

UC PERSONAL INSIGHT QUESTION PROMPT 7: COMMUNITY SERVICE

7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?

UC ESSAY EXAMPLE #1: “HOUSE OF PAIN”

So many of my friends had eating disorders. Scrolling through poems written by students at my school on a poetry publishing site, I was shocked by the number of girls starving or purging in attempts to love themselves. Before finding out about their struggles, I thought I was the only girl hating my reflection. Almost all the girls I knew at SAS were hiding their insecurity behind a facade of “health choices”.

Knowing I wasn’t alone in my fears, I found courage to take my own first steps. I joined House of Pain (HOP), an exercise club my PE teacher recommended. Although I initially despised working out, I left the gym feeling strong and proud of my body. Over the first weeks, I even developed a finger-shaped bruise on my bicep as I checked it daily. I began to love exercise and wanted to share my hope with my friends.

Since my friends hadn’t directly acknowledged their eating disorders, I had to engage them indirectly. I intentionally talked about the benefits of working out. I regularly invited them to come to the HOP sessions after school. I talked about how fun it was, while at the same time mentioning the healthy body change process. I was only their coach, but felt their struggles personally as I watched girls who couldn’t run 10 meters without gasping for air slowly transform. Their language changed from obsessing with size to pride in their strength.

I was asked to lead classes and scoured the web for effective circuit reps. I researched modifications for injuries and the best warmups and cooldowns for workouts. I continue to lead discussions focusing on finding confidence in our bodies and defining worth through determination and strength rather than our waists.

Although today my weight is almost identical to what it was before HOP, my perspective and, perhaps more importantly, my community is different. There are fewer poems of despair, and more about identity. From dreaming of buttoning size zero shorts to pushing ourselves to get “just one more push up”, it is not just our words that have changed.

UC ESSAY EXAMPLE #2

I have lived in the Middle East for the last 11 years of my life. I've seen cranes, trucks, cement-mixers, bulldozers and road-rollers build all kinds of architectural monoliths on my way to school. But what really catches my attention are the men who wear blue jumpsuits striped with fluorescent colors, who cover their faces with scarves and sunglasses, and who look so small next to the machines they use and the skyscrapers they build.

These men are the immigrant laborers from South-Asian countries who work for 72 hours a week in the scorching heat of the Middle East and sleep through freezing winter nights without heaters in small unhygienic rooms with 6-12 other men. Sometimes workers are denied their own passports, having become victims of exploitation. International NGOs have recognized this as a violation of basic human rights and classified it as bonded labour.

As fellow immigrants from similar ethnicities, my friends and I decided to help the laborers constructing stadiums for the 2022 FIFA world cup.

Since freedom of speech was limited, we educated ourselves on the legal system of Qatar and carried out our activities within its constraints. After surveying labor camps and collecting testimonials, we spread awareness about the laborer's plight at our local community gatherings and asked for donations to our cause. With this money, we bought ACs, heaters and hygienic amenities for the laborers. We then educated laborers about their basic rights. In the process, I became a fluent Nepalese speaker.

As an experienced debater, I gave speeches about the exploitation of laborers at the gatherings. Also, I became the percussionist of the small rock band we created to perform songs that might evoke empathy in well-off migrants. As an experienced website-developer, I also reached out to other people in the Middle East who were against bonded labor and helped them develop the migrant-rights.org website.

Although we could only help 64 of the millions of laborers in the Middle East, we hope that our efforts to spread awareness will inspire more people to reach out to the laborers who built their homes.