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### I Can't Believe I Lived Through This

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Ryan Collins  
St. John Fisher College Service Scholar  
6/8/2020  
Scholar Assignment  
Cardinal COVID Journal

### **“I can’t believe I lived through this”**

Amidst the COVID-19 coronavirus world-wide pandemic, many people of the U.S., including college students like myself have had to adapt to the new state of the nation.

As a service scholar at St. John Fisher College, I am committed to volunteering 200+ hours a year at non-profit organizations. For the past two years, I have primarily volunteered/ interned at Writers & Books, a non-profit organization that promotes reading and writing as lifelong activities for people of all ages and backgrounds. Due to the cancellation of so much, I was cut short of completing my hours.

I was responsible to write a quick history research paper on the culturally enriched non-profit organization I volunteer at as well as a reflection on what this history and my experience thus far has taught me as a volunteer/intern.

I thought I would share my work of my experience at Writers & Books.

During my junior year as a student at St. John Fisher College and Service Scholar, for the second year in a row, I was fortunate to volunteer at a local non-profit literary center called Writers & Books. Located in the heart of Rochester’s Neighborhood of the Arts, W&B is known for serving the greater local Rochester community through its contribution of fostering and promoting reading and writing for all ages. W&B came to be recognized, together with various distinguished institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York City Ballet, the Rochester Museum of Science Center, and the Rochester Philharmonic, as among the state’s important cultural organizations. Writers & Books offers a wide range of reading seminars and writing workshops for both kids and adults and reach an estimated 25,000 people per year. Other inclusive programs powered by W&B include community outreach initiatives that help local schools, hospitals, and social service agencies, readings from special guests including accredited regional authors, as well as an annual city-wide reading program, “Rochester Reads.”

Writers & Books has evolved over time, starting out in 1974 as a mobile bookstore and book distributor traveling throughout the northeastern United States. Through its direct contact with individuals, bookstores, and libraries, The Books Bus was able to introduce thousands of new readers to the many valuable writers of America during the growing independent press era of the 1970’s. In 1980, The Book Bus was transformed into the literary center that stands today titled Writers & Books. In 1985, W&B moved from its original location

to its current standing landmark building. This main center location is a historic former police precinct station located in the city's Neighborhood of the Arts. W&B also has a secondary retreat center location that is 35-miles south of the City of Rochester in New York's famed Finger Lakes region.

Writers & Books mission is simple; *"Writers & Books promotes reading and writing as lifelong activities for people of all ages and backgrounds."* W&B maintains its mission by offering a setting and forum for interested individuals to meet and exchange ideas. The non-profit organization also assists writers in creating, publishing, and distributing work; reaching out to the public through publications, media presentations, and exhibits; as well as offering educational programs relating to reading and writing for people of all ages.

In 1986 Writers & Books was named one of New York State's "Primary Arts Organizations" by the New York State Council of the Arts – something given to organizations that have been judged to "make a substantial contribution to the state's cultural life." In 1988, through the generosity of a local supporter, W&B was given the use of a house located in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State. This retreat, called The Gell Center of the Finger Lakes, provides time and a scenic setting away from the normal routine in a writer's daily life. Over the past several years, recognition for Writers & Books achievements in and contributions to the Rochester Community have come in various forms including a number of awards accredited to the organization and former Executive Director, Joseph Flaherty.

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As an active member of society including the greater Syracuse and Rochester area, I have been fortunate enough to explore the various cultural offerings of these two regions. As an active and an engaged young adult, I have many volunteering experiences under my belt, however my experience at Writers & Books seems to have a large impact on me. On top of attending college classes and playing a varsity level sport at school, I volunteer around 4-6 hours a week at W&B and help with various in-house projects and have embraced a role as an intern and an active market maven; A consumer who spreads information about products and services available in a marketplace.

Writers & Books is a short drive away from my off campus living quarters located just outside the heart of downtown Rochester. My responsibilities as a volunteer intern at Writers & Books vary. I have done work for the website and other social media platforms, have edited press releases, helped out with in-house managerial operations, have contacted other local non-profit organizations and businesses as well as distributed flyers and posters across the city of Rochester, and have helped with many other marketing/ communication initiatives.

I have learned that a non-profit business is extremely effective and efficient. They also take a lot of work to maintain. It takes a lot to manage, plan, coordinate, and maintain good standing as a non-profit and requires connection with those in the surrounding area for its

sustainability to flourish. Non-profit organizations, in my opinion, are comparable to an organic community culture of those devoted to culture and serving the community in ways that they feel fit best for society's growth.

The role of a volunteer is to help society. Volunteers play a huge role in running our communities, both at a local and national level. Through the history of Writers & Books, I have learned my role as a volunteer and the underlying work I have done and will continue to do is appreciated by many even though they might not even recognize it. A productive and successful member of society contributes in any way possible even if it isn't apparently evident in plain view. I feel the work that is done outside the public's view, not in plain sight is usually the most beneficial.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?" Writers & Books has taught me valuable lessons on how to function as a productive member of the community while also playing college lacrosse and attending classes as a student. Being involved is something I find enjoyable, powerful, rewarding.