



**PRESIDENTIAL CITIZEN
SCHOLARS PROGRAM**

Music & Mentoring at the NSCC

PCS Capstone Project
2021 PCS Cohort

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Salisbury's North Camden Community

Salisbury, Maryland is a college town, and civic partnerships between Salisbury University and the surrounding community are part of what makes this community unique (Weaver, 2021). The North Camden Neighborhood, just north of SU's campus, has a population of several hundred people that is especially diverse: migrant families, young families, retirees, college students, and invested homeowners who call this neighborhood their home. In 2020/2021, the City of Salisbury launched the Newton Street Community Center (NSCC) to meet the needs of the surrounding community, especially the youth who live in this neighborhood.

The 2020 Presidential Citizen Scholars at Salisbury University partnered with the City of Salisbury's Mayor's Office and Community Development Department to conduct a needs assessment survey in the North Camden Community to determine what programming the community wanted to see featured in the NSCC when it opened. According to Blake et al. (2020), the community expressed that they would benefit the most from a childcare program that supports career prep, reading, writing, and art skills. In other words, the Newton Street Community would like to have more opportunities to connect with one another through new means such as liberal arts-based programs.



Figure 1. Newton Street Community Center (Salisbury, Maryland)

Additionally, Blake et al. (2020) found that over 53% of the homes within the Newton Street Community has at least one child under the age of 18. This means there are more than enough children who would benefit from all kinds of programming within the Newton Street Community Center.

The Power of Music

As a member of the 2021 PCS Cohort, I decided to focus my Civic Engagement Capstone Project on addressing the need for music programming and mentoring for youth at the NSCC. Music gives people the ability to connect and create bonds with each other while benefitting through collectiveness at large. According to a study conducted by Rana (2018), "musical engagement can positively strengthen one's social bond with others." Bonds are important to humans because it is what keeps us with a sense of belonging.

Likewise, music is also known for its de-stressing properties. Music can be beneficial to any community by being able to reduce stress and anxiety that people may face daily. In a study Toyoshima, et al. (2011) noted, "cortisol levels were markedly decreased for piano playing, clay molding and calligraphy, indicating a reduction in stress due to participation in creative activities; the effect of piano playing was significantly greater than clay molding and calligraphy" (p. 1). This study gives more evidence that arts-based programs can do more than create bonds with others socially, music has the power to heal people internally and be a difference-maker in any community by alleviating stress while allowing others to build bonds through sharing musical and cultural experiences.

Toward a Sustainable Music Program

As my knowledge for the power of music began to grow, my passion for the youth in the Newton Street Community grew stronger. I wanted to provide a music center within the NSCC for the youth to experience music in its most raw form, playing musical instruments and receiving feedback from mentors in their musical journey and personal growth. I reached out to several faculty members of Salisbury University's Music Department to gain advice

regarding the sustainable development of a music and mentoring program between SU students and youth at the NSCC. Unfortunately, the Music Department at SU did not believe it was possible to move forward to partner with the NSCC at this time because I had a lack of concrete information on how the programming at the NSCC would involve SU student volunteers for mentoring at the NSCC. As with any civic engagement project, community partnerships are vital for sustainability (Weaver, 2021). A partnership with Salisbury University for music and mentoring would be the most beneficial for the youth in the Newton Street Community because 68.7% of community members surveyed asked for mentoring programs in Music, Art, and/or Dance (Blake et al., 2020).

With a presently undefined partnership with Salisbury University's Music Department, I decided to persevere by searching for a local nonprofit organization or business that might have similar goals to engage the community and provide mentoring through music for the youth in the Newton Street area. I stumbled upon The Lion's Den Recording Studio in Downtown Salisbury, which provides recording services, music lessons, artist

management, production, and podcasting in the community. After conversations with the founder of The Lion's Den, Abdias Charles agreed to support my project by offering music lessons to the youth at the Newton Street Community Center for a few months, specifically by assisting with piano and percussion lessons. At this point in my PCS Capstone Project, I had a partnership with The Lion's Den to help facilitate musical activities but no tools or instruments for the youth to use. Fortunately, the Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement (PACE) allotted funds for my project through a grant proposal process, and I submitted a grant proposal to fund the purchase of musical instruments to be housed within the NSCC. Unfortunately, my grant proposal was denied due to SU's grant policies which did not allow for any of the instruments to be housed anywhere else except on SU's immediate campus.

Perseverance in Civic Engagement

My next step was to reach out to the Community Relations Manager at the City of Salisbury, Rachel Manning, to inquire about any funding for musical equipment through the City's grant structure. Rachel Manning suggested that



Figure 2. Dhedhus Unboxing the Music Equipment at the Newton Street Community Center

we propose a loan form agreement between the City of Salisbury and Salisbury University which might allow SU to loan the instruments to the NSCC for a music program for youth. Dr. Alexander Pope (Director, Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement) and Heather Saxman (financial representative and administrator at SU), worked with Rachel Manning and I to pioneer the first loan agreement where SU has provided instruments “on loan” in collaboration with local community: SU and PACE would purchase the equipment needed for music programming at the NSCC and the community leaders at the NSCC would keep these items secured at the Center for youth to be mentored through music. The loan form agreement that has been established will be renewed annually to ensure that the musical equipment is in good shape and that the instruments are still available to youth who frequent the Newton Street Community Center.

Next Steps for future Harmonious Collaborations at the NSCC

My three semesters in the Presidential Citizen Scholars Program taught me what it truly means to lead with humility, vulnerability, and faith. Earning the PACE grant has made the music programming at the Newton Street Community Center possible through the purchase of music instruments and equipment. I have learned that networking and relationships are essential for successful civic engagement work. After earning the PACE grant, I reached out to SU’s Music Department once more to see if an official civic partnership between the NSCC and SU students would be possible through a professor on campus or through SU’s PRESTO Program. Dr. Colleen Clark has agreed to support my PCS Capstone Project in a future semester by bringing some of her SU music students to work with the youth interested in music at the Newton Street Community Center. I believe that by providing music instruments for this purpose, even more harmonious collaborations between SU and the youth at the NSCC is now possible.

Salisbury University and the Newtown Street Community Center have the beginnings of a partnership with one another through my Presidential Citizen Scholars Capstone Project. I am also excited to announce that I have been hired to serve as a Community Program Specialist at the NSCC during my Senior year at SU so that I will be able to invest my time and musical skills as a mentor with the youth in the North Camden Neighborhood. It was challenging to lead a civic engagement project through the COVID-19 pandemic, but I am grateful that the partnerships with PCS, PACE, the NSCC, The Lion’s Den, and SU’s Music Department have allowed my project to become a success.

Future PCS Scholars should consider renewing and updating the IRB research that the 2020 PCS Cohort conducted to see if the programs, like my music and mentoring project, are meeting the needs of the youth in the community. The 2019/2020 data has been valuable to Rachel Manning and her team at the NSCC, but COVID has changed things in ways that a new IRB-approved research study would help clarify. The next research study by PCS Scholars should measure the Newton Street Community’s perception of the effectiveness of NSCC programming while also investigating what new programs the community would like to see developed for the youth in the neighborhood.

References

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The Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement (PACE) is a resource center where the SU community, local government, non-profit and public groups can access knowledge and information. PACE draws on the interdisciplinary expertise of SU faculty, students, staff, and community partners. As a nonpartisan contributor, the Institute organizes projects and programs that are customized to fit the particular needs of the Eastern Shore community. For more information about PACE or the PCS Program, please contact us at PACE@salisbury.edu

The Presidential Citizen Scholars Program (PCS) is a multi-faceted, civic engagement experience that prepares students to become community leaders now and in the future. The PCS program offers students of all majors and levels of experience the opportunity to become engaged in the political life of the community and to develop habits of democratic citizenship. The PCS program builds on SU's mission statement "to empower students with knowledge, skills, and core values that contribute to lifelong learning and active citizenship in a democratic society." Over the course of three semesters, Presidential Citizen Scholars apply the theory and practice of engaged citizenship to cultivate a legacy project that will endure beyond their time as a student at Salisbury University.



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