and it was striking to me that they uniformly answered that there weren’t really any. Big A said there weren’t any challenges with the program, though he hated being locked up and couldn’t wait to just go home. JJ answered that he didn’t have any challenges because he was pretty smart. None of the boys identified any problems they had with the CSA program or any of the classes.

18.1.2 Activist & staff obstacles and challenges

The staff and activists, on the other hand, were able to identify obstacles and challenges. Mr. Freeman and Ms. Caren are the first ones to admit that the CSA program at the Youth Academy is far from perfect and there are many things to work out. There are logistics that could be improved, such as having a consistent classroom, having a more efficient system for getting the boys gathered and having the schedule of CSA classes coordinated. There are also obstacles or resistances that keep efforts from being maximized, such as when Ms. Nancy trained several high-level staff members to be AVP facilitators, so they could continue to train the boys on an on-going basis, but due to time constraints, workloads or overall inertia nothing much came of it, yet. The Youth Academy is also working inside of a larger culture that can often lean towards punitive justice, and sometimes it is hard to break even the most well-meaning staff out of a paradigm that they have lived in for years. Mr. Freeman talked to me about the obstacle of people not knowing what is possible, of staff not having experienced programs that were not punitive to know that they worked, “People who come from small communities tend to see things only one way and they haven’t been exposed. All they see, ‘this is the right way, and anything else outside of that has to be wrong.’ Ignorance is the obstacle, and not wanting to step outside the box or look at things differently.”

18.1.3 Stability of following protocols

One important logistical challenge is that in the day to day workings of the Youth Academy things can often be unpredictable and unscheduled. In my time there, staff members would sometimes be arriving to work at noon because they had been there until 9pm the day before on an emergency, so to their
credit, staff are flexible and adjust their hours to respond to the needs of the boys. As Mr. Wheeler told me after he gave me his job title, “We all walk in every day understanding that everybody in the building is a youth care worker, because the kids come first. So, if something going on with the kids interrupts anything that is incorporated in my job title, the kids come first – if it’s a behavioral problem, if someone is distraught, whatever it may be.” Because of this, staff are not always available when CSA activists arrive as scheduled, and the policy that a Youth Academy staff member should always be in the classroom with the students is often skipped over. This policy was put in place for two reasons: to help the staff also be exposed to mindfulness and mindset shifting compassion training so they can reinforce them in the Youth Academy culture and to be present for the safety of the CSA activists, just in case. Now, there has never been a single incident where a student threatened a CSA teacher and none of the activists I talked to have ever felt unsafe. I did hear of one incident where the prim and proper etiquette teacher, Ms. Sandi, had to intervene between two boys who were about to start physically fighting each other. She jumped in-between them, pushed them back and told them to “knock it off” and the situation probably de-escalated in large part because they were so shocked. The whole classroom stared at her in her business attire with matching accessories and she said, “I have a brown belt in karate.” So, while Ms. Sandi was not phased one bit, the program in general is challenged following its own structure, and there is at least one CSA activist who pulled back from teaching because this policy was not followed.

“That how we ride, that’s our transportation. You have to be in handcuffs and shackles to the dentist office. Sometimes we go out in it, and you can really not see nothing from the inside to look out. And looking at the outs just thinking, dang I’m in here, I can’t be out there.”  ~ William
18.2 The boys who are not ready to open

It is also impossible to forget that the boys and young men at the Youth Academy are there because they have committed crimes and they come from rough neighborhoods. Dr. Wallenberg lays it out, “The streets are very rough, unkind, they know no other way because this is what has been dealt them.” So, there are certainly boys that go through the program who do not transform, and for the integrity of this thesis, it is important to not only acknowledge them, but honor them, also. Among the ten boys who volunteered to participate in my thesis, one of them didn’t even make it to the interview because he misbehaved. Of the other nine, there were those who had made fundamental changes and those who simply wanted to get out and stay out. However, it would be wrong to rank them on a scale or compare them to each other under the guise of research, as we never know who will use the tools at what time and which of the boys I interviewed will prove to be truly transformed. But beyond those who volunteered, there are many boys who refuse to participate altogether. Dr. Wallenberg shared with me, “There are definitely some difficult stories, and those are the ones who just shut down and don’t want to participate in anything that is being offered. And we do have some of those, but that has to do with growth and they are not there yet. Those are the rebels without a cause, rebelling against everything that could possibly help them develop.” I heard several stories about those boys as well. Ms. KaZ had a young man in her class who had started to open up, then he exploded on the pod, was put in
confinement and when she tried to reach out to him one-on-one he seemed like a different person and flatly said “no” to any help she offered. He ended up attacking a staff member and being sent to a maximum-security facility. Ms. Sue has had an entire class that got so difficult they had to just stop and start again with a new set of kids. As much as the volatile kids need the meditation, you cannot force them to sit down and focus. And sometimes working with these kids is heartbreaking, as Ms. Sandi told me, “I had one kid who I thought was doing so well, and he left and a few weeks later he was murdered, he was shot. I cried for two days. I’ve still got his picture, it just hurts me.”

It is important to honor all of the students, even the ones that cannot be reached at this point, even the ones that are not ready to trust or to open. And it is important to honor the fact that life at the Youth Academy is not entirely a bed of roses, unless you mean to say that there are beautiful flowers blossoming in the middle of painful thorns.

19  ANALYSIS

I have started with an inductive study of ethnography, beginning with a blank slate of participant observation. Throughout my observations above I have analyzed the impact and results by organizing my findings according to my research questions. I am now applying a deductive study by analyzing my observations through a theoretical framework. Therefore, I am doing an abductive study of the spiritual activism and its impact on the boys and the community of the Youth Academy. So, we are going to look at a few of the same quotations and the overall patterns that emerged through another lens, using the existential health theory framework, in order to understand the transformation.

19.1  Spiritual activism at Youth Academy & Existential health

In order to analyze the overall impact of CSA’s spiritual activism for the boys at the Youth Academy, it is useful to find a tool that intersects spiritual activism, social justice, mindset & consciousness shift, as well as individual quality of life. The most useful tool I could find was the model for understanding the relationship between the physical, mental, social and existential levels of health presented by Cecilia Melder and Catrine Kostenius. Their eight aspects of existential health are a useful framework for analyzing the impact of the program on the overall mindset and quality of life changes of these young men. The eight aspects are: spiritual connection, meaning and purpose in life, experience of awe and wonder, wholeness and integration, spiritual strength, inner peace, hope and optimism, as well as faith.

89 Melder and Kostenius.
The underlying goal of the CSA program at the Youth Academy is to help change the mindset of the young men in order to improve their quality of life. The overall goal of spiritual activism is to create an individual transformation in the “hearts and minds of men” in order to create a collective consciousness shift in worldview. Creating both a transformation of mindset and a consciousness shift involve changing people existentially – changing how a person relates to themselves, to each other, to the world and to life. How we relate to existence determines how we define existence. CSA is helping to fulfill Mr. Freeman’s vision to offer these underprivileged young men a true academy – a learning environment filled with opportunities for growth, exploration and healing that will give these boys a new chance to define who they are from a place of wholeness. We can look at the CSA Youth Academy program to see how the different components impact and transform the eight aspects of existential health. This shows the existential impact on mindset and consciousness shift.

Of course, existential dimensions of the human psyche are fluid, organic and unquantifiable. It goes without saying that any of the program components can and do touch upon any of the eight aspects of existential health, that they flow between each other, and that it will be different for individual people. Though in my interviews and field work, I might notice a pattern where several boys talk about inner peace, spiritual strength and an experience of awe & wonder connected to the meditation and AVP classes, this doesn’t mean that they do not also gain inner peace or spiritual strength through music or some other component of the program. I am simply looking at the existential health aspects that I can see being most impacted and how that in turn impacts mindset and consciousness shift.

The components of the CSA Youth Academy program that I will analyze are:

- Meditation & Alternatives to Violence Program
- Music, Art & Etiquette
- Compassion & Service from and to others
- Overall Program effect of Health Equity & Social Justice

I will then summarize how these program components impacting the existential dimensions of the young men at the Youth Academy are helping to create a consciousness shift, and how that relates to the larger picture of spiritual activism.

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19.2 Meditation & Alternatives to Violence Program impact

During my field study time, it became clear to me that the most dramatic changes in the boys seemed to come through the meditation and AVP classes. Mindfulness Meditation, Moving Meditation and AVP all seemed to primarily impact similar aspects of existential health: inner peace, spiritual strength and an experience of awe & wonder.

19.2.1 Inner Peace:

Over and over the students would tell me how the meditation has helped them be calmer, to control their anger, to cope with their emotions. Flame had prayed for help with his anger and now he tells me, “When I’m going through something, when somebody is trying to make me mad, I can do the breathing, the meditation, everything I learned, I can do it and I’m right back in the calmness.” Eli, Isaiah, Skyler and William similarly told me that they use the techniques on a regular basis to help them stay calm, and JJ said he knew he could if he wanted to. Key’shun, too, had been able to begin building a sense of calm, so even though it had taken him almost two years to make it through the program due to his anger issues and outbursts, meditation was able to help him change his mindset. It is like Mr. Wheeler telling me what he has seen with the boys overall, “There has been some kids that have participated that have been pretty aggressive and
what it has done is give them some calmness and some purpose. [...] I think it helps them learn how to rationalize better when they are calmer, helps them think through things and problem solve in a better way.” Inner peace is perhaps the typical fruit of meditation, but in the case of these young men who often come from a background of violence and turmoil, it is an aspect of existential health that is vital to creating a shift for their future.

19.2.2 Spiritual Strength:

Mr. Wheeler, in the quote above, touches upon the aspect of existential health that is closely connected to inner peace: spiritual strength. When there is less turmoil and more calmness, it is easier to connect with spiritual strength and positivity. This is the existential aspect that makes meditation such a game changer for these boys. Isaiah articulated this very eloquently, “I think it would be smart to expand this program, a lot of kids need meditation. [...] Even when you’re out, you can still wake up, you might be stressing, you might have had a loss in your family or you lost someone important. So that would be very important, instead of losing it, [...] I’d have to do a meditation and stuff like that, to heal my mind. Breathing skills, alternative ways to avoid anger, avoid stress and negativity. That is something that can take over somebody’s life, so it’s very important to learn, that is something that can lead you to greatness instead of destructiveness.” So, learning how to control their anger shows these young men that they are stronger than their anger. For Kahlil to learn how to be a peace keeper on his pod teaches him that he is stronger than the violence he came from. Many of the activists and the staff were as impressed as I was with the young men’s level of self-awareness, recognizing what these spiritual tools can do for them. Building this spiritual strength is a vital part of the program. When these boys leave the Youth Academy they will be back in their rough neighborhoods and chaotic environments and they need to have spiritual strength to keep them on the right track.

19.2.3 Experience of Awe & Wonder:

The aspect of existential health that is perhaps most elusive inside of a high-security juvenile facility is the experience of awe and wonder. It’s perhaps not easy to foster awe and wonder surrounded by razor wire, locked metal doors, and 70 other angry incarcerated boys. However, awe and wonder came to the surface. During the meditation classes, the boys would ask questions about all sorts of expansive experiences. After a Tibetan bowl meditation, JJ commented, “Wow, that was coming to me and nobody else.” In the interviews Eli talked about a God that loves him just like he loves a girl, and Skyler said that in his room, “It’s like I just channel into another world.” Ms. Sue told me of her students, one who welled up with tears realizing he was finally soulful, another proclaiming, “you know Miss Sue, do you know that God
is everywhere? No no, I mean everywhere!” The meditation classes gave the students a safe place where they had permission to go beyond the limits of their violent past and their confined present. They provided a way in for students to access a sense of awe and wonder.

The existential health aspects of inner peace, spiritual strength and an experience of awe & wonder are an integral part of creating a new mindset and a new future for these young men. It gives them a way out of the turmoil, the strength to keep going, and the sense of wonder they need to have hope. Mindfulness Meditation, Qi Gong and Tibetan singing bowls in the Western world is usually seen as bourgeois spiritual pastimes, but for these boys it is a matter of life or death, or at least a matter of freedom or life in prison.

19.3 Music, art & etiquette impact

The biggest aspect of existential health that is impacted by the music, art and etiquette component, from what I heard in interviews, is hope and optimism. For several students, the art and music component were also an important opening into the experience of awe and wonder.

19.3.1 Hope & Optimism:

Key’shun’s uncles and cousins are in prison, Flame was homeless and talked about people dying all around him, Isaiah’s dad was in prison for years of his childhood; many of the boys mentioned to me family members in jail or murders in their neighborhoods. It is hard to have hope and optimism when your formative childhood years are spent surrounded by drugs, violence and poverty, and many of the kids end up in the system because they see no other options. So, for Skyler to realize that he is really good at drumming, for Eli to believe he can make it in music, for John Doe to start thinking he can become a professional photographer, these are meaningful changes to their existential health that affects their futures. Mr. Wheeler spoke of this hope & optimism: “Despite their big bravado, they are really kids at heart, as their ages tell you. So, they really show their youthfulness just in terms of wanting to participate. […] The art, the etiquette classes, they really haven’t been exposed to those things, exposure there opens up a lot of doors for them.” When Ms. Sandi teaches them how to eat at a fancy restaurant, she also speaks to them expecting that they will need to know this for important business meetings. This gives the boys permission to dream that they have a better future.

19.3.2 Experience of Awe & Wonder:

Though the spiritual realm of meditation is perhaps the most obvious connection into an experience of awe and wonder, awe and wonder can be sneaky. Not all students are open to meditation, some boys may not be able to sit down and focus, some simply don’t want to. But
art and music can also connect the existential health aspect of experiencing awe and wonder. Ms. Jackie spoke of her student who ate up the color lessons and began to see the world with an artist’s eye. Ms. Amber brings in music that blows the kids’ minds and in drumming circles they experience awe and wonder in rhythmic connection.

Hope and optimism cannot be underestimated as part of existential health; people of wealth and privilege all over the world who lack hope and optimism feel themselves trapped by the disease of depression. For these underprivileged boys to be given hope and optimism, along with an experience of awe and wonder, is key to opening them to a new mindset and a new future.

19.4 Compassion & service from and to others

An overarching component of CSA’s Youth Academy program is compassion as well as service. CSA has their formal compassion pledge, but in addition, all of their classes are infused with compassion, and all of the activists model for the boys what it means to be of service to others. It quickly became clear in my interviews with the boys how deeply they recognize the care and compassion, and how they, too, long to serve others. This component of the program gives an impactful bridge for these young men to the existential health aspects of spiritual connection and meaning & purpose in life.

19.4.1 Spiritual Connection:

Every single boy that I interviewed spoke to me about the care they could feel from the activists. For them, having people who are free and can choose to do anything choose to come to a juvenile facility and invest in them means the world. Some of the boys develop lasting spiritual connections with these activists, all of the boys are nurtured by the sense of spiritual belonging. This sense of spiritual connection is mirrored in the staff, as well, as Dr. Wallenberg told me, “We’re all responsible for each other. I told one youth, you’re my son. I don’t care how you look at it, you’re my son.” She spoke to me about how the “compassionate people” are coming in, giving these kids a parental caring that many of them have never experienced. This often allows the boys to open up in many ways. Skyler told me that in the meditation class he was able to open up to the other students in a way that it was not safe to do in other classes, and William told me he now had a friend who he considers a brother. And in opening to compassion from others, it opens them up to inner spiritual connections, as well. A few of the boys talked to me about their belief in God and their newfound connectivity was beginning to help them to understand God as compassionate, not just in a book, but personally loving them. So, the thread of compassion can be seen winding through the CSA program, into the hearts and minds of the boys, linking them into the existential dimension of spiritual connection.
19.4.2 Meaning and Purpose in Life:

Meaning making is a vital function for human well-being, and the component of compassion and service is helping to give these young men a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Seeing the difference that the CSA activists made, many of the boys spoke of ways they wanted to give back and it was clear that some of them had given a lot of thought to this before I ever asked. Flame wanted to help homeless kids, John Doe wanted to be a motivational speaker, William said, “I’d like to be able to do the same thing I was taught, teaching meditation, art, photography, all that, at Boys and Girls Club or something. Really like, I’ll tell them how I grew up, I’ve been locked up most of my young life, really, don’t make the mistake I made.” Isaiah had clearly spent a lot of time thinking about how meaningful it would be for him to help other kids, “I mainly want to speak with troubled youth, see what’s going on, ‘there is a way out. This is not where it’s at. There are so many things you can be.’ I feel like it would be positive.” As he was talking about how he could help other kids, how he could help answer their questions and help them find their way, I could feel his sense of purpose in doing something good. And even the boys who didn’t want to directly volunteer, their increased capacity for compassion and spiritual connection helped give them more of a sense of meaning just in daily life.

When Eli said of the CSA activists, “If no one else cares, they care,” it was a testament to the love that these volunteer teachers have for these kids, and the boys pay close attention to the service and dedication. The overarching component of compassion and service that is at the core of everything that Compassionate St. Augustine does is teaching these boys how to deepen their existential health through spiritual connection and meaning & purpose in life.

19.5 Overall program effect of health equity & social justice

Another overarching component of the CSA Youth Academy program is the effect it has on the young men as whole human beings. Through this holistic care, the program is addressing the issues of health equity and social justice, changing for these young men “the circumstances in which people grow, live, work, and age” that the WHO Commission examined. In changing this overall outcome, in giving these boys at least a slightly better sense of equality and social justice in their lives, it changes the existential dimensions of wholeness & integration and faith.

19.5.1 Wholeness & Integration:

CSA activists teach everything from Qi Gong breathing exercises to how to properly butter your bread at a nice restaurant. Together with the Youth Academy staff, they are trying to address

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91 Marmot et al., *Closing the Gap in a Generation*, iii.
every aspect of these young men’s lives, giving them emotional, spiritual, educational, vocational, creative and professional development, along with a healthy amount of simple fun. This gives the boys the opportunities they need for healing and integration. Mr. Freeman spoke of his holistic vision of the Youth Academy: “The big goal down the line is to truly be an academy. When you think of academy, I think of a highly functioning learning environment, not just scholastics, but life learning, so kids can come here, and you really see it as an opportunity, and you take full advantage of that. And that every program you go through, you take a piece. And it starts to fill those voids, fill those empty places inside of you. And you come out a truly healthy well-adjusted young man.” By giving these underprivileged boys an array of opportunities, all delivered within the container of compassion, they are providing them a way to connect to the existential health dimension of wholeness & integration.

19.5.2 Faith:

Faith is defined as “complete trust or confidence in someone or something.” Whether or not one has faith in God, faith in humanity or faith in love, faith is the aspect of existential well-being that gives a sense of safety and stability. When Eli casually mentioned to me that he didn’t know when he’d die, I realized how that these boys grow up with no faith at all in their own futures. But Eli now says he wants to have a long life and he wants it to be good. John Doe realizes that he is smart, and he needs to make his future reflect all that he has learned. Big A wants to go home, go to college, become an engineer. These boys come from an environment where the economic and racial inequality tells them they won’t make it past 20, and through their sense of health equity being restored, they begin to trust in life. When the CSA Youth Academy program starts to level their playing field, it gives them permission to dream of the future and gives them access to the existential dimension of faith.

Improving health equity and social justice in America is, of course, too tall an order for a small band of activists and juvenile justice staff in St. Augustine, Florida. But they can make dramatic changes in health equity and social justice for these individual boys which helps them leave as “truly healthy well-adjusted young men,” accessing the existential health dimensions of wholeness and integration and faith.
19.6 Answers to research questions

At the end of my analysis, I return to my research questions to summarize the answers here:

1. **What spiritual and/or humanistic factors motivate the individual receivers and activists to transform their life?**

   The bottom line connecting answer to this question is love, and I don’t mean this in a sentimental way. For many of the boys it was their love of their family that motivates them to change, or their love of themselves to want to be a different person, or they said the care they felt from the teachers motivated them. For the activists and staff, they care about these boys and want to help, they feel a sense of love and unity and responsibility for each other as humans, they see suffering or injustice and their hearts are compelled to act out of love.

2. **What impact happens on the receiving end of the action, both on an individual and a community level, in the current state of life?**

   For the individuals boys I got to know, they learned to control their anger, make better choices, they found inner peace and spiritual strength and they started making progress in their program, preparing for a better future when they leave. For the community of the Youth Academy, they have had dramatic changes, such as going one month without a single altercation after the compassion pledge. At the same time, the overall culture is changing slowly, becoming more and more compassionate, therapeutic and restorative over time.

3. **What is the result of the spiritual activism process for both activist and receiver and how has the future been changed?**

   The result is that the Youth Academy program is becoming more restorative, the boys there are realizing that it is a place of opportunity for them, a place for them to turn their lives around, and for many of these boys their futures are transformed because of the programs they have been a part of. They are in turn changing the communities they are returning to, speaking at middle schools or neighborhood clubs. And the DJJ is looking at the Youth Academy, asking them to help them expand Mindfulness and some of their other classes to other facilities.

4. **What obstacles are there for spiritual activism to have impact?**

   While the boys themselves didn’t offer me many obstacles, the program as a whole faces organizational obstacles of time, resources and structure. There are also attitudes, limited thinking and inertia. And the further out in society you go, the greater the resistance to systemic change becomes.
20 CONCLUSION

20.1 Conclusion: Existential health equity theory

The World Health Organization has put out a call to action: “Achieving health equity within a generation is achievable, it is the right thing to do, and now is the right time to do it.” 92 While there are many economic and political factors that affect the social justice health equity of these young men, often Hispanic or African American, almost always from poor neighborhoods, the work that is being done through the CSA Youth Academy Initiative is changing the existential health and quality of life significantly for those it touches. And it is showing us that, in society, restorative justice is the way forward to bring healing to our young men and women, to liberate them from mass incarceration and give them hope. On a larger scale, this will bring more social justice and health equity to future generations.

92 Marmot et al., iii.
20.2 Conclusion: Spiritual activism theory

Desmond Tutu reminds us, “You know the saying, there is only one way of eating an elephant, a piece at a time. So, you can’t do anything about global poverty, but yes you can, you can do something about this guy. Because as you remember, the sea is really only drops of water that have come together.” 93 So perhaps the CSA Youth Academy program cannot do anything about social injustice, racism and mass incarceration, but yes they can. They can do something about Eli walking around expecting to die, about Flame growing up homeless, about Isaiah being surrounded by murder, about Key’shun’s family being in prison. By creating a fundamental change in the mindset of Skyler, William and JJ, they are changing the mindset of society. By giving opportunity and hope to Big A and John Doe, they are changing the future. Through all the different components of the spiritual activism they are engaged in, they are impacting the existential dimensions of these young men under their care, reaching in to transform their mindset, changing how these fine young men define their existence.

Desmond Tutu continues to explain to us how we change the world: “How does change happen? It happens because you are concerned, you are concerned, you are concerned. And you have this coalition, and you have a coalition that becomes a movement and it overcomes apartheid.” 94 And the coalition is already forming, and not just at the Youth Academy. Several of the boys who have left are already out speaking at Boys and Girls Clubs, at middle schools, making connections in their communities, and several of the boys who are there are burning to do so when they leave. And the rest of the juvenile justice community in Florida is paying attention. Mr. Warren, Mr. Freeman and Ms. Caren all tell me the DJJ is wanting them to help pass this along to other facilities. Mr. Freeman tells me, “We’re hoping to become a model. And even though we’re nowhere near where we want to be, we’re still doing some really great things that some of the other programs could benefit from. So, we might become that model program. To let other programs to see how programs can work.” So their work for these individual boys is already taking on coalition level change, and their mindset transformation work has the potential to reach hundreds of boys in the state.

The CSA Youth Academy program is spiritual activism at work. By changing the mindset of these individual boys with great love and care, they are changing the overall culture of the Youth Academy, moving the mentality of the entire Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, and reaching into the rough neighborhoods that these transformed kids return to. Their spiritual activism is rippling out into a consciousness shift that is creating a larger change for social justice, changing entire communities and improving the lives of world citizens, as the WHO Commission called for: “Putting these inequities right

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93 Shadyac, I Am.
94 Shadyac.
is a matter of social justice. Reducing health inequities is an ethical imperative. [...] Social injustice is killing people on a grand scale.” 95 So, while they might not be working directly on government policy or economic reform, they are changing the minds of our most vulnerable citizens, changing the consciousness of our marginalized communities, lifting up hope for the poor. These were the issues that Martin Luther King Jr. had begun addressing at the end of his life, “when he broadened the Civil Rights Movement from lunch counter sit-ins to a cross-cultural economic battle for the rights of the poor regardless of color.” 96 These are the economic and political injustices that Catholic communities across Latin America responded to with Liberation Theology. 97 These are the societal structures that spiritual activism is looking to turn upside down. In modern society, religion has been removed to a realm of spirit and few theologians think about economic policy, but perhaps they should. Religion is all about simple every day matters, the details of living life that Liberation theologian Jung Mo Sung calls attention to in his call for economic justice: “Theology has something to say to the economy precisely because this field is fundamental to human life and social relations.” 98 In theology, economy and civil rights – we are all connected, we are all drops in the same ocean.

The true revolution in spiritual activism is realizing that we are all in this together, that as one of us suffers, we all suffer; when one of us changes, we all change. Desmond Tutu describes this as, “I am because we are, I am because I belong.” 99 This becomes both our call to action and our solution to the world’s problems. Richard Rohr, a Franciscan friar and activist, speaks of this call to wholeness: “As Jewish poet Emma Lazarus wrote, “Until we are all free, we are none of us free.” If we are all made in God’s image, if we are all the Body of Christ, then treating black and brown bodies with love and respect is the only way for our country, our communities, and our Christianity to be whole. Our love must be active and embodied. We cannot just preach peace and justice in a theoretical way; the rubber of justice needs to hit the real road.” 100 So, in our unity we find compassion for our often black or brown incarcerated youth. Recognizing them as our sons, we give them what every mother or father wants for their children – healing, hope and a future. Seeing them flourish, they recognize their unity with others and reach into their communities. Coalitions are formed, movements are born. Mindset transformation turns into consciousness shift, and the revolution is under way.
21 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The areas of juvenile justice and criminal justice reform are both in much need of attention from research, media, activism and policy in order to create major changes in the lives of communities of color in the United States, inside and outside of detention centers. For continued research in the areas specific to this thesis, I have the following suggestions:

- Larger scale research on effects of mindfulness meditation and/or other forms of meditation in juvenile populations, to further document the impact and to provide impetus for implementation on a larger scale.
- Document change in recidivism rates related to meditation and holistic restorative justice programs. The Youth Academy did not have the capacity to follow this in a systematic way. Mr. Freeman visits everyone after they leave, and they had stories of how boys were doing well, but no statistics. Still, the DJJ is noticing the difference – but a real study would be needed to document the results, which would help create policy changes and funding.

22 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

In concluding my research, I add my own critical approach to my thesis: to the methods, theory and written work.

22.1 Limits of sample size, classes & time

I fully realize that my sample size consisted of only 9 young men, and therefore my results are scientifically limited. I also realize that my interviewees were all volunteers, which already made them more open to the program than other students might be, who did not volunteer. I was also limited to asking for volunteers from just the two classes that I was participating in, meaning that there were 28 other classes and programs over the last two years where the students did not have an opportunity to volunteer. So, had I been setting out to do a scientifically objective qualitative study, these things would be very problematic. However, my intention was to paint a picture of this slice of life and to understand what is possible with this program, and what factors make it possible. I do acknowledge that it does not work for everyone, and I did hear stories from activists and staff of the ways it does not.

I was also only present in the community for five weeks, and during those five weeks, I could only be there while attending classes, meetings or events or while interviewing people. I was not able to take part in ‘daily life’ for these boys. During my field study, there were only two classes that I participated in, Moving Meditation and Etiquette. Other classes were either in-between sessions, not started yet or it
didn’t work out for me to participate for other circumstances. I was also limited due to the scope of my thesis, as I actually conducted 23 interviews and was not able to use all of the material I collected.

### 22.2 Ethnographic approach

I realize the ethnographic approach is more grassroots than some social science approaches, which try to be more quantitative. All theoretical perspectives have limits, and of course ethnography does as well. Perhaps for academic researchers or traditional scientists, a more quantitative or strict rational approach would be deemed ‘better,’ and there are arguments to be made that perhaps such an approach could persuade such experts whereas the grassroots ethnography approach of telling a humanizing story will only put them off (such an argument might even have been made by my supervisor on occasion). But I felt that if I had squeezed the boys into more numbers and boxes, while some people might have had an easier time with it, so much of the qualitative value would have been lost. So, I am aware of ethnographic storytelling’s limitations, and yet out of all the theoretical approaches, the ethnographic approach is the one that felt most aligned with the purpose of my thesis, so I accepted its limitations as I preferred them to the limitations of other approaches.

### 22.3 Written work

I also realize that my thesis is quite lengthy, mostly due to the ethnographic storytelling approach and my desire to give the boys the room to say what they had to say. There are also many photovoice pictures, which added so much to the understanding of the lives of these young men that I felt it would be wrong to not include as many of them as I could. For my friends who are getting master’s degrees in the anthropology field, a 100-page thesis is common place, though it is less common perhaps in the theology department. That being said, it has been a labor of love and I wouldn’t want to omit any part of the story that the boys and the community showed me.

### 23 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIETY

Being a spiritual activist myself, I tend to see how all social justice issues are connected into one big picture. So, it is not lost on me that in the short time I was immersed in the small community of Compassionate St. Augustine’s Youth Academy Initiative, there was a school shooting in Parkland, Florida where 17 people were killed, \(^{101}\) 23-year-old African American Stephon Clark was shot 20 times by police officers while standing in his own yard holding a cell phone, \(^{102}\) the president of the United

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\(^{102}\) Lowery, “Sacramento Police Shot at a Man 20 Times in His Own Yard, Thinking His IPhone Was a Gun.”
States referred to immigrants as “animals,” and Bishop Michael Curry gave a fiery social justice sermon at the royal wedding watched by an estimated two billion people. Of course, it is clear to me how school shootings were the excuse to start pushing young black and brown people out of schools and into the juvenile system, despite the fact that school shooters do not look like them. And when Stephon Clark was shot in the back and killed while I was interviewing these young African American men about their fear of being killed, the news on TV became all too real. And the rampant racism that is being normalized in the United States (and Europe, too) is obviously connected to the systemic racism that has pushed these young men to where they are. But I will keep my recommendations for society in this thesis related to reforms for the school-to-prison pipeline and the juvenile justice system, except to start with a recommendation from spiritual activism theory, as articulated by Bishop Curry to two billion people worldwide:

“Someone once said that Jesus began the most revolutionary movement in all of human history, a movement grounded in the unconditional love of God for the world and a movement mandating people to live that love and in so doing to change not only their lives, but the very life of the world itself. I’m talking about some power, real power. Power to change the world.”

What I learned from my time studying the CSA Youth Academy program is that there is power in love. Bishop Curry said, “There is power in love. Don’t underestimate it, don’t even over-sentimentalize it. There is power in love. […] When you are loved and you know it, when someone cares for you and you know it, when you love and you show it, it actually feels right. There is something right about it.” And it’s not an overly sentimental or airy-fairy spiritual love that I am talking about. The factors of transformation that the students, the activists and the staff all talked about at the Youth Academy were centered in love – loving our families and not wanting to break their hearts, loving ourselves and wanting to define who we are, feeling the love others are giving to us and letting that change us, feeling the responsibility that we are one loving community here to take care of each other. Love is the power that helped create change for these young men. So, imagine love at the center of our schools, our police, our criminal justice, our governments, our commerce and our society.

As for my specific recommendations for juvenile justice and the school systems, they are as follows:

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103 Newkirk II, “The Real Risk of Trump’s Dehumanization of Immigrants.”
106 Curry.
• Meditation is an invaluable key, especially for these at-risk youth. I have been a meditator for 30 years and listening to them speak of the life-changing power of meditation opened my eyes. I had never experienced meditation as such a life or death tool. It also is needed for the staff and teachers, to change the overall culture. Therefore, I recommend implementing mindfulness or other forms of meditation as broadly as possible: for juvenile detention centers, for Boys and Girls Clubs, for inner city schools, for the foster care system, etc. All of these children and youths really need individual therapy, but at the very least, we can give them this tool.

• Incorporate compassion into our school curriculums. The fact that one week of focusing on compassion could help 70 incarcerated boys to go one month without a single altercation proves how important this is. We need our education system, from elementary school to high school, including the juvenile education system, to be holistic and not just teach math and writing. Often, the religious right tries to force a certain religious points of view on the school system, which obviously is problematic. So, instead we can agree that compassion is the foundation of all world religions and that we need our schools to educate our children in compassion.

• Implement art, music and other electives in juvenile detention education. It is a mistake to give the boys and girls in the juvenile system only the bare minimum. Expanding their hopes for the future is a vital part of their rehabilitation.

• Equalize education funding so that all children have exposure to art, music, electives and opportunity. This should not be something for only rich white neighborhoods with higher property values. Seeing the difference it makes for the students at the Youth Academy to know they have options for their future shows that this should start early for all children, and this will help break the cycle of children from poor neighborhoods thinking their only option is crime.

• Stop the school-to-prison pipeline – out of my small 9-person sample, 3 of the boys specifically mentioned that they got in trouble when they weren’t in school anymore, and perhaps the others would have also if I had specifically asked. These children need more support, not expulsion, and it is entirely wrong to kick them out of school and put them at higher risk.

• Put therapeutic resources into schools for at-risk youth, instead of sending them to juvenile detention centers for therapy. Many of the youth that I met were both kind and smart and had they received the therapeutic support they were getting while locked up while at school, instead of being expelled, they would have likely never gone down this path.

• Make the CSA Youth Academy Initiative a model of juvenile justice and improve upon it. Unfortunately, many of the juvenile facilities in Florida and many states are still more punitive, and restorative justice is what is needed to help heal these young men, to help bring more social justice to society in general and to bring health equity to future generations. The program at the
Youth Academy is not perfect and it still has room to grow, but their hearts are in the right place and they know that opportunity, rehabilitation and compassion is the answer. And that love is the power.

Coming back to the power of love that was spoken of to two billion people, Bishop Curry started by quoting the great Martin Luther King, Jr., so I will end with it:

“We must discover the power of love, the redemptive power of love and when we do that, we will make of this old world a new world. For love, love is the only way.”

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Figure 33 – Poster designed by Youth Academy Art class student for Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

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107 Curry.
24 SOURCE MATERIALS


time-woke-radical-evolutionary-activism-spiritual-political?akid=16819.1085851.SZBrPW&rd=1&src=newsletter1089746&t=16.


APPENDIX A ~ DEFINITION & INTERPRETATION OF KEY WORDS

Below is a list of words that I use in this thesis and their definitions. Many of the terms are broad sociological or theological words that are difficult to authoritatively define and whose meanings are often debated. Therefore, I am not only giving the strict literal definitions, but also including the interpretation as the words are being used within this thesis. This is being done so that the reader understands the meanings of these words here, as opposed to the many other interpretations or definitions that can be found for the same words in other contexts.

Faith – The Oxford Dictionary defines faith both as “complete trust or confidence in someone or something” and “strong belief in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction.” For this thesis, I am giving the word “faith” a very broad definition. It could be religious or spiritual faith, and it can also entail a humanistic faith in love, humanity or human rights. No one should feel excluded from taking action because they do not like the word ‘spiritual’ or their faith does not fall into a certain religious or theistic category.

Faith vs. Belief – Faith is however here NOT merely describing one’s beliefs; therefore, I am not using them interchangeably. From the Oxford Dictionary, the words trust, confidence and conviction are key. As author Matt Carmichael pointed out in our interview, “Faith is about trust. Belief is more about conceptual understanding about reality. Of course, they are interlinked. But for activism, trust is much more meaningful than belief. A Christian who genuinely trusts God is liberated to follow a risky calling. Believing in ideas about God rarely brings such liberation.” Having faith in one’s convictions in human dignity also brings such liberation, which simple belief does not. Therefore, I am using faith, not belief, to describe both spiritual and humanistic trust in our convictions.

Activism / Action – The Oxford Dictionary defines activism as “the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change.” For this thesis, activism must involve someone or something outside of oneself, an action on behalf of someone else (human or non-human) or the environment in the local community. E.g. Prayer only counts if it is done in group in front of City Hall, and random acts of kindness to cashiers and strangers does not fall under activism, though it does make the world a better place.

Spiritual / spirituality – The Oxford Dictionary defines spirituality as “The quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things,” however, this thesis disagrees with the latter part of that definition. Spirituality is the experiential aspect concerned with the human spirit or soul, AND it is intricately connected to the physical world we live in. Walter Wink defines spirituality as that which connects to the “spiritual reality at the heart of everything, from photons to
supernovas, from a Little League baseball team to Boeing Aircraft”. For this thesis, spirituality is the inner life connected to the whole of life.

Religion – The Oxford Dictionary defines religion as “A particular system of faith and worship.” For the purpose of this thesis, one way to understand this system of faith is the way that Matt Carmichael illustrates religion for his classes. He brings in a container of water from the local stream, Meanwood Beck. He says to his class “I have brought with me Meanwood Beck in this container,” and then his class has a discussion. He explains: “That is a good image of religion: the natural river is the river of life flowing. But there is nothing wrong with putting some water in a container, so you can bring it somewhere.” That is what religion is, a particular system of faith and worship so you can contain some of the river of life. But the container is the not the whole river.

God – The definition of the word God has been argued over for millennia, so I have no plans to solve it here. It seems silly to consult the Oxford Dictionary on this question, but it states, “the creator and ruler of the universe and source of all moral authority,” which is far too limited and patriarchal. In general, I prefer “God is Love,” which is true though somewhat over-simplistic. Brian McLaren suggested that God should be spelled with a question mark in the middle (G?d), as anyone who thinks they know, doesn’t. For this thesis, we can use Howard Thurman’s distinction between the “God of Religion” and the “God of Life,” and here we are referring to the God of Life, that is, not to a God of a certain religion or creed, but to the God that is among us in the midst of life.

Soul – Soul is again a word that has no direct definition. The Oxford Dictionary simply states, “the spiritual or immaterial part of a human being or animal.” It was the first question Eli, a 16-year-old resident at the Youth Academy asked me. “What is a soul?” So, I asked him, “What do you think it is?” and he answered, “Your innermost self?” I think that is a good definition. And as Eli has as much authority on the definition of a soul as anybody, let’s go with Eli.

Humanistic – The Cambridge dictionary defines humanistic as “treating people with respect and making certain they are safe, happy and healthy based on human values and interests, often without accepting the beliefs of religion.” I often experience humanists as more noble and passionate than that definition makes them sound and I venture to say that the “human values” have a great deal to do with love and compassion.

Racism – If one simply looks up racism in the Oxford Dictionary one gets a generic definition: “Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one’s own race is superior.” This sounds like it could be applied equally from any race to another. However, racism requires the societal power to oppress. Thus, sociologist Dr. Nicki Lisa Cole states

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“Racism refers to a variety of practices, beliefs, social relations, and phenomena that work to reproduce a racial hierarchy and social structure that yield superiority, power, and privilege for some, and discrimination and oppression for others... It exists when an imbalance in power and social status is generated by how we understand and act upon race.” 111

Social justice – Social justice is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges.” It is the core concept that all members of a society should have equal access to resources, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or other categorization. “The word duo, social justice, was roughly combined in the mid 1850's [and it] relayed the core idea that all members of a society should have equal benefits and opportunities. In its early days, the term social justice specifically targeted poverty and the need for an equal distribution of resources. Today, the term has acquired a broader and more detailed definition that accounts for specific modes of moral treatment...which in effect protects human dignity.” 112

Economic justice – Economic justice does not have a separate entry in the Oxford Dictionary but is defined as justice “relating to economics or the economy.” For this thesis, it is the component of social justice that seeks specifically to rectify economic inequality and the structural violence of poverty.

Equality – The Oxford dictionary defines equality as “The state of being equal, especially in status, rights, or opportunities.” That is fairly straightforward.

Radical – As Terry Patten explains, “The word radical means ‘root.’ The Oxford English Dictionary defines radical as ‘relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something,’” and so the word radical here means something that “seeks to address the source of problems instead of their symptoms”. 113

Revolution – The Oxford Dictionary defines revolution as “a dramatic and wide-reaching change in conditions, attitudes, or operation.” Revolution comes from the word revolve, which means to turn around or turn upside down. Donald Kraybill talks about how Jesus’ teachings really depict an upside-down kingdom where the meek and the poor inherit the earth and the rich and powerful are sent packing. I agree with Kraybill (and Jesus), revolution is “an inverted, upside-down way of life that challenges the prevailing social order”. 114

Mindset – The Oxford Dictionary defines mindset at “The established set of attitudes held by someone.” Psychologist and researcher Dr. Gary Klein elaborates, “Mindsets aren’t just any beliefs. They are beliefs that orient our reactions and tendencies. [...] When our mindsets become habitual, they define who we are, and who we can become.” 115 This is why individual transformation is about

113 Patten, “What It Really Means to Be ‘Woke’: Radical Activism Is Spiritual as Well as Political | Alternet.”
114 Kraybill, The Upside-Down Kingdom, 16.
115 Klein, Ph.D., “Mindsets: What They Are and Why They Matter.”
changing mindset. “One of the most powerful aspects of mindsets is how quickly they can be shifted, […] Unlike skills that have to be practiced again and again. […] Mindsets are powerful, and shifting them can be sudden and transformative.” 116

**Individual Transformation** – Reading the Oxford Dictionary definition of transformation, “a marked change in form, nature, or appearance,” does not provide much insight into what is meant by an individual transformation in terms of spiritual activism, restorative juvenile justice or social justice consciousness change. For the purpose of this thesis, we can simply define it as a marked change in an individual person’s mindset that is reflected in their thoughts, actions, outlook and belief system about themselves and their worldview.

**Worldview** – The Oxford Dictionary defines worldview as “a particular philosophy of life or conception of the world.” This definition is important for this thesis, as in changing the prevailing social order, spiritual activism’s aim is to change worldview. Walter Wink defines it thus: “A worldview dictates the way whole societies see the world. A worldview provides a picture of the nature of things: what is visible and invisible, what is real and unreal. They are the bare-bones structures with which we think. Through the lens of our worldview we make sense of our experiences”. 117 The reason spiritual activism is key in changing worldview is that oftentimes, worldview is unconscious and needs to be brought into awareness before it can be changed. “Normally, a worldview functions on an unconscious level. People are unaware of its existence. It is just the way things are.” 118

**Consciousness shift or change** – In looking for a shift or change that is radical, revolutionary and pertains to worldview, an ‘ideological change’ was too narrowly focused on the mind only. The word consciousness when defined in various dictionaries contains “the fact of awareness by the mind of itself and the world,” feelings, thoughts, perceptions, understanding, responsiveness and moral conscience both individually and collectively. Therefore, a collective consciousness change is a much more accurate and holistic term to describe what spiritual activism is referring to – a shift that involves the heart, the mind, the soul, our relationship to all of life around us and our actions.

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116 Klein, Ph.D.
118 Wink, Loc 196.
## Appendix B ~ Students Interviewed

Below is very short basic biographical information of the students at the time that they were interviewed. I did not ask what anyone was at the Youth Academy for and no one volunteered that information, and I would not want to include it to cloud anyone’s picture of these boys with that knowledge. The information below is intended to illustrate the dysfunctional state of our school-to-prison pipeline and the punitive juvenile justice system, that has until now not given these young men what they have needed. This information was not part of my interview questions and is simply gleaned from things they mentioned.

- **Big A** – Age 15, African American. He had spent 10 months at the Youth Academy. He was living in the Independent Living pod and was only a couple of weeks away from going home. This is his first program.
- **Eli** – Age 16, African American. He had spent 10 months at the Youth Academy. He had been in one previous program, which was a lower security program. He ran away from that program and was therefore sent to this high-security program.
- **Flame** – Age 17, African American. He had spent 2 months at the Youth Academy. He told me he had been to 3 or 4 previous detention centers. He was also homeless and had been expelled.
- **Isaiah** – Age 18, African American. He had spent 2 months at the Youth Academy. He had been in one previous program, which he mentioned had been when he was 14. His father also spent time in prison while Isaiah was growing up.
- **JJ** – Age 17, White. He had been at the Youth Academy for 7 months. He had been in one previous high-security program for 19 months.
- **John Doe** – Age 17, African American. He had spent 14 months at the Youth Academy. He had been in 3 previous juvenile centers, starting at age 12.
- **Keyshun** – Age 17, African American. He had spent 22 months at the Youth Academy. He had been in 3 previous juvenile facilities in Florida and Georgia. Most of the men in his family are in prison.
- **Skyler** – Age 19, White. He had spent 18 months at the Youth Academy and was getting out in just a couple of weeks. He had been to one previous program.
- **William** – Age 18, Hispanic/Haitian, He had spent 15 months at the Youth Academy. He had been to 2 previous programs for 18 months & 6 months. He is the father to a two-year-old little girl.
APPENDIX C ~ INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

Masters Thesis Interview Informed Consent – Youth Academy students

Researcher statements: Shanti Graffstrom, Uppsala University
Thank you for volunteering to participate in an interview for my thesis research into Compassionate St Augustines program at the Youth Academy.

Participation is Voluntary: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to answer or NOT answer any questions during the interview. You are also free to end the interview at any time. You are also free to end your participation entirely for any reason without penalty up until May 15th, when the thesis will be complete. Simply let me know if you change your mind and I will not use your interview for my thesis.

Recording: I will be recording our interview, audio only (no video) in order to type up what you say accurately. The audio recording will not be used for any other purpose. The audio recording will be stored securely on my computer only.

Student Anonymity: In order to protect your anonymity, I will not use your name in my thesis. I will use a first name of your choosing to refer to you so that you know who you are in my report.

Student Photos: I will use the photos you took for our interview in my thesis. In order to protect your anonymity, I will not use any photos that can identify you.

No right or wrong answers: I have no affiliation with Compassionate St Augustine, the Youth Academy, the Juvenile Justice System, any Law Enforcement or with any Church or religion. There are no right or wrong answer, I am only looking for your honest thoughts and feelings.

Use of Material: The end product thesis will be published on the Uppsala University online research library. It will be available to the public online, for anyone searching for research on activism or projects such as this one at the Youth Academy. I may also publish my thesis in book form, combined with other works about spiritual activism.

Consent from Youth Academy student participants:
Each of the student and staff interviewees have had the above statements explained to them and have had the opportunity to ask questions and had all their questions answered to their satisfaction. Each participant agreed to the above statements and voluntarily agreed to participate in this study. As the young men are under the legal care of the Youth Academy, their participation in the thesis interviews is covered by their general participation in the Youth Academy program.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: 3-29-18
Printed Name: Orlando Freeman
Masters Thesis Interview Informed Consent – Activists

Researcher statements: Shanti Grafström, Uppsala University
Thank you for volunteering to participate in an interview for my thesis research into Compassionate St Augustine’s program at the Youth Academy.

Participation is Voluntary: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to answer or NOT answer any questions during the interview. You are also free to end the interview at any time. You are also free to end your participation entirely for any reason without penalty up until May 15th, when the thesis will be complete. Simply let me know if you change your mind and I will not use your interview for my thesis.

Recording: I will be recording our interview, audio only (no video) in order to type up what you say accurately. The audio recording will not be used for any other purpose. The audio recording will be stored securely on my computer only.

Activist Names: Since you are an adult public figure and I'd like to give you professional credit, I will use your whole name, unless you let me know you would prefer otherwise.

No right or wrong answers: I have no affiliation with Compassionate St Augustine, the Youth Academy, the Juvenile Justice System, any Law Enforcement or with any Church or religion. There are no right or wrong answer, I am only looking for your honest thoughts and feelings.

Share as Much as You are Inspired: I am telling the story of Compassionate St Augustine and the Youth Academy and as you might know – stories are better if there is more detail, so please share any stories that you feel were important or illustrate a point with as much specificity as possible.

Use of Material: The end product thesis will be published on the Uppsala University online research library. It will be available to the public online, for anyone searching for research on activism or projects such as this one at the Youth Academy. I may also publish my thesis in book form, combined with other works about spiritual activism.

Consent from interview participant:
I have read the statements above and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ____________
Printed Name: Sue Fitzgerald
Masters Thesis Interview Informed Consent – Youth Academy staff

Researcher statements: Shanti Grafstrom, Uppsala University
Thank you for volunteering to participate in an interview for my thesis research into Compassionate St Augustine’s program at the Youth Academy.

Participation is Voluntary: Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to answer or NOT answer any questions during the interview. You are also free to end the interview at any time. You are also free to end your participation entirely for any reason without penalty up until May 15th, when the thesis will be complete. Simply let me know if you change your mind and I will not use your interview for my thesis.

Recording: I will be recording our interview, audio only (no video) in order to type up what you say accurately. The audio recording will not be used for any other purpose. The audio recording will be stored securely on my computer only.

Staff Names: Since you are a public figure and I’d like to give you professional credit, I will use your whole name, unless you let me know you would prefer otherwise.

No right or wrong answers: I have no affiliation with Compassionate St Augustine, the Youth Academy, the Juvenile Justice System, any Law Enforcement or with any Church or religion. There are no right or wrong answer, I am only looking for your honest thoughts and feelings.

Use of Material: The end product thesis will be published on the Uppsala University online research library. It will be available to the public online, for anyone searching for research on activism or projects such as this one at the Youth Academy. I may also publish my thesis in book form, combined with other works about spiritual activism.

Consent from Youth Academy staff participants:
I have read the statements above and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signature: [Signature]
Date: 3.29.18

Printed Name: Joe Warren
Photovoice:

Thank you for participating in an interview for my thesis.

Before I sit down to talk with you, please use this digital camera to take a few photos.

Please take photos that show what is important for you about the Compassionate St. Augustine program of classes.

- Take photos that say something about how you felt and what you thought BEFORE you started the classes.
- Take photos that say something about how you feel and what you think DURING the classes.
- Take photos that say something about how you feel and what you think about THE FUTURE, after having been a part of the classes.
- You can also take photos that say anything that you want to say about the Compassionate St. Augustine program of classes.

When you are done taking pictures, please return the camera so that I can receive your pictures before we sit down for our interview. Then in our interview, you can tell me what the pictures mean to you.

Thank you!

Ms. Shanti