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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

Explore the Power of Children: Understanding Nonprofit Organization's Roles in Reinforcing Youth Character Education

by

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Capstone Research Report Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Master of Nonprofit Administration Degree
in the School of Management
directed by Dr. Richard Gregory Johnson III

San Francisco, California

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Abstract

Over the past two years, the pandemic has drastically changed how children interact with media and real people. With many children spending more time at home, their media use has increased, and this has had a significant impact on their mental, physical, and emotional development. However, amidst this challenging time, character education can play a vital role in supporting children's growth and development. Character education can help children navigate the complexities of our changing world and become more resilient in the face of adversity by providing the tools they need to make sound decisions and behave well. Nonprofit organizations, by their mission and capacity, can invest in and design high-quality character education and programs, we can ensure that our children are better equipped to face the challenges in real life and the virtual world with confidence. This study examines how a nonprofit organization cultivates K-12 students' volunteering involvement and connects character education with community services and philanthropy. An extensive literature review and several expert interviews discuss key findings around the existing practices. This capstone is intended to present a successful model for any nonprofit organization or education system either looking to engage students in volunteer service or improve their current practices by offering practical insights and recommendations.

Keywords: character education, volunteerism, youth program

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Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures.....	ii
Section 1. Introduction.....	1
Defining Character Education.....	1
Why Does Character Education Matter?.....	2
The Connection between Character Education and Volunteering.....	3
Research Questions.....	3
Section 2: Literature Review of Character Education	4
Character Development and Behavior Outcomes.....	4
Benefits of Character Education.....	5
Implementation of Character Education.....	6
Comprehensive and Modular Character Education.....	8
Youth Engagement.....	8
Nonprofit Organizations' Role in Youth Program	9
Conclusion.....	12
Section 3: Methods and Approaches.....	12
Section 4. Data Analysis	17
Literature Analysis.....	18
Interview Analysis.....	19
Section 5: Implications and Recommendations	23
Findings	23
Implications.....	28
Recommendations.....	30
Section 6: Conclusions.....	31
List of References	33
Author's Bio.....	36

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1. Expert Interview Profiles.....	13
Table 2. Interview Questions.....	14
Table 3. Tzu Chi Character Education Growth Trend.....	16
Figure 1. Violent Crime by Youth of Day.....	11
Figure 2. Tzu Chi Youth Engagement Flow.....	18
Figure 3. Tzu Chi Youth Association Participants Number.....	19
Figure 4. Character Education and Volunteering Model.....	28

Section 1. Introduction

Character education is critical in promoting positive character traits and helping children make ethical decisions that benefit themselves and others. Being a volunteer is an effective way to develop positive character traits through hands-on methods in real-world settings. Voluntary work provides students with opportunities to reflect on their values, fosters their involvement in the community, and raises awareness of social issues. This project aims to explore how a local nonprofit organization cultivates K-12 students' involvement in volunteering and how it connects character education with community service and philanthropy. The study seeks to understand the impact of youth engagement in the nonprofit sector on personality development toward future leadership.

Defining Character Education

Dr. Thomas Lickona defines character education as a conscious attempt to assist individuals in comprehending, valuing, and implementing ethical principles. In his landmark book, *Educating for Character*, Dr. Lickona emphasizes that “When we think about the kind of character we want for our children, it’s clear that we want them to be able to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and then do what they believe to be right—even in the face of pressure from without and temptation from within.” (Lickona, 1991)

According to the U.S. Department of Education, “Character education is a learning process that enables students and adults in a school community to understand, care about and act on core ethical values such as respect, justice, civic virtue and

citizenship, and responsibility for self and others. Upon such core values, we form the attitudes and actions that are the hallmark of safe, healthy, and informed communities that serve as the foundation of our society.” (US Department of Education (ED), n.d.)

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, “Good character is not formed in a week or a month. It is created little by little, day by day. Indeed, it required consistent and patient efforts over an extended period to develop good character.” This is the reason why the character needs to be taught starting from young kids.

Why Does Character Education Matter?

Because of the shelter-in-place policy during the pandemic, the total amount of screen media used daily went from 4:44 to 5:33 (hours) among tweens, and from 7:22 to 8:39 (hours) among teens between 2019 and 2021. (Rideout et al., 2022) There has been a significant increase rate in just two years than the previous four years. Entertainment screen use includes time spent watching television and online videos, playing video games, using social media, browsing websites, creating content, e-reading, and other digital activities. Social media usage and exposure to inappropriate online content can also negatively affect teens, distracting them, disrupting their sleep, exposing them to bullying, rumor spreading, unrealistic views of other people's lives, peer pressure, and even depression and anxiety. Children may be even more vulnerable because of the immature nature of their brain development.

Additionally, bullying and not respecting faculty are also major problems at school. It is, therefore, very important to empower students to identify and solve these problems by themselves. Character education helps students develop important human qualities and virtues. Quality character education can help students learn critical thinking, make the right decisions when facing challenges and frustrations in real life, and strive for excellence.

The Connection between Character Education and Volunteering

Character education and volunteer service are closely related as they both aim to promote positive values and behaviors in individuals. Volunteering allows individuals to put their character education into practice by demonstrating the values they have learned in real-life situations.

In addition, volunteering can also reinforce and enhance character education. By engaging in volunteer activities, students can learn new skills and knowledge, build their self-confidence, and develop a sense of meaning in life.

Research Questions

This project's driving interest was a series of questions about how nonprofit organizations can guide students' attitudes and behavior along with character education from parents and school systems. How do the students engage the community through volunteerism and philanthropy if the outcome is positive? Can we foster young children to be long-term volunteers? Will they make any impact?

Considering all these questions, three primary research topics arise:

1. Can nonprofit organizations provide opportunities to reinforce and change students' mindsets and behavior?
2. How do nonprofit organizations cultivate K-12 students to get involved in volunteering?
3. What is the impact of youth engagement in the nonprofit sector?

Section 2: Literature Review of Character Education

Character development and behavior outcomes

Our character is shaped by our habits, which are often formed during childhood and adolescence and tend to persist into adulthood. The influence of parents on their children's habit formation can be significant, either positively or negatively. While the family continues to be the first and oftentimes the most influential social institution for children, education is also highly influential in cultivating children's shared values, beliefs, knowledge, and skills of a community or society (Lippold et al., 2011). K-12 students spend most of their time at home and 6 hours at school. Parents and educators are responsible for teaching students good character and supervising their behaviors.

Character development programs often aim to influence "academic motivation and aspirations, academic achievement, prosocial behavior, bonding to school, prosocial and democratic values, conflict-resolution skills, moral-reasoning maturity, responsibility, respect, self-efficacy, self-control, self-esteem, social skills, and trust in, and respect for teachers" (Was et al., 2006: 151). It is commendable to see that these programs recognize

the holistic nature of character development and aim to instill positive qualities that can benefit individuals in different ways.

According to a longitudinal study on character development, a sample of 5,189 students from 35 schools (16 control and 19 treatment schools) in an open-enrollment charter school system participated. Results from a three-level longitudinal growth model analysis indicated that students in treatment schools attained higher school grades and exhibited fewer problem behaviors than those in control schools across 4 school semesters. (Top et al., 2016) The findings of this study suggest that the intervention effectively improved students' academic performance and reduced problem behaviors. However, it's important to note that this study was conducted in a specific context of an open-enrollment charter school system, and the results may not necessarily generalize to other educational settings.

Benefits of Character Education

The What Works in Character Education project (Berkowitz et al., 2005) found that several primary positive outcomes of character education included:

1. The reduction of sexual behavior,
2. Increased socio-moral cognitive development,
3. Improved problem-solving skills, and
4. Improved emotional competency - reduced violence, aggression, and drug use, and improved academic achievement.

Another school district discovered the power of character development, improved their school climate, and saw positive results and improvements in the following areas (Singh, 2019):

1. Student engagement, motivation, and achievement,
2. Self-discipline, pro-social behavior, and interpersonal relationships,
3. Equity and respect for diversity,
4. Preparation for the workplace,
5. School culture, civility, and feelings of safety,
6. School community partnerships,
7. Volunteer activities,
8. Civic engagement, and
9. Engagement in social justice issues

In addition to individual-level benefits, character education also benefits schools and society. By educating how to respect and empathize, students can understand different cultures and create a diverse and inclusive campus. For society, character education fosters students to be good citizens and engage in social justice issues.

Implementation of Character Education

Character education can be initiated at any grade level. It is important to set a strong foundation at an earlier age and to reinforce and build upon that foundation during the later grades. To be effective, character education must include the entire school community and must be infused throughout the entire school curriculum and culture.

(Pala, 2011)

Five Keys to Success of Character Education are (Character Education Informational Handbook & Guide II, 2001):

- **Instruction Must be Planned:** Character education will not just happen. Direct instruction must be planned. Once organized, this will serve as a springboard to other ideas and school-wide activities.
- **Application:** Students must be able to apply what they have learned. Learning knowledge or theory without applying it is not effective learning. By providing a scenario, students must think, make a decision, and foster a sense of ownership, and be responsible for their decision.
- **Teacher Friendly:** The program's instructional and school-wide components must be as teacher friendly as possible. This increases the likelihood of the program being accepted by the teachers and taught effectively. Teachers act as caregivers, models and mentors, treating students with love and respect, setting a good example, supporting pro-social behavior, and correcting hurtful actions.
- **Supported By All:** Character education must involve the whole community, including parents, schools, and teachers. Parents are the primary and most important moral educators of their children. Schools should develop character education programs in close partnership with parents and the community. School leaders can make it important by providing the necessary materials, scheduling time for the program and assemblies, and talking about it frequently.
- **Prepare the Students:** Students often approach the notion of character education with skepticism and resistance. Substantial, well-planned efforts must be made to create a school climate conducive to maximum buy-in by students.

Comprehensive and modular character education programs

School-based character education programs can be divided into two broad categories differing in the nature and scope of their implementation as follows (Institute of Education Sciences, 2006):

Comprehensive programs are those aimed at affecting the school as a community by integrating character education into the full spectrum of school activities and school life through such means as (a) involvement across curricular topics, discipline practices, after-school activities, and other such school functions; (b) participation by teachers, principals, school staff, parents, and especially students in program design and implementation; and (c) multiple approaches to teaching character (e.g., instruction, modeling, special events, community service, experiential learning).

Modular programs are those designed to be used in a single classroom or group of classrooms (e.g., a set of character education lessons) or involve a particular type of event or activity, such as an inspirational speaker. Modular programs can be schoolwide without necessarily being comprehensive (e.g., lessons taught to all students in at least one class, such as social studies, or with all students exposed to one or more special events). Nonprofit organizations can play an important role in modular programs. For example, Tzu Chi Foundation adopts modular programs by providing weekly one-hour character lessons.

Youth Engagement

To reinforce and enhance character education, youth engagement is the most effective and efficient method to apply the knowledge students learn. Effective youth

engagement is important for positive youth outcomes at different levels. For the individual level, it can help self-identity and empowerment; for the social level, it offers belongingness, social support, and cultural identity; and for the community level, it impacts system change. (Blanchet-Cohen & Salazar, 2009; Davidson, Wien, & Anderson, 2010; Lind, 2008; Wexler, DiFluvio, & Burke, 2009; Yohalem & Martin, 2007).

In 2000, a local organization conducted a youth-led needs assessment of the South of Market (SOMA) neighborhood in San Francisco, involving a diverse group of 7 teenage youths in designing and conducting a neighborhood needs assessment on the issues and potential solutions. The case study showed different impacts of this youth-led project. (London, 2007) The youth's voices and needs were being heard in public for the short-term impact. That also raises parents' awareness of kids' needs. In the intermediate impacts, a community coalition of parents, teachers, city activists, and other residents was formed and pressured the school district to build a new campus. Unfortunately, the proposal was dropped by the school district. Without organizational continuity, the youth had difficulty sustaining their positive community involvement. After years of negotiations, the school finally agreed to construct a new elementary school.

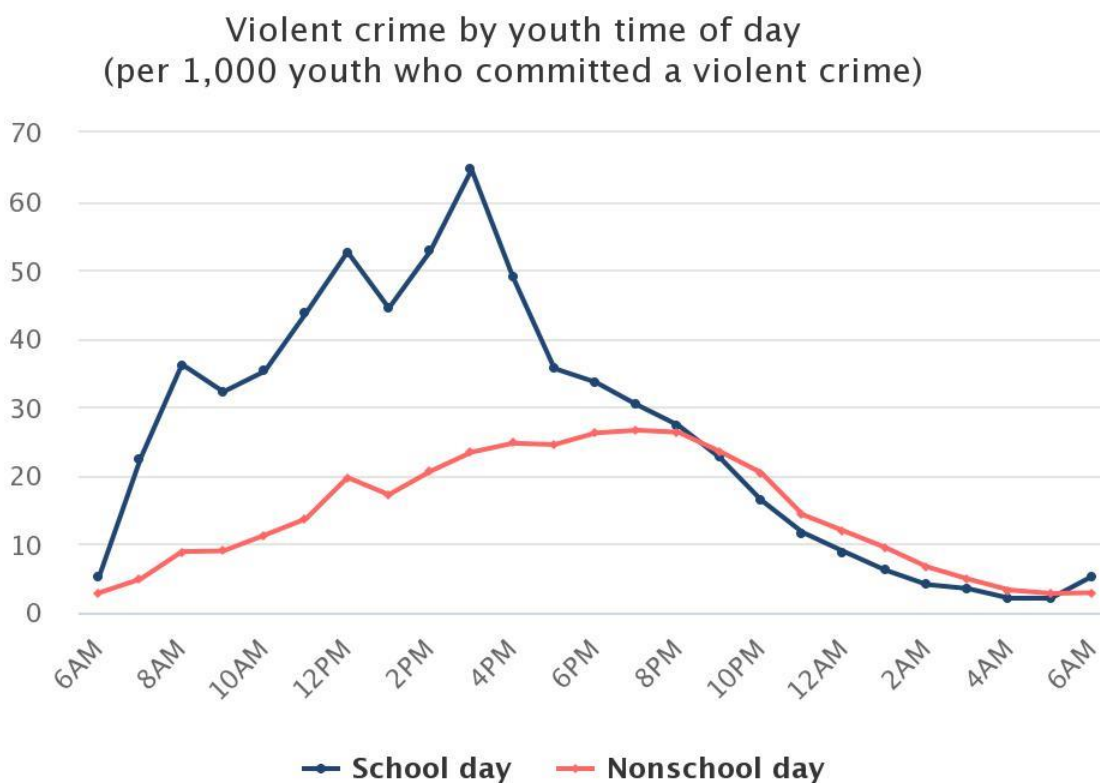
Nonprofit Organizations' Role in Youth Programs

The Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE-CC) classification system divides the universe of nonprofit organizations into 26 major groups under 10 broad categories as follows (NCCS,2013): Arts, Culture, and Humanities, Education, Environment and Animals, Health, Human Services, International, Foreign Affairs, Public, Societal Benefit, Religion Related, Mutual/Membership Benefit, Unknown, Unclassified.

Those nonprofits provide different youth programs for children or deliver services directly to children with difficulties.

An estimated 11.3 million youth leave school with nowhere to go, and that number rises in the summertime. (Afterschool Alliance, 2014) Nonprofits have the capacities to offer kids and teens to join the programs or perform service learning. However, parents in low-income and minority households are more likely to report a lack of available afterschool programs in their community and are also more likely to cite barriers related to location and safe travel to and from an afterschool program. Children in afterschool programs benefit from a wide variety of essential supports and activities. Eight in 10 parents of children in an afterschool program report that their program offers opportunities for physical activity, and more than 7 in 10 said their program offers homework assistance, snacks and/or meals, and opportunities for reading or writing. 83% of parents of afterschool program participants agree that afterschool programs reduce the likelihood that youth will engage in risky behaviors, such as committing a crime, using drugs, or becoming a teen parent. Just 3% of parents disagree with this statement. (Afterschool Alliance, 2014)

Figure 1 Violent Crime by Youth of Day



According to the U.S. Department of Justice (National Center for Juvenile Justice, n.d.), violent crimes by youth (ages 7-17) occur most frequently in the hours immediately following the end of school hours on school days. On non-school days, the incidence of violence committed increases through the afternoon and early evening hours. Nonprofit organizations can advance their mission by designing different programs for helping the youth. By offering character education and engaging in different programs, teens are less likely to involve in substance use or commit violent crimes. It also creates a safer environment.

Conclusion

Character education has many positive impacts on children, and it is needed to instill from a young age to form the habit. Different ways to implement character education exist; many factors can influence the learning outcome. To make it successful, we need to consider different factors and keep improving.

While youth engagement with the right values can result in certain impacts, it takes support from parents, teachers, schools, communities, and organizations' support to have a long-term impact. Nonprofits provide volunteer opportunities or youth programs, students develop their competence in self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness. Students can become better people and make a difference in society by focusing on character education.

Section 3: Methods and Approaches

To understand the roles of nonprofit organizations in children's character education, this research analysis utilizes a mixed-methods research approach consisting of a literature review of several nonprofit organization resources and three nonprofit organization expert interviews conducted between March and April 2023.

The primary resource of the literature review is from Tzu Chi website and its annual reports published within the past five years. Secondary sources are referenced in the "Literature Review of Character Education" section above.

Three interviews were conducted to gain some insight into best practices regarding nonprofit organizations' involvement in character education. The experts are

from different backgrounds and professional fields. Table 1 outlines the details of each interviewee's role, organization, and professional expertise.

Table 1: Expert Interview Profiles

Name	Role/Organization	Background
Mark Smith	Ex-codirector of Presbyterian Federal Chaplaincies (Religious NPO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Navy chaplain for 30 years. - Master of Ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary
Stanley Kou	Board of Fremont Union High School District (FUHSD) (Educational NPO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work experience: teacher, principal, software engineering manager - Master's in computer science and MBA
Roxanne Buchwitz	Charity Lead in Tzu Chi Foundation (Humanities NPO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 20+ years' experience in pharmaceutical industry - Conduct programs (Happy camp, MAGIC Back-to-School Celebration, Backpack Giveaway) in Bayview-Hunter Point

Sources: Author's Creation. Peijen Hsu, 2023

It is very important to get insight from a different point of view. Based on the experts' experience, various considerations and challenges were mentioned.

All three interviews were semi-structured and conducted to understand character education's effect on developing youth's values and behavior. Each interview was recorded over video teleconference with the participants' permission. The interview questions seek to gain insights into how interviewees perceive the role of character

education in shaping today's society and explore any social and cultural factors and potential long-term benefits of the character education programs. Table 2 outlines the questions.

Table 2. Interview Questions

	Questions
1	Do you think character education is important in today's society? Why or why not?
2	What values do you think should be emphasized in character education programs?
3	Do you think character education should be taught in schools, or is it the responsibility of families?
4	Have you seen any positive effects of character education programs in your community or school?
5	Do you think nonprofit organizations could help address social issues like bullying or discrimination?
6	Do you think character education can be effectively taught through role models, stories, or other methods in ?
7	What role do you think technology can play in character education programs?
8	What challenges or criticisms do you see in implementing character education programs?
9	Do you think it would be a good idea for young kids to volunteer and contribute to their community?
10	What impact can character education have on the future of our society, particularly concerning volunteerism and civic engagement?

Sources: Author's Creation. Peijen Hsu, 2023

About the Organization

Tzu Chi Foundation is an international humanitarian organization whose mission is to relieve the suffering of those in need while creating a better world through compassion, love, and hope. Today, Tzu Chi USA has 65 offices and facilities throughout the U.S., with volunteers and donors working tirelessly to make a difference in their

communities. In 2012, Hurricane Sandy struck the East Coast, and Tzu Chi distributed 10 million dollars in immediate relief aid to the victims. Tzu Chi USA was recognized as National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) Member of the Year in 2013 and received the Champions of Change Award from the White House.

There are several main areas Tzu Chi focused on, such as charity, medicine, education, and humanistic culture. Since 2006, Tzu Chi has partnered with schools (7 in California, 1 in Texas, and 1 in Turkey) in low-income communities to provide a curriculum focused on the virtues of respect, responsibility, gratitude, giving, compassion, courage, contentment, emotional management, filial piety, and love.

Literature Review

Believing that tomorrow's leaders should have strong morals and academic knowledge, Tzu Chi instills positive values from an early age. At Tzu Chi's accredited preschools, kindergartens and elementary schools, and two dozen bilingual weekend academies, students are provided opportunities to develop wisdom and character. Tzu Chi volunteers also offer regular character education lessons at several public elementary schools. The total number of staff and students in 2021 was 58 teachers and 3,259 students. (Tzu Chi USA, 2022)

Since 2006, Tzu Chi has partnered with schools in low-income communities to provide a curriculum focused on the virtues of respect, responsibility, gratitude, giving, compassion, courage, contentment, emotional management, filial piety, and tolerance. By adopting a comprehensive program, they integrate character education into their current curriculum. After implementing the program, participating schools report improved

student behavior and a reduced need for disciplinary action. As students discover the impact of their changing behavior on the well-being of their classmates and their own sense of self-worth, they are inspired to continue on this path of self-cultivation, emerging as global citizens with a humanistic worldview.

Table 3. Tzu Chi Character Education Growth Trend

Character Education					
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Volunteers	27	25	74	29	170
Students	1400	1200	2264	1301	90
Schools	4	5	8	6	9

Source: 2020 Tzu Chi Annual Report

Tzu Chi Academy

Tzu Chi Academy was first established in Los Angeles in 1994 with a unique focus on teaching students about not only the Chinese language and culture but also the practices of character education. According to the 2021 annual report, there are 25 Academies spread across 14 states, including 3,460 students and 307 teachers. The weekly one-hour character education class allows students to nurture their hearts and minds while developing kindness, compassion, joy, and giving. They adopt the modular program to teach character education. Providing lectures and activities such as a 30-day veggie table challenge, well-prepared students contribute their company to the elders or people in a nursing home or senior house. This kind of program inspires students to become aware of their own behavior and how it affects others and to cultivate positive

character traits and virtues that lead to harmony in the classroom, the family, the community, and society.

Tzu Chi Youth Association

The teenage years are a key stage of development, so it is vital that positive values and a love of service are instilled in young people at this early age. In sixteen local chapters of the Tzu Chi Youth Association, high school students meet at least twice a month to learn the compassionate spirit of Tzu Chi and apply it through service-learning projects led by the students themselves.

Other character education programs include the 3R field trip (one-day camp to learn about environmental protection, innovative ways to give things a second life, and recycling), Every Day is Earth Day Assembly (recognizing individual responsibility in protecting the earth), Ethical Eating Day (combat climate change through vegetarian diet).

Tzu Chi Education Foundation is a President's Volunteer Service Award-certified organization. It is qualified to apply for the President's Volunteer Service Award on behalf of Tzu Chi Sprout volunteers who have completed eligible service hours. During a period of 12 months, Tzu Chi volunteers who meet a minimum of 26 hours of service (5–10 years old) or a minimum of 50 hours (11–15 years old) may apply to Tzu Chi Education Foundation's Humanities Office by January 15 each year with their volunteer service certificate and related documents.

Section 4. Data Analysis

This project results from a mixed data analysis approach consisting of three expert interviews conducted between March and April 2023, a literature review of several

resources, including Tzu Chi's official website, and its annual reports published within five years (2017-2021).

Literature Analysis

With 65 offices and facilities throughout the U.S., Tzu Chi has the capacity to focus on charity, medicine, education, and humanistic culture. With the vision of a character education that provides both value content and moral action, Tzu Chi builds up a good model to present in the nonprofit world.

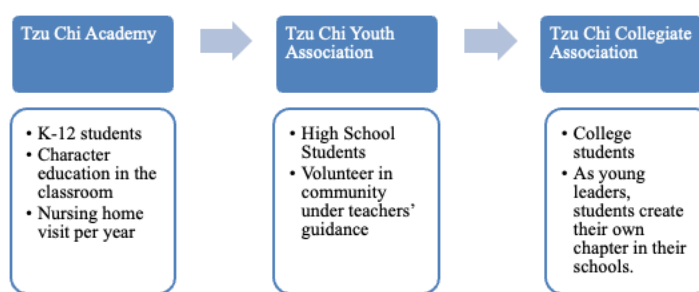


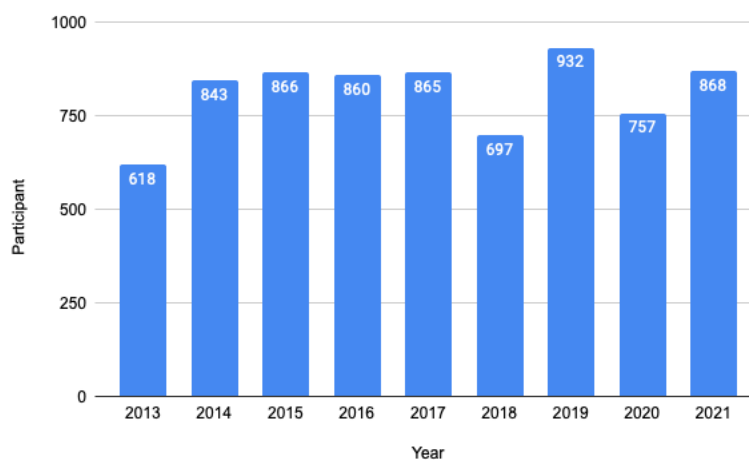
Figure 2. Chi Tzu Youth Engagement Flow

Through Figure 2, the organization starts the program from kindergarten and circles with the same core values: gratitude, respect, compassion, responsibility, giving, courage, emotional management, contentment, tolerance, filial piety, and grit. The classes are designed to meet the standard for different grade levels and are combined with community volunteer opportunities.

When students reach high school, they can join the Tzu Chi Youth Association to apply their learning to action. Students develop their self-awareness and social awareness through community service under teachers' guidance. They tackle the community problem and work on innovative solutions through monthly meetings. Students build up

habits to volunteer and help people anytime as time passes. This is why we can see the number of student volunteers grow.

Figure 3. Tzu Chi Youth Associate Participants



Source: 2021 Tzu Chi Annual Report

After graduating high school, many Tzu Chi students become young leaders and create Chapters of the Tzu Chi Collegiate Association in their colleges to expand their network and volunteer across the US. By connecting with peers with the same passion for community service, they have stronger strength to empower people and uplift the communities.

Interview Analysis

All the interviewees recognize that character education in today's society is important because public figures lie in public, the diversity of communities, and economic disparity. They all agree that character is built over time, beginning with the family. Parents, schools, and communities all share the responsibility to educate children well. Three of them mentioned that character education should start early, and parents

and school leaders should be role models to demonstrate how their actions align with their values. With the volunteer experience, children can form habits, reflect on their values, and improve their behaviors to be good citizens in the future. Nonprofit organizations can play an important role in promoting character education and provide opportunities for the youth to volunteer or activities for them to engage in.

Mark Smith

Mark is from a religious group and has a master's degree in ethics. Mark emphasizes the importance of making good choices and treating others with respect, integrity, and empathy. Churches teach to the character standards of their religion but may still base those standards on an interpretation of their religious teaching that ranges from conservative to liberal. So there can be variation even within the same religion. Church instruction to children is to orient them to the teachings of their religious beliefs. He believes that character education should be taught in both schools and families. Schools reflect the current view of character development that the school has under the laws prevalent at the time. So, the school could arguably be influenced more by current politics than the church. However, both could be affected by politics. The challenges in implementing character education include political differences and a lack of trust between parents and schools. Mark also stresses the importance of volunteering and developing empathy and the impact of character education on civic engagement and society. Finally, he mentions the influence of Aristotle's philosophy on character education, emphasizing the importance of habitually making good choices.

Stanley Kou

Stanley is a school district board member. He emphasizes the importance of character education and how it traditionally starts in the family. However, due to immigration and new generations, some students may not learn these values at home, so it is important to integrate character education into public education. He mentioned that to reflect California's diverse population's history, culture, and struggles, Governor Newsom signed legislation making California the first state to require all students to complete a course in ethnic studies to earn a high school diploma. The purpose is not only for academic benefits but also can build character as students learn how people from their own backgrounds face challenges, overcome them, and make a safer campus.

Stanley also mentions that wellness education is crucial, especially since some students face mental pressure after the pandemic. Honoring outstanding behavior, involvement in school activities, and positive behavior on social media are ways to promote character education. Stanley's school district is diverse, and they want to build a cohesive and friendly campus environment. Catching up on education challenges some immigrant students and their families. Therefore, school leaders encourage community service to instill positive character traits and involve parents in their child's education. Schools also encourage students to connect with nonprofit organizations, look for volunteer opportunities and obtain service hours to receive the President Service Award. The purpose is to encourage students to explore their communities' problems and find a solution to improve or resolve them.

Roxanne Buchwitz

Roxanne is from a humanitarian organization. She leads many programs for under-resourced communities. She believes character education is essential and should be applied beyond one's immediate family and community to one's daily life. Roxanne emphasizes gratitude, respect, and love as important values to be instilled in education, especially in distressed communities where people tend to focus on what they lack. Nonprofits can show them what they have, like nature, nice weather, clean water, and teach them to appreciate nice things. They don't have much material, but they do receive a lot of assistance from other nonprofits, making sure they have nice education, making sure they have public housing, emphasizing what they have, and teaching them to appreciate what they are getting. From there, they can actually equip themselves. Many kids and many families don't respect themselves. So they go into the violence, they go into the drug abuse, they go into the self-trashing. So, if nonprofits help them to understand appreciation, they respect themselves trying to do good for themselves, their society, and the community. She believes that nonprofit organizations can help address social issues like bullying and discrimination by creating a positive environment where individuals learn to respect themselves and others, respect the environment, and volunteer to benefit the community. Roxanne believes that meeting the children's needs is the priority. If students sleep well and eat well, they can start to learn higher-level education, such as character education in the classroom. From there, they can learn the knowledge and step out to volunteer in food banks. pick up trash from the neighborhood, or help others.

Section 5: Implications and Recommendations

Findings

RQ1: Does the nonprofit organization provide opportunities to reinforce and change students' mindsets and behavior?

Based on various research, the study showed that with the appropriate character education intervention, not only did problem behavior decrease, but also improvement of student engagement, motivation, achievement, social-moral cognitive development, and emotional competency improved. The interviews also showed that character education changed the students' mindsets and behavior.

“When our kids were very young, they attended a Chamorro School in Guam.

They were exposed to the Chamorro way. It was very much based on caring about other people and honoring other people. So that's had a lifelong impact on our kids.” – Mark

“the most outstanding students monthly, the scores count from their involvement in the school clubs or sports, and the relationship they get, not just their academic achievement. They need to get many friends to support them to be honors students of the month.they are now star students.In these five high schools, we have two high schools with a national ranking above 10. – Stanley

“When I ask a second grader, what do you want to be when you grow up? And he says that he wants to be a robber. So I asked him, why do you want to be a robber? You don't need to be a robber. I said, well, think about something else. Don't be a robber. He says okay, I want to be a parole officer. He sees his family members in

and out the jail with parole officers. That's the connection. Connect that with their life, don't connect it with your IVY towers' idea. ...if their basic needs are unmet, and you want to teach them character education, they won't get it. I have academic training in child psychology and a master's degree in education. But at the end of the day, it is how you connect with that child and meet their needs. And then so you can promote your higher level of the Maslow hierarchy.” - Roxanne

According to Tzu Chi's website, their students graduated from high school and went to different colleges around the world; they started new chapters of Tzu Chi Collegiate Association *autonomous* in their current school and connected with their previous resources to do social suitable activities—students' autonomy and relatedness with peers involved with the high level of mindset and behavior change.

RQ2: How do nonprofit organizations cultivate K-12 students to get involved in volunteering?

Nonprofit organizations can involve in different ways. Wealthy philanthropies or foundations can support research or programs. Local nonprofit organizations or communities can provide volunteer opportunities. Religious or any education-related nonprofit organization can design character education programs to instill morality and virtue.

For example, Craig Newmark Philanthropies supports Common Sense, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of all kids and families, to conduct Common Sense Census Program to track trends in media use among tweens and

teens since 2015. The report should be a wake-up call for the parents to be gatekeepers, limiting electronic use and supervising the content to which their children are exposed. (Rideout et al., 2022)

The interviews also showed the importance of the school and nonprofit's roles.

“Church instruction to children is to orient them to the teachings of their religious beliefs. Both families and the school have responsibility. The problem with that is that it may cause the parents to want to have a discussion. But a discussion between teacher and parent, if done with respect and honor, everyone will benefit from the conversation.” – Mark.

“I'm encouraging the students to start doing their community service as early as possible, for young kids, as long as their parents can work with or help them.

We're supervising them to complete their duties. And if you check the United States presidential service award, there's no age limit. You can earn the Presidential service award since first grade. You can check on the website, and we are encouraging our students to earn those Community Service awards to be a future good citizen.” – Stanley.

“Federal has recognized that there is a disconnection. They want to bring the community CBOs to the school. They will help instill this kind of community spirit with character education or humanitarian education that you have and be able to make real in your life.we conduct home visits to the student. We teach them in the community with their parents together every Saturday. Now we have about 175 families that we work with.” – Roxanne

Tzu Chi's volunteer system also provides a good role model. While many grandparents and parents are involved in community services, charity, and philanthropy, their kids observe and learn from them since they are young. Character education is embedded in school life. Volunteers provide opportunities to apply the knowledge students learn from the class. They also explore more social problems and train their critical thinking and problem-solving ability. The process also helps students to discern reality and the boundary.

RQ3: What is the impact of youth engagement in the nonprofit sector?

Youth engagement in the nonprofit sector can significantly impact organizations and the young people involved at various levels.

- Increased creativity and innovation: Young people bring fresh perspectives and ideas. This can lead to more creative and innovative solutions.
- Increased diversity: Engaging youth in the nonprofit sector can bring more diversity to the organization. This can include a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. This creates an inclusive environment and a better understanding of the needs of different communities.
- Increased energy and enthusiasm: Young people often bring high energy and enthusiasm to their work. This can inspire others and create a positive atmosphere within the organization.

- Increased skill development: Youth engagement in the nonprofit sector can provide opportunities for skill development which include leadership, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills.
- Increased social impact: Young people can be effective advocates and ambassadors for the organization, helping to raise awareness and mobilize support for important causes.

The youth-led project in SOMA is a great case study to show the impact. (London, 2007)

“I think that volunteering opens everyone's eyes. I mean, the leaders, the students, the people who are cared for, in some ways, and it's always a good training opportunity for developing empathy and caring about the other person. I think a life of volunteering improves society because everyone works together to improve things for people.” – Mark.

“As long as we educate our students to respect other people and get involved and have those understanding that will reduce those bully or all the difficulty between the students....Recently, we have been giving out the most outstanding students monthly and behavior scores, not just their academic achievement but also their involvement in the school clubs or sports and also their relationships; they need to get many of their friends to support them to be a honors students of the month. So, we have our five high schools, and now we honor the students so they will become the role model or behave” – Stanley.

“My principle is always telling them that even if you are poor, it doesn't give you a right to trash your community or home. So respect comes from respecting themselves, respecting the environment, we respect their mother, and from that, they love themselves the same way their family and they love their community. They can go out to volunteer in their food pantry, to volunteer to pick up the trash and volunteer to take care of people with disabilities in the community. They even donate money to Turkey earthquake and other natural disasters, like Chico, so they understand, even if it's one penny, that is from your love..... - Roxanne

Implications

Figure 4. Character Education and Volunteering Model

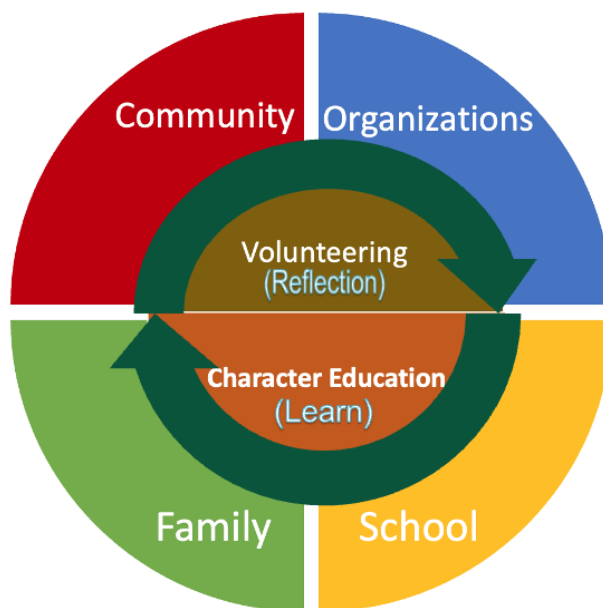


Figure 4 shows that character education can be learned from family and school, and communities or organizations can provide children with meaningful and hands-on volunteer experiences. Reflecting on their work allows them to see the impact of their actions. It can be a powerful motivator to continue their involvement in volunteering. The following are more implications.

- Character education is the most critical component of personal and social development, and volunteering is the act of putting character education into practice. By promoting character education, individuals are better equipped to engage in volunteer service, and by engaging in volunteer service, individuals can put their character education into action and further develop their character.
- While character education programs are not a perfect solution for all, evidence suggests that they can effectively promote positive mindsets and behavior. However, the impact of character education may depend on various factors, including the quality of the program, the age and developmental level of the students, and the context in which the program is implemented.
- Measurements of impact for character education need to be better designed. From the annual report, we understand the number of youth volunteers is growing and what kind of programs are running. Seeing the positive outcome or impact visually would be more encouraging and inspiring.

- New technology, such as VR, social media, and online games, profoundly affect the education system. Children mimicking inappropriate behavior without thinking or by peer pressure are dangerous.
- Both character education and volunteering can start as early as possible. Just like the old saying, “Charity begins at home.” Setting an example to children by volunteering strengthens the development of good character and personhood.
- Nonprofit organizations provide different kinds of opportunities through their mission and vision. Parents can choose a specific program related to their goal to volunteer with the whole family.

Recommendations

Several recommendations have emerged from experts’ insights and research findings to assist nonprofit organizations in developing best practices.

- **Raise awareness**

A child’s moral values are formed by what they see around them. They absorb and mimic everything people do. Parents, teachers, peers, and community leaders should be aware of the influence of their words and behaviors and the content on the internet. NPO can invest in research or offer parents and education leaders quality character education.

- **Partner with the schools**

Nonprofits can partner with local schools to promote volunteering opportunities to students. These partnerships can foster collective action, leverage resources, and create synergies to maximize the impact of youth programs.

- **Offer training and programs**

Nonprofits can provide evidence-based approaches and best practices that help educators create a better learning environment. Nonprofits can also provide a safe, positive environment for youths to learn, grow, and discover their potential and talents through programs or volunteering.

- **Measurement the impact**

Instead of showing quantitative data in the annual report, a compelling story is more powerful to empower young students. The 2012 movie “Little Red Wagon” is an incredible true story of a young boy who collected resources from his neighborhood to support tornado victims.

- **Use social media and online platform**

Social media and online platforms are great channels to reach K-12 students and promote opportunities. The online platform can also offer teaching materials and showcase the impact.

Section 6: Conclusions

Through the literature reviews and several expert interviews, this capstone research project explores how a nonprofit organization cultivates K-12 students’ volunteering involvement, connects character education with community services and

philanthropy, and how to engage more students in volunteer service by improving current practices.

With the widespread use of the internet among young kids after the pandemic, kids learn about values, thoughts, and behaviors from the online content they are exposed to. With so much inappropriate content and even public figures' controversial conversation and behavior, parents, schools, and communities are all responsible for being gatekeepers to protect our children.

Character education plays a vital role in shaping the values of the children. Nonprofit organizations can reinforce youth character education by providing safe spaces, mentoring programs, engaging students in service projects, providing different resources, and collaborating with schools and communities. By instilling positive character traits such as empathy, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and gratitude, nonprofit organizations can help children develop a solid moral compass and a deep sense of civic duty from an early age. When they face challenges or difficulties, they know how to make the right decisions and do good things. These character traits are a foundation for cultivating children to be good citizens.

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Author's Bio

Peijen is a Chinese teacher with more than ten years of experience working with students from K to grade 8. Peijen believes in the pedagogy approach in education. Students are more engaged and motivated by using real-world scenarios and problem-solving activities in language learning. Peijen specializes in administrative management and technology. As the Chinese Language Digital Teaching Association (CLDTA) president, she is responsible for educating teachers by inviting experts to share their expertise through online workshops and partnerships with another university for a Chinese innovation forum. Peijen likes to share her positive attitude and encourage others.

Through teaching kids at school and offering teacher training online, she delivers her value – empathy and respect to people. With the empathic lens, students will be more engaged in helping others and building a better community. By diving into this capstone research, she hopes to improve her character education class.

This summer, Peijen will help Vox Nativa – a nonprofit weekend music school that offers educational resources to the aboriginal communities in Taiwan. Peijen is currently on the fundraising committee for their US concerts. With the fundraising from the concerts, they can support kids with college tuition. After studying Nonprofit Administration at the University of San Francisco, she hopes to volunteer in more nonprofit organizations and contribute more to philanthropy.