

Engaging Community Organizations in the Design, Implementation, and Assessment of The  
University of Alberta Residence Services' Alternative Reading Week Community Service-  
Learning Program

by

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## **Abstract**

This research explores the role community organizations can have in the design, implementation, and assessment of the University of Alberta's Alternative Reading Week community service-learning program to align the program with a more justice-based approach to service-learning. Specifically, this research aims to identify potential strategies that staff of University of Alberta Residence Services can utilize to highlight community organization voice in all stages of the program. The research question was "What are community organization's perspectives on how the University of Alberta Residence Services staff can best engage them in the design, implementation, and assessment of the Alternative Reading Week program?" It was explored by surveying and interviewing five representatives from community organizations who have hosted service placements and educational workshops during Alternative Reading Week programming within the past three years (November 2019 - November 2021). A secondary data analysis of program learning outcomes, schedules, and assessment questions was also conducted. Research findings identified key areas where community organizations could be more involved in the design of the Alternative Reading Week program, including early discussions on organizational and institutional learning outcomes, preparing student participants for community organizational involvement, and communication during the planning phase of the program. Findings also highlighted that community organizations perceived their engagement with Alternative Reading Week primarily in the implementation phase of the program and as being the primary facilitators of this portion of the program. Further, organization representatives interviewed suggested an openness for community organizations to be more involved in the assessment of the Alternative Reading Week program through debriefing or contributing to program assessment questions. Particularly, how the individual context of each institutional-community partnership can influence

what the engagement of a community organization in Alternative Reading Week entails. Recommendations are included on how Residence Services staff could best engage community organizations in future service-learning programs, highlighting a need for engagement to be facilitated on a case by case basis that was sensitive to each community organization's needs, objectives, and relationship to the institution. Finally, although the research findings identify potential areas as to where community organizations could be more engaged in the Alternative Reading Week program, the specific strategies and methods of engaging community organizations requires additional research.

## **Preface**

This thesis is an original work by Caitlin McLeod. The research for this thesis received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “Engaging Community Organizations in the Design, Implementation and Assessment of The University of Alberta Residence Services’ Alternative Reading Week Community Service-Learning Program”, Pro00112867. October 2, 2021. An amendment was approved to the study to include additional community organizations on January 4, 2022.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Many of us are taught that helping others is the right thing to do. But is there a right way to help? Recently, the world of higher education has seen an increase in the popularity of service-learning programming (Butin, 2006; Himely, 2004). With recent generations entering the post-secondary sector with increased interest in creating meaningful change, as well as institutions highlighting the benefits of community engagement for university students' holistic development, it is not surprising that institutions across North America have continued to grow and expand their service-learning opportunities. However, this inflation of demand for community service-learning programming by institutions has also begun to contrive criticism for prioritizing student growth and institutional objectives over the creation of actual social change (Mitchell & Humphries, 2007), and at the expense of the very communities they set out to empower. Concerns regarding the institutionalization of service-learning pose the issue that at best service-learning programs lead to no social change, and at worst, can perpetuate a system of oppression that reinforces the need for social change in the first place. Communities are not objects to be used as a tool to produce student learning or social awareness. Rather, communities are critical partners with distinct assets and contributions to offer in helping expand student learning and development. In fact, institutions rely on these community partners in order to create and provide service-learning opportunities and placements to their students.

### **Defining Community Service-Learning**

Within the literature, various definitions of community service-learning (CSL) within a post-secondary context exist. For instance, researchers such as Bringle and Hatcher (1996), make a clear distinction between extracurricular volunteer programs and curricular service-learning programs, suggesting that service-learning programs must be a course-based, for-credit academic

opportunity for students. Others, such as Zhizhong and Haiqing (2020), opt for a more open definition of CSL which includes experiences facilitated by staff outside of academic departments or faculty members, “as long as those experiences incorporate the fundamental elements of service learning, reflection and reciprocity” (p. 21). In fact, these researchers go further into expanding on our traditional understanding of “community” in which community itself can be narrow and isolated or conceptualized on a global scale (Zhizhong & Haiqing, 2020). Jacoby and Howard (2015) also utilize a more broad definition of service-learning outside curriculum by stating that service-learning “includes experiences facilitated by student affairs professionals, campus ministers, community partners, and student leaders, as long as those experiences incorporate the fundamental elements of service-learning, reflection, and reciprocity” (Ch. 1). One of the challenges with defining CSL, is that many institutions and administrations classify CSL in differing contexts, and in some situations, CSL can be quite broad in the types of experiences it encompasses (Furco, 1996). For example, The University of Alberta’s Residence Services Engage Edmonton webpage (2022) defines service-learning as:

Service-learning is an approach to learning that emerges from active engagement with the community, ultimately working towards positive social change. Although volunteering and service-learning both involve community service, service-learning has a stronger focus on the intentional learning outcomes associated with that service. A key aspect of service-learning is reciprocity, which emphasizes that service placements should be mutually beneficial for students and community partners.

The above definition does not speak to a curricular requirement in service-learning but rather highlights a broader explanation of CSL, in which the program integrates intentional learning with personal reflection and acts of service in an effort to create meaningful social change



(Espino & Lee, 2011). Van Styvendale, McDonald, and Buhler (2018) emphasize that service-learning “mobilizes relationships between the university and the larger community” (p.1). CSL is different from volunteerism, as volunteerism focuses exclusively on the service those volunteering provide, and positions recipients of the service as the sole benefactors (Furco, 1996). Furco (1996) further elaborates that in volunteer programs, volunteer learning or benefit to those volunteering is merely accidental. Comparatively, CSL requires learning on behalf of its participants and mutually beneficial programs for both participants and the community.

Existing literature also introduces the perspective that CSL occurs on a spectrum or a continuum, and often undergoes changes in the degree to which it follows traditional principles of service-learning. Furco (1996) suggests that CSL programs may at times have equal attention to the service and the learning component of the program, but at other times, focus more on the learning and less of the service (and vice versa). Depending on how much weight a program has on the learning or service components, the actual program design, and structure may look differently from other CSL programs. The focus on learning and service may also change depending on institutional or community priorities and capacity at the time of the program. For instance, if a program is facing institutional pressures to demonstrate its value, a greater focus may be placed on the learning taking place through the service-learning program, to justify its resources and context within the institution. Hence, CSL programs can look differently from one another, institution to institution, and even within the same program or institutional context. Despite definitions of CSL differing slightly throughout the literature, a common theme amongst the research is that in order to be considered CSL, a program needs to align with three core principles of service-learning: intentional learning outcomes, space for reflection and mutually beneficial partnerships.

## **Key Principles of Community Service-Learning**

The framework of CSL has been implemented and utilized in the Alternative Reading Week program to help establish a program rooted in intentional learning outcomes, reflection, and reciprocal relationships. CSL integrates classroom-style learning with engagement in experiential learning opportunities alongside community organizations, to achieve intentional learning outcomes. Bringle and Clayton (2012) speak to this intentional learning component of CSL programs, by identifying that these programs must “be grounded in well-articulated goals for both learning and service” (p. 106). CSL combines learning outcomes or lessons with reflection and service events in order to provide meaning to one's world and how one can create social change (Espino & Lee, 2011).

This notion of the critical role reflection plays in the learning process, is another key principle of CSL. Reflection separates service-learning from volunteerism, as it is through this writing on their experience and their interpretation of the connection between classroom learning and real-world experiences, that students' awareness of themselves as well as the world begins to transform (Bubriski & Semaan, 2009). Reflection includes a participant asking such self-focused questions as “Why am I really doing good?” (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999, p. 184), which leads to additional self-awareness and development. Further, reflection provides space for students to process their experiences within communities and with structured learning (Van Styvendale et al., 2018). Reflection is a core component of CSL as it translates student experiences into moments of learning.

Another core principle of CSL is the establishment and maintenance of institutional-community partnerships in order to create sustainable and mutually-beneficial service-learning opportunities. At its core, CSL emphasizes the need for reciprocity, or a mutually beneficial

relationship between communities and the institution (Bubriski & Semaan, 2009; Crabtree, 2008; and Espino & Lee, 2011). Therefore, the community as well as the CSL participants, should both benefit in a way that meets their unique needs. Reciprocity indicates that both the institution and the community are benefiting and contributing to the service-learning experience (Jacoby & Howard, 2015). The partnership between communities and CSL programs is intended to “foster respect for and reciprocity with the communities that colleges and universities are all too often in but not of” (Butin, 2006, p. 479). This focus on a program that mutually benefits both the institution and the community is repeated throughout service-learning literature and is a key component of the program that distinguishes it from volunteerism (Furco, 1996; Schmidt et al., 2004).

In summary, although there are differences that distinguish CSL programs from one another, all service-learning programs share the same core values of investing in mutually beneficial community-institutional partnerships to foster learning through reflection. The next section will introduce and explore an co-curricular service-learning program within the University of Alberta residence community called Alternative Reading Week.

### **The University of Alberta Residence Services’ Alternative Reading Week Program**

University of Alberta Residence Services aims to provide educational and recreational activities outside of a student’s academic courses to support their individual wellness and personal development. Research suggests that when compared to off-campus housing, living on-campus can lead to a variety of benefits supporting student success (Graham, Hurtado, & Gonyea, 2018; Peters, Wakabayashi, Wepler, D’Alessio, & Mudge, 2018). Particularly, involvement in residence programming has been linked to academic success and a sense of greater satisfaction with residence overall (Arboleda, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen, 2003). With benefits to both the

student learning and the reputation of residence, residence halls make an effort to prioritize and invest in co-curricular programs which contribute to the student experience.

The University of Alberta Residence Services' Alternative Reading Week program is one such residence initiative, which engages students and community organizations to create a week-long, co-curricular service-learning program for students living in residence. The program is open to any of the approximate 4000 students living in a University of Alberta residence and takes place in Edmonton during each of the Fall and Winter Reading Weeks at the University of Alberta. Alternative Reading Week features a variety of educational workshops (hosted both internally and by community organizations), team building activities, and service placements. The schedules for Alternative Reading Week identify over 20 hours of programming in which students spend on-campus as well as within the city of Edmonton at specific community organizations (see Appendix B). The Alternative Reading Week program is rooted in the principles of CSL: intentional learning outcomes, reflection and reciprocity. This is evident in the past schedules of the Alternative Reading Week program (Appendix B), where educational workshops are incorporated into the schedule and in the program learning objectives (Appendix A). The learning objectives for the Alternative Reading Week program (Appendix A), focus on the development of leadership skills and a sense of citizenship, rather than specific academically-focused curricular content. Further, designated periods of reflection can be found in each of the Alternative Reading Week program schedules (Appendix B), and the program relies on community organizations to help create service and educational opportunities for students that are mutually beneficial. Each year the program may engage different community organizations to help host service opportunities, educational workshops, as well as to facilitate reflection exercises with students. Depending on the community

organization, their level of involvement in the program may differ from other organizations and may change over time as organizational capacity and goals develop and change.

The Alternative Reading Week program originated from Residence Services' international service-learning program and was adapted in 2018 for a local community context. A key focus of student programming in residence at the University of Alberta is centered around understanding what it means to be a part of a community; whether the residence community, university community, or the greater Edmonton community. When students are living in communal living arrangements, understanding diversity, identity and how individual actions can impact the community around them is crucial. Therefore, there is immense benefit to service-learning type programs such as the Alternative Reading Week program, which encourage students in residence to evaluate their role in helping create positive change in their community. Specifically, one of the Alternative Reading Week program's main goals is to educate and engage students in better understanding social issues in the city of Edmonton, such as poverty, and their role in helping address these issues (see Appendix A). In creating Alternative Reading Week, there was an intention to avoid using a charity approach when working with communities and instead try to center the program around social justice. To support this justice-based approach, every Alternative Reading Week schedule (see Appendix B) features an educational workshop outlining the difference between charity and social justice. However, how can the program do more to further implement best practices for CSL programs rooted in social justice?

Existing research has critiqued service-learning programs for traditionally prioritizing the student experience and institutional benefits over the communities they engage (Himely, 2004; Mitchell & Humphries, 2007). An examination into community-university relationships, particularly to redefine "the role community members, students and faculty [have] in the service-

learning experience” (Mitchell, 2008, p. 50) is crucial in shifting service-learning programs away from charity-based programs towards programs that help to create sustainable social change. How can institutions best engage community organizations and their voices in all stages of service-learning programs, from planning to assessment, to utilizing a more justice-oriented approach to service-learning? Since its flagship program in 2018, the Alternative Reading Week program structure and the role community organizations have played in this program has undergone minimal revision. If Residence Services aspires to continue to develop and offer this program as one of the many co-curricular opportunities for students in residence at the University of Alberta, it is critical that there is an evaluation of its process for collaborating with community organizations. By identifying strategies on how to best engage community organizations in the design, implementation, and assessment of the program, Residence Services staff can reflect on whether community needs and perspectives are equally prioritized in its programming, and move towards creating more socially-just service-learning experiences.

As a lead facilitator of this program, I have begun to explore strategies for best engaging community organizations in programs that are truly reciprocal and support meaningful social change. Unfortunately, much of the literature that exists detailing the benefits, challenges and opportunities that exist within community service-learning programs are most often exclusively depicted from the institutions' point of view. By failing to actively portray the community organizations' voice and autonomy in the practice of designing, implementing, and assessing these programs, institutions can perpetuate harmful power dynamics rather than support social change. The role of community organizations in all stages of service-learning programs is a limited area of research that suggests best practices for future justice-oriented program development and institution-community relationships. My research will examine opportunities and potential barriers

for engaging community organizations in the design, implementation, and assessment of the University of Alberta's Residence Services' Alternative Reading Week program by surveying and interviewing representatives from community organizations that have hosted service placements and educational workshops during Alternative Reading Week programming within the past three years (November 2019 - November 2021).

### **Overview of Research Question**

CSL aims to feature a two-way relationship in which both the institution and the community have something to gain. However, up until now community partners have not engaged holistically with the Alternative Reading Week program's design, implementation, and evaluation. Rather community partners are often called upon to help support specific segments of the program, at the discretion of the university residence staff. Therefore, this research will explore the role community organizations can have in the design, implementation and assessment of the University of Alberta's Alternative Reading Week service-learning program. Specifically, what are the potential strategies that can be used to foster a space where the community has a voice in all stages of the Alternative Reading Week program, from development to evaluation?

The primary research question is, "What are community organizations' perspectives on how the University of Alberta Residence Services staff can best engage them in the design, implementation, and assessment of the Alternative Reading Week program?" Key questions include:

1. Why is the inclusion of community organization perspectives important for the success of the Alternative Reading Week program?
2. How can we improve current relationships with community organizations and facilitators of the Alternative Reading Week Program to be more collaborative?

3. What are the current barriers that prevent community organizations from playing a larger role in the design, implementation, and assessment of this program? How can these barriers be diminished?
4. What do communities see as their ideal role and identifiable opportunities to become more engaged in the program design, implementation, and assessment?
5. What potential strategies can University of Alberta Residence staff use to facilitate the community having a greater voice in the planning, implementation, and assessment of this program?

The goal of the research will be to identify ways that community organizations can practice an engaged role in the University of Alberta's Alternative Reading Week program to help develop a justice-based service-learning placements that best serve their community's unique needs and contexts. I will explore this research question by engaging with various representatives from community organizations who have previously been involved in the Alternative Reading Week program and through an internal secondary document analysis of Alternative Reading Week learning outcomes (Appendix A), schedules (Appendix B) and assessment questions (Appendix C). Existing literature highlights the complexity and diversity of CSL programs across institutions and has informed me of taking a qualitative approach to my research that provides the space and openness for community participants to help shape my research findings. Given the uniqueness of the Alternative Reading Week program and varying understandings of CSL, individual interviews will be helpful in distinguishing how community organizations ideally see their role in engaging with Residence Services staff in all stages of the Alternative Reading Week program. The secondary document analysis will provide additional resources and insights into the existing role and opportunities for engagement of community organizations in this program. My research



findings will help influence a list of best practices for Residence Services staff to consult with when designing, implementing, and assessing future Alternative Reading Week programs.

Additionally, the implications of this study will be largely beneficial for post-secondary institutions seeking to foster positive institutional-community relationships and evaluate how effectively they are engaging community organizations in their own service-learning programs. Specifically, how could the strategies for engaging community organizations explored in this research benefit other co-curricular service-learning partnerships? As research from the community's perspective on service-learning is becoming more common, this study will add to a field of literature to be used to help inform future CSL program development in post-secondary institutions and address a gap in literature regarding how communities prefer to be engaged in these programs. Lastly, much of the literature that exists regarding programs similar to the Alternative Reading Week program, do not speak to the alignment of the core principles of CSL in these programs, but instead focus on the volunteer nature of single initiatives that do not feature intentional learning outcomes or reflection activities. I hope to help contribute to a gap in the literature of programs that utilize the pedagogy of CSL without ties to academic credit or faculty-related initiatives. The final goal I anticipate achieving through this research is to bring the community organizations' voices to the forefront of the design, implementation, and assessment of the Alternative Reading Week program. A recurring theme in existing CSL literature highlights the tensions and challenges between navigating institutional-community partnerships in CSL and how these dynamics limit the ability for the institution to actively engage the community in the CSL process. Throughout this research I hope to contribute to the field of CSL, the community's perspective on tangible ways in which they prefer to be engaged to be further studied across a range of CSL opportunities in post-secondary institutions.

## **Personal Positioning**

In my professional career I have been responsible for coordinating multiple co-curricular service-learning programs in both an international and local context. It is important to note that my experience with service-learning programs within the University of Alberta has been with programs that are not faculty-specific or for academic credit, but for certificates of participation. These programs include the University of Alberta's Residence Services' Engage Edmonton Program, Global Service-Learning Program, and Alternative Reading Week program. The service-learning programs of which I have facilitated, have entailed myself and colleagues facilitating classroom workshops on understanding poverty and social issues. Through my professional experiences, I have worked with multiple community organizations who have hosted our students and supported these programs. CSL has made me a more compassionate, justice-oriented, and active citizen in my community. Although I strongly believe in the value of CSL programs to the university student experience, to community organizations, and in bridging the gap between institutions and communities, I want to ensure that the CSL programs I lead also highlight the key role of communities in making the programs possible. I am grateful that I have developed positive relationships with community organizations in my professional and personal involvement in volunteering and CSL. I want to use these experiences and relationships to address a gap in the current literature and support the development of an improved, community-centered Alternative Reading Week program in the future. My experience with service-learning has required me to analyze the potentially harmful unintended consequences these programs can have when service-learning reinforces stereotypes of communities instead of supporting mutual growth and social change. Specifically, I've seen students participate in service-learning programs and leave with a more fully developed sense of citizenship, empathy and understanding of social issues.

Unfortunately, I have also witnessed students leaving service-learning programs with a saviour-complex; feeling as though they are the missing piece in solving social issues within communities of which they do not belong. My work with service-learning programs inspired me to explore how these programs can be better designed to challenge a patriarchal relationship where the institution and students are seen as facilitating top-down service, and best support social change. In order to explore service-learning from a justice-based lens, it is critical that I utilize tools and methods of reflection to analyze my own relationship to Alternative Reading Week and the community organizations participating in this research. Given my pre-existing relationships with many of the community organizations contacted to participate in this research, I was intentional in being transparent throughout the recruitment process with community organizations that this research was being facilitated in a way that would not impact their relationship with Residence Services. At the time of conducting this research, I was seconded into a role outside of Residence Services, further increasing the separation from the research project and Alternative Reading Week itself. By being clear with community organizations throughout the research process that their participation would be kept confidential, it further supported the notion that this research would not impact their professional relationship with the institution. Additionally, given the role I had in previous Alternative Reading Week programs and being a representative of the institution, I utilized research methods that assessed and reflected on how power dynamics between myself and community organizations could have influenced research findings. Although I have a vested interest in the success of the Alternative Reading Week program, I am mindful that I will most likely not stay in my current role forever. I want to leave a legacy of my time working with communities to be developing a more justice-oriented Alternative Reading Week program that emphasizes the value and expertise community organizations bring to the program.

## **Conclusion**

The next chapter of my thesis, the literature review, will explore the tension between post-secondary institutions and community organizations that host service-learning programs and outline previous research on the engagement of community organizations in community service-learning programs by post-secondary institutions. Findings of this literature review will reinforce the need for additional research from the community organization's perspective regarding opportunities and challenges for more actively engaging the community in all stages of service-learning programs, such as Alternative Reading Week, from conceptualization to evaluation.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The primary research question, “How can University of Alberta Residence Services staff best engage community organizations in the design, implementation, and assessment of the Alternative Reading Week program?”, guided the literature review. Supplementary guiding questions included:

1. Why is the inclusion of community organization perspectives important for the success of institutional-community partnerships and CSL?
2. What are the current barriers that prevent community organizations from playing a larger role in the design, implementation, and assessment of service-learning programs?
3. What potential strategies can Residence Services staff use to empower the community to have a greater voice in the planning, facilitation, and assessment of service-learning programs?

A thorough literature review was conducted to analyze the existing literature around community organization perspectives and involvement in service-learning programs. Existing research highlighted a need for more community-centered literature regarding CSL programs and presented key areas of future exploration when engaging with community partners as part of this research.

### **Literature Review Methodology**

The above questions were explored using the University of Alberta Library databases SAGE Journals and JSTOR. Google Scholar and the database for the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning were also employed to conduct this literature review. Boolean logic was utilized to analyze key terms in the research question, such as: community service-learning and post-secondary institutions or higher education, community organizations and assessing

service-learning programs, service-learning and institutional partnerships, community institutional partnerships and service-learning and assessment. Although there is a plethora of academic research in regards to service-learning programming, articles were required to feature a connection to at least one of the above research questions in order to be included in this review.

Specific eligibility criteria were constructed in order to further determine and prioritize which literature would be included and best inform future research. All literature was from peer-reviewed journals, in order to establish their academic credibility. The majority of authors included in the literature have published research studies or academic journal articles surrounding the topic of service learning programs or community engagement. It is important to note that university-based volunteer programs that did not speak to the principles of service-learning such as reflection, intentional learning outcomes, or reciprocity, were not included. Articles included in the literature review presented a balance between “pro” and “anti” service-learning perspectives and were scrutinized for potential bias. Articles that holistically convey the controversial nature of service-learning programming in regards to balancing academic programming and social justice intervention, were prioritized. Although articles from within a North American context were the primary focus, multiple international articles were also included to highlight the global nature of the challenges university-community partnerships in service-learning programs face. Similarly, some foundational articles were included as they provided the basis for more recent research into service-learning programs, however articles published within the last fifteen years were prioritized. Due to the increased interest in service-learning programming and research, it was essential that the majority of literature was as recent as possible in order to depict an accurate narrative of the current landscape of this field. In order to best inform the research question, articles were limited to service-learning programs within a post-secondary context and excluded programs involving

high-school or community volunteer programs. Lastly, articles that spoke to the community organization's perspective on service-learning were prioritized. The above parameters ensured the review was applied to the context of the research question and could help to inform best practices.

Articles identified to be key sources were organized into four categories: university-community partnerships, community organizations in the design of service-learning programs, community organizations in the implementation of service-learning programs, and community organizations in the assessment of service-learning programs. A google spreadsheet was utilized to further organize the articles and highlight key themes as well as controversial findings for each topic.

## **Literature Review**

### **Institutional-Community Partnerships in CSL**

The very existence of community organizations are what make CSL programs possible as, “without community partners, there would be no service learning” (Ward & Wendel, 2000, p.768). Therefore, the relationship between institutions and community organizations in CSL programs is critical for the success of these programs. The Alternative Reading Week program relies heavily on various community organizations to host service opportunities and educational workshops throughout the week. The relationships between Residence Services staff and the community organizations they engage with, influence the success and sustainability of the organization's involvement in future residence programs. A review of the literature emphasized why community voice in CSL is crucial to minimize the perpetuation of unintentional harm on communities, presents key factors that influence institutional-community partnerships, and explores how power dynamics impact institutional-community relationships. Literature investigating the community's perspective on institutional partnerships in service-learning programs helps to inform the role

community organizations currently play in the CSL process, how they could be engaged in a more critical form of CSL, and provides a foundational basis for how these relationships may be improved in the future.

### ***Community Voice in CSL Partnerships***

When exploring institutional-community partnerships in CSL it is important to recognize the two-way nature of the relationship between the community and institution, where each party contributes to the overall program and its effectiveness. CSL programs where the institution applies a top-down approach to working with communities, risks reinforcing traditional systems of oppression and power imbalances with community partners. In Santiago-Ortiz's (2019) research into the possible decolonization of CSL, they emphasize the distinction between programs which only engage communities by focusing on outcomes of social issues experienced by the community, and programs which challenge the systems that perpetuate these social issues in the first place. This distinction between charity and social justice is explored in more detail by Mitchell and Humphries (2007), who describe that engaging with communities through a justice-based lens "promotes a sense of mutuality in a community-university partnership" (p. 48). A justice-based lens involves engaging communities as equal stakeholders in CSL and investing time in understanding the complex and holistic context of the community. Rather than prescribing what a community's involvement in CSL should entail, a justice-based approach challenges power imbalances by engaging with communities on the basis of their assets and what contributions they bring to the program (Rosner-Salazar, 2003, as cited in Mitchell & Humphries, 2007). A superficial understanding of the community based exclusively on its needs and not the intersectional social issues impacting the community, can increase misconceptions and stereotypes among CSL participants (Mitchell & Humphries, 2007). This shallow understanding of



community context leading to harmful assumptions is of particular concern for short-term CSL programs (Himely, 2004), such as the Alternative Reading Week program.

The literature emphasizes that bringing the voice of the community to the forefront of CSL program development can shift CSL away from a deficit-based model and reduce potential harm to the community. For example, Blouin and Perry (2009) conducted a qualitative study of various community organizations. To limit potential bias and to ensure that their research was capturing the scope of initiatives that qualify as service-learning programs, the researchers focused on including a range of community organizations in their study who had experience working with multiple CSL programs (Blouin & Perry, 2009). Blouin and Perry (2009) emphasized that some community partners were concerned with ensuring they were “protecting their vulnerable communities from harm” in CSL programs (p. 121). This concern for ensuring that CSL does not disenfranchise or perpetuate the oppression of marginalized communities is a common concern in CSL literature that is centered upon the community’s experience of CSL. In fact, Sandy and Holland (2006) note in their research conducting focus groups with community organizations to explore institutional-community partnerships, that all community organizations drew attention to the concerning problem that faculty administrators would sometimes require CSL participants to “create assignments that were illegal or inappropriate for their workplaces” (p. 37). Hammersley (2012) talks about how by educating the institution and participants of the history of a community, addressing the dominant ideologies that influence these programs, and focusing on bringing attention to the traditionally excluded voices of CSL, we can begin to decolonize service-learning. Further, Yancey (2016) writes, “If the wisdom and perspectives of all participants are truly honored and respected, service learning cannot be focused on the intent of the faculty in creating teaching-learning moments or on specific desired learning outcomes, nor can “service” be seen as

doing for” (p. 118). By establishing the community as equal partners in CSL, we do not render them powerless in CSL programs or impose the dominant institutional narrative of service upon them, but rather emphasize the key role they play in supporting these programs.

Another common theme in support of why communities need to be more engaged in the CSL process, is that the communities provide the institution with the knowledge and context to ensure that the programs meet their specific needs. When we know the history, context, and experiences of the community, we are better able to empathize and understand their perspectives (d’Arlach, Sanchez, & Feuer, 2009). If communities are not engaged in the process, there is potential for CSL programs to not be as valuable to the community as they could be. Multiple articles support this notion by reinforcing the concept that only communities are experts on their own world and context (Sandy & Holland, 2006; Hammersley, 2012). Blouin and Perry (2009) express concern that if communities are not involved in CSL program development, then they may be investing their limited time and resources into a program that does not achieve any goals for the community. In fact, institutions lacking an understanding of the community is something that Blouin and Perry (2009) found in their discussions with community organizations, who emphasized issues of students being unprepared for their service placements as a result of university staff lacking knowledge of the community context. Maurrasse (2002) sheds additional light on this lack of preparedness and suggests that institutions are currently gaining more from their partnerships with communities than the community counterparts. In their research, Maurrasse (2002) investigates how institutions can evaluate the progress of their partnerships with communities by utilizing the same methods businesses use for engaging with communities in corporate social responsibility programs. One of the practices of corporate social responsibility explored, is the consideration of consequences for not developing strong partnerships with the

community (Maurrasse, 2002). For example, have Residence Services staff taken the time to discuss and assess the potential risks for not engaging with communities appropriately during the Alternative Reading Week program. Further, what is the risk of not facilitating this type of CSL program at all? How would eliminating the Alternative Reading Week program impact the institution and communities involved? Are these impacts reciprocal, indicating a loss of mutual benefits that both partners receive from the program? Maurrasse (2002) encourages institutions to focus on the process of investing in relationships with communities, noting that this process will take time and that institutions need to ensure that the process is accessible to communities. Institutions cannot simply provide space for community organizations without giving community partners an understanding of what kinds of questions to ask (Maurrasse, 2002). Developing a strong relationship with the community, builds capacity in the community for understanding what the institution may be able to provide that could benefit them (Maurrasse, 2002). Do community organizations that partner on Alternative Reading Week have a clear understanding of what their involvement could look like in this program? How can community organizations share their perspectives and identify how they would prefer to be engaged throughout the program from design, to implementation, and assessment, if they are not first able to identify what each of these stages of the program encompass? Hence, raising community voice in CSL as equal partners can mitigate charity-based approaches to service-learning, but requires an intentional commitment from the institution to build relationships that support this level of engagement.

### ***Factors that Support Positive Institutional-Community Partnerships***

Literature analyzing institutional-community partnerships highlights how trust, relationship building, and the act of creating space for communities inspires positive and reciprocal relationships between institutions and the communities that host CSL placements. In a flagship

article for examining CSL partnerships between institutions and the community in the Canadian context, Taylor and Kahlke (2017) conduct an interpretative study with both the institutional administrators and community partners of various CSL programs to explore the ways in which individuals rationalize and reconcile service-learning with different institutional logics. The findings of their interviews and focus groups with participants demonstrated how CSL programs being centered within an academic environment influence these partnerships and the ways in which the institution approaches these relationships compared to the community (Taylor & Kahlke, 2017). Community partners embraced “trust and reciprocity, an emphasis on personal investment in the group” in regards to CSL partnerships (Taylor & Kahlke, 2017, p. 143). Community partners expressed a lack of relationship-building efforts on behalf of the institution that was evident by the limited presence of the faculty within the community (Taylor & Kahlke, 2017). Worrall (2007) also affirms that positive partnerships in CSL are rooted in trust, personal relationships and the ability to meet the needs of both the institution and community. Particularly, Worrall (2007) used interviews with community organizations to explore their perspectives on the relationship they held with their institution, and found that “the quality of relationships is paramount” (p. 8) and that good relationships held some degree of personal connection between the institution and faculty administrator of the program, the relationship was valued by both parties, and it supported mutual benefits. Sandy and Holland (2006) acknowledged that relationships can be difficult to develop and maintain with factors such as capacity, staff turnover, and volume and variation in community partners institutions work with. For example, the Alternative Reading Week program has paraprofessional staff turnover each year, resulting in a new individual connecting with community organizations in regards to the program. How can Residence Services staff appropriately build relationships for a program that occurs as infrequently as twice a year and with new staff coming

to the table on a regular basis? The existing literature provides one strategy for fostering positive relationships between community and university partners, by expanding the partnership beyond the interaction within a single CSL program (Cushman, 2002; Sandy & Holland, 2006). For instance, rather than focusing on the relationships as a piece of a single service-learning program, institutions should reframe their relationships with community organizations in regards to ongoing projects (Cushman, 2002). McDonald and Dominguez (2015) suggest that every successful CSL program helps build a stronger foundation for the relationship between the institution and community. Rather than viewing each Alternative Reading Week program as a completely isolated program, Residence Services staff should focus on how each time an organization collaborates on Alternative Reading Week, their relationship has the potential to develop and strengthen. Existing literature emphasizes that positive relationships and trust take time to develop (Taylor & Kahlke, 2017; Worrall, 2007) and the relationship between community and institutions may take even longer to develop if there is a negative history or past between the partners (Maurrasse, 2002). However, investing the time and resources into ongoing, strong institutional-community partnerships grounded in trust and relationship building, can create opportunities for the community to play an active role in contributing to the development and outcomes of the program.

### ***Power Dynamics in Institutional-Community Partnerships***

Another common theme in the literature is challenging potential harmful power imbalances by engaging with the community not just as a beneficiary of CSL, but instead as an integral partner in the program. For example, Hammersley (2012) focuses on using a developmental lens to challenge traditional notions of power dynamics in service-learning and highlighting the “deeply embedded ideologies that inform service-learning” (p. 172). CSL programs that do not actively engage the communities risk positioning communities as powerless in the act of creating change

or meeting their own needs. Hammersley (2012) draws parallels between colonization and service-learning, in which a dominant group privileges and enforces their own agenda upon a community. This concern for potentially harmful power dynamics influencing CSL partnerships is echoed in an earlier article by Kezar and Rhoads (2001), in which the authors state that academic institutions often regard themselves as knowing what is best for communities. Kezar and Rhoads (2001) take a philosophical approach to analyzing how CSL programs and partnerships are situated within an institution and reinforce the concept that “community members and campus service providers ought to engage jointly and democratically in identifying needs and how such needs are to be met” (p. 160). By incorporating the community as equal decision-makers, CSL programs can move away from “doing for communities rather than doing with them” (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000, p. 767). Collaborating with the community as equal partners in the CSL program prevents power imbalances from occurring (Mitchell & Humphries, 2007). This involves creating the opportunity and space for the community to share their experiences and to articulate their own goals for participating in a service-learning program (Yancey, 2016). By taking the time to create space for the community, CSL programs can engage communities as partners rather than as recipients of a service (McDonald & Dominguez, 2015). CSL programs need to identify and align their programs with the notion that the community is its own entity with “people with their own histories, interest and understandings of wholeness” (Morton & Bergbauer, 2015, p. 19). The importance of engaging community organization voices in CSL is further explored in another finding from Sandy and Holland’s (2006) focus groups with community organizations regarding their perspectives on institutional-community partnerships. Sandy and Holland (2006) found that engaging the community in joint planning of CSL programs was an effective way to better improve the relationships between the institution and community. Specifically, Sandy and Holland (2006)

caution that institutions who do not appreciate and engage with “the community perspective may have dire consequences because there is considerable room for misunderstanding between higher education and community partners” (p. 31). Without engaging community perspectives directly, institutions are relying on their assumptions regarding the community (Sandy & Holland, 2006). Rooting CSL programming in the assumed understanding of a community’s needs and perspectives, applies a paternalistic role of the institution towards communities and reinforces power differentials. Hence, the literature indicates that in order to address power imbalances, all components of a CSL program must reflect both the needs of the institution and community and take into account the role each partner has in the process (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000; McBride, Brav, Menon, & Sherraden, 2006). A focus on examining power dynamics in community-university partnerships as means for cultivating CSL programs rooted in social justice, has led to the development of a more critical form of community service-learning presented in the literature.

### ***Institutional-Community Partnerships in Critical Community Service-Learning***

Critical service-learning focuses on the examination of power dynamics in traditional institutional-community partnerships and emphasizes relationship building between partners, in an effort to facilitate social change (Mitchell, 2008). Mitchell (2008) asserts that critical service-learning as “unapologetic in its aim to dismantle structures of injustice” (p. 50), compared to traditional CSL, which does not focus on the root causes of social issues or the role institutions have in perpetuating these issues. Critical service-learning requires institutions and students to be reflective on the impact CSL has in a community, for better or worse (Mitchell, 2008). Going against traditional power structures in CSL for critical service-learning, involves featuring community partners in more active roles throughout the program. For instance, Mitchell (2008) describes how engaging communities in service-learning programs can be done by establishing

community organizations as co-educators and co-creators of CSL curriculums. Critical service-learning explores how the identities of each student participant, institution, and community partners intersect and influence one another, using the relationships between institutions and community as a means for addressing social issues (Mitchell, 2008; Santiago-Ortiz, 2019). If a more justice-oriented CSL program can be achieved by engaging communities in the CSL process and challenging the status quo, why is critical service-learning and community perspectives not always put into practice for all CSL programs? The next section will explore the barriers to engaging communities in the design, implementation and assessment of CSL and why community voice is not easily incorporated into CSL.

### **Barriers To Engaging Communities In CSL Programs**

CSL programs that are situated within post-secondary institutions are faced with programmatic, cultural, systemic, and bureaucratic challenges that prevent these programs from collaborating and fully engaging with communities.

Firstly, CSL programs within higher-education must work within the existing framework and boundaries of the institution. This can result in programmatic challenges that neither the facilitator of the CSL program or the community can modify. For instance, many CSL programs are restricted to a set timeframe that is determined by the institution without consideration of the community it will engage (Cameron, 2010). A common theme in the literature emphasizes communities expressing challenges of having to navigate CSL programs that align with the academic calendar and how this timing is not always best for their organization (Cameron, 2010; Loh, 2016, Sandy & Holland, 2006). For instance, The Alternative Reading Week program takes place only during the set week-long breaks in the University of Alberta's academic calendar, offering little flexibility on dates and timelines in which community organizations can participate



and contribute to these programs. Sandy and Holland (2006) found that communities struggled with the logistics of CSL programs being situated within the institutional context, such as a minimum hour requirement for CSL placements. Particularly, communities “felt that the designated hour requirement sends the wrong message to students and were sometimes distressed by the amount of paperwork this requirement generates” (Sandy & Holland, 2006, p. 39). Unfortunately, the rigid restrictions of CSL programs within institutions do not provide the flexibility to meaningfully engage with communities in the logistics of these programs.

A second theme that highlights why institutions do not always engage communities in the CSL process is because faculty administrators of CSL programs are required to constantly demonstrate the value of CSL programs in an academic context. In fact, as institutions are typically seen as the storehouses for knowledge, it can be counterintuitive for an institution to also recognize and engage with the expertise and knowledge of communities (Taylor & Kahlke, 2017). Similarly, Kezar and Rhoads (2001), suggest that CSL requires institutions to expand their notion of scholarship and that this is a “radical act that challenges the university’s claim to ownership of expertise” (p. 145). Ultimately, institutions often tend to prioritize traditional forms of knowledge over relationship building within communities (Taylor & Kahlke, 2017).

Lastly, the literature draws attention to the concern that community organizations may lack the capacity to be engaged further in the CSL process, even if they desire to be. For instance, Sandy and Holland (2006) heard from community organizations that sometimes the amount of time the community needs to invest in the preparation of hosting CSL placements is more than the actual placements. This concept is further elaborated in Tryon and Stoecker’s (2008) research in which community organizations expressed reluctance to and the challenges with investing time and capacity in training and hosting service placements for projects that were short-term or did not

result in future ongoing service projects. The concept of barriers to engaging communities in CSL was also identified by Cronley, Madden and Davis (2015) who conducted focus groups on community organizations and found that while some organizations desire CSL placements as a means to increase organizational resources, there are some organizations that lack the initial capacity to take these programs. As stated in the above section examining institutional-community partnerships, the literature suggests that developing positive relationships between the community and institution takes time. Unfortunately, even if the institution is willing and able to engage the community, the community does not always have the capacity to make sure their voice is heard. Despite these barriers, centering CSL programs with consideration of both the role of the institution as well as the community is integral for ensuring the program is mutually beneficial and meets the needs of the community.

### **Engaging Communities In CSL Program Design, Implementation, and Assessment**

Interestingly, despite literature suggesting that community voice is crucial for successful CSL programs, there is limited research depicting what engaging the community currently entails. In fact, a mixed methods research study by Gazley, Bennett and Littlepage (2013) of over two hundred and ninety community organizations on their experiences with university partnerships found that communities are largely not engaged or communicated with by the university staff regarding the program development, facilitation, and evaluation. A review of the literature regarding community engagement in the CSL process shows that the community desires more active engagement and see themselves as playing a key role in the learning of students. However, there appears to be an identifiable gap in the CSL literature that explores or introduces tangible recommendations for exactly what this increased engagement could look like in practice.

#### ***Engaging Communities in CSL Program Design***

Literature that focuses solely on the actions the institution takes when working with community groups in CSL, continues to undermine the role of community organizations as equal partners in the development of these programs. Specifically, research that does not involve the community's perspective on program development, places them as simply stakeholders who need to be communicated *to* rather than *with*. For example, articles by Brooks (2008), Gazley, et al (2013), and Blouin and Perry (2009) emphasize the need for institutions to create Memorandums of Understanding and clear expectations at the beginning of the program development process to be communicated to community partners. Although written agreements can support clear expectations for both partners, it is crucial that the institution is not thrusting their agreement upon the community, but rather developing aspects of the agreement together. Unfortunately, CSL programs are often developed with the institution spearheading the process and imposing goals upon the community organization. Bortolin (2011) conducted a discourse analysis of service-learning literature and found that the institution is regularly privileged over the community in how we articulate and approach service-learning. Particularly, the findings of Bortolin's (2011) research exploring how community was defined and represented in existing literature, indicated that the community is often presented solely as a means for the institution to achieve their goals, resulting in the development of programs that require the community to adapt to the institution's needs and desires. A recurring theme stresses the need for community involvement in the development of CSL programs. Kezar and Rhoads (2001) indicate that the community needs to be "equal participants in identifying community needs and in constructing service projects" (p. 167). Additionally, Sandy and Holland (2006) affirm that CSL programs need to be developed using an ongoing collaborative approach.

The most tangible way in which the literature recommends engaging communities in the planning process of CSL programs is by using transparent communication (Cameron, 2010; Hacker, 2013). Purposeful communication is highlighted as the most effective method of ensuring that the needs and goals of the community are being met by a CSL program (McDonald & Dominguez, 2015). Further, in the research conducted by Gazley et al. (2013), community partners cited a desire for more communication in the planning process and at the very least being shared classroom materials and assignments before a CSL project begins. Apart from increasing input from the community to help establish the groundwork for CSL programs, another major theme of the literature is ensuring the institution is familiar with the community's needs and goals before the CSL program begins to increase staff and student preparedness for these projects (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Cushman, 2002; McDonald and Dominguez, 2015; and Gazley et al, 2013).

### ***Engaging Communities in CSL Program Implementation***

Literature exploring the community's experience with how CSL programs are facilitated highlights three common themes:

1. An argument for more faculty involvement in community organization service work,
2. The demonstration of successful case studies in which communities played an active role throughout the classroom and CSL project duration
3. And an emphasis on the role community organizations play as informal co-educators

In regards to faculty involvement, community organizations expressed a desire for more frequent visitation by faculty to the community organizations during CSL programs or ongoing involvement from the faculty with the community (Cushman, 2002; Cronley, Madden & Davis,

2015, Gazley et al., 2013, Hammersley, 2012; and Sandy & Holland, 2006). Cushman (2002) explored a CSL program that was focused on the faculty playing a more intentional role in the service learning program and actively participating alongside the community organization and participants. By having the instructor connecting more frequently with the community, and learning alongside their students, the relationship between the institution and community had increased trust and learning goals were more closely integrated in the service projects (Cushman, 2002).

The literature that depicts tangible examples of communities being actively involved in the facilitation of CSL programs is overwhelmingly dominated by case studies. For instance, Loh (2016) introduces a co-learning model into service-learning in which community partners share responsibility for the program and the educating of program participants. Stephenson, Stephenson and Mayes (2012) also explored a service-learning program hosted by various community organizations working with multiple institutions and found community partners had high satisfaction with the collaborative process of having the community guest lecture and support student learning. Finally, Morton and Bergbauer (2015) explored four service-learning programs in which the institution focused on creating physical and metaphorical space for the community throughout the program facilitation, including participant reflection. By integrating the community so thoroughly in these four programs they were able to empower communities and participants to make decisions together and design the program based on these discussions (Morton & Bergbauer, 2015). Another example of a case study that showcased a CSL program in which the community held a more active role in the facilitation was found in an article by Arches and Apontes-Pares (2005). They detail a CSL program centered around a housing development project in a community and an institution (Arches & Apontes-Pares, 2005). Specifically, the institution engaged with the

community on identifying possible social services that could benefit the neighborhood and to establish plans for implementation (Arches & Apontes-Pares, 2005). The case study highlights the multiple tensions that arise between community partners and the university when working collaboratively on CSL programs (Arches & Apontes-Pares, 2005). For example, student participants struggled with the unstructured nature of community collaboration, in which the project would require ongoing revisions based on community feedback and direction (Arches & Apontes-Pares, 2005). Similarly, the community was hesitant to fully trust the institution, as past interactions on similar projects had led to no sustainable benefits to the community (Arches & Apontes-Pares, 2005). The investment (or lack of) to develop and maintain a partnership between the institution and community can present challenges when engaging community organizations in CSL. Although these case studies provide foundational evidence for what engaging communities in the implementation of CSL programs could look like for institutions, it is important to note the limitations in generalizability due to the specific nature of the case studies.

The perspective that the community should be revered as equal co-educators in the service-learning process is apparent in the literature (Cronley et al, 2015; Worrall, 2007). Darby, Ward-Johnson and Cobb (2016) conducted a qualitative study of community partners who host service-learning placements and found that many helped educate students. Particularly, Darby et al. (2016) writes that community partners often help students “advance their understanding of diversity, overcome their anxiety and uncertainty, conquer their fear of interacting with those who are different, and relate more effectively to the clients “ (p.7). The key role community partners play in supporting the learning of students is further depicted in the study by Rinaldo, Davis & Borunda (2015), in which qualitative analysis of nine community partners of one university to explore the stages and diversity of experiences in creating and implementing a CSL program. Rinaldo et al

(2015) found that one of the key stages of a CSL program was the education by the community that helped orient student participants, providing them with necessary training and contextual information for the community. Findings of this research suggested that community organizations were extremely committed to this role as educators and “valued the opportunity to be involved in students’ learning and development” (Rinaldo et al, 2015, p. 120). Furthermore, the existing literature highlighting a desire from communities to be more involved in CSL programs or to be more actively recognized as co-educators in these programs, is not limited to a North American context. Fourie (2003) analyzed eight service-learning projects at a South African university in order to explore what characteristics make a service-learning project support true community development and found that despite the community playing a key role in assisting student learning, the community rarely received credit for being a “source of learning” (p. 37).

### ***Engaging Communities in CSL Program Assessment***

The literature reveals a major problem in how research currently engages communities in the assessment of CSL programs. The traditional evaluation of CSL programs has been showcased as a one-sided process in which the institution is responsible for “reporting up” the success of the program, and the community is neither consulted nor informed of the results (Cameron, 2010). Therefore, there is an identifiable gap of information regarding how community partners actually feel about service-learning programs (d’Arlach et al., 2009). In Tryon and Stoecker’s research (2008) exploring community-organization’s feelings towards service-learning programs, their findings highlighted that community organizations view their participation in CSL programs as investments to raise awareness about their organization’s mission and hopefully inspire CSL participants to be future long-term supporters of the organization. If institutions understand the objectives community organizations have for partnering on CSL programs, they can better work

with communities to assess whether community goals are being met. For instance, community organizations may be interested in assessing how many Alternative Reading Week program participants are interested in continuing to engage in volunteer service placements with their organization, following the completion of the program.

Of the research on community perspectives on CSL assessment that does exist, the majority is limited to having the community evaluate elements of the institution-community partnership (d'Arlach et al., 2009). These assessments examine the community's satisfaction with the institution or participants, and neglect to assess the impact of the actual service-learning program on the community (Butin, 2003). This is evident in research by Ferrari and Worrall (2000), who assessed community organizations' perspectives on CSL participants. Ferrari and Worrall (2000) had community partners who oversaw service-learning students, complete surveys to evaluate the performance of CSL participants on factors such as the student's dedication to the project, attendance, and respectful behaviour. Similarly, Lester, Tomkovick, Wells, Flunker and Kickul (2005) also assessed the community partner's experience with service-learning in regards to how they perceived student professionalism and desire to learn, rather than the impact the participants had on addressing the community's needs. Engaging the community in only providing feedback for CSL participants, prioritizes information that is valuable for the institution on how to improve the CSL program, over feedback that is applicable to the community's assessment of whether their goals were achieved.

The literature that involves community perspective on CSL program impact does not provide a platform for the community to define for itself whether their goals have been accomplished through a CSL program. Instead, much of the literature features evaluations that researchers or the institution create and place upon communities rather than develop alongside



them. For instance, Boles et al. (2020) conducted interviews with community partners and looked specifically at perceived community impact in regards to capacity. Additionally, research that engages community organizations on the impacts of CSL on the community often explores possible benefits over actual program results. George-Paschal, Hawkins and Graybeal (2019) used focus groups to learn about the experiences students, faculty and community partners had with service-learning. Through analyzing focus group data of community partners, George-Paschal et al. (2019) found that community partners highlighted one of the top benefits of participating in CSL as networking with institutions and students. However, this type of research did not provide space to engage community organizations in a conversation as to how networking could be assessed or evaluated, in an effort to gain greater understanding into the degree to which the community benefited from the program. Likewise, James and Logan (2016) conducted an exploratory case study using semi-structured interviews to further understand what we mean by community impact and how evaluation of community impact can be improved. In this research, community members who were involved in a variety of capacities of a particular CSL program called Teaching in Place were asked to evaluate their experiences with whether the program met their expectations (James & Logan, 2016). Similar to the above case studies, James and Logan (2016) investigate the community's experience with a CSL program but do not provide space for the community to contribute to how the program's success could be measured in a way that would be meaningful to them.

Very few articles describe how the community can be actively engaged in the development of an assessment model for a service-learning program. Of those articles that focus on why engaging the community in evaluation is beneficial, they fail to depict strategies for how to do so. For instance, Cruz and Giles (2000) suggest that engaging the community in an asset-based

evaluation in which the community helps dictate the variables to be assessed will improve service programs moving forward. Paineau and Kiely (1996) highlight the value of engaging community partners in the evaluation process by suggesting when communities are engaged in this process they gain feelings of self-efficacy and develop new skills. Existing literature around community organizations and their involvement in developing CSL program assessment is a specific area that needs more attention, particularly on how this engagement with communities could occur.

### **Limitations of Literature Review**

The majority of the literature examining CSL from the community perspective, highlights that engagement in program development, implementation, and assessment is important, but how they can be best engaged in these processes is not always clear. Furthermore, engaging the community is often framed as a means to benefit the institution, instead of how it better supports the community's needs. Miron and Moely (2006), found that those community partners who had more voice in the planning and implementation of the project, viewed the institution more favourably. Miron and Moely 's (2006) findings highlight how incorporating the community in the development of service-learning programs can benefit the institution's reputation. Further, Hartman (2015) discusses how utilizing the community as a cooperative partner in the participant's learning process can reduce tension between institution and community priorities.

Another way in which the existing literature privileges the benefit to the institution for engaging communities rather than the benefit to communities themselves, is by focusing on the experience of student participants, rather than community members. For instance, Inella (2010) wrote about a collaborative service-learning program between an institution and community museum, and focused solely on the impact to students learning that close community engagement had.

Another major limitation of the research presented above is the fact that the majority of the literature regarding service-learning programs feature case studies or definitions in which service-learning programs are limited to those that are curricular in nature or facilitated by faculty members. A gap in the literature is post-secondary programs that utilize the principles of service-learning but are not associated with a specific faculty or course. Perhaps this identifies a need in the literature for a subcategory of service-learning programs led by university staff outside of academic faculties.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the literature review supports the goal of my research which is to bring community voice to the forefront of the development, implementation, and assessment of the Alternative Reading Week program. The literature highlights the tensions and challenges between navigating institutional-community partnerships in CSL and how these dynamics can limit the ability for the institution to actively engage the community in the CSL process. Throughout this literature review a clear gap of information was identified in which there is limited research from the community's perspective on tangible ways in which they could be engaged throughout all stages of a CSL program. Particularly, there is very limited research of community organizations helping establish and create assessment models for CSL. This literature review drew attention to the complexity and diversity of CSL programs across institutions and has informed me of taking a qualitative approach to my research that provides the space and openness for community participants to help shape my research findings while focusing solely on the Alternative Reading Week program.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

As outlined in the introduction, the Alternative Reading Week program engages diverse community organizations in a variety of ways, relying on an organization's expertise and involvement to assist with a spectrum of Alternative Reading Week activities. As no two community organizations may have the same degree of involvement with the program, a qualitative research approach was necessary to provide flexibility and space for organizations to speak for their unique roles within engaging in the planning, implementation, and assessment of Alternative Reading Week. Further, through evaluating the literature and the research question, a qualitative approach empowered me to dive deeper into strategies that may be identified to support community organization engagement in all stages of the Alternative Reading Week Program. Because a key goal of my study is to bring forward the voices of the community organizations that currently help support the Alternative Reading Week program, I was conscious of not limiting their insights and feedback by narrowing the scope of questions or data collected by more quantitative methods.

#### **Approvals**

As the Alternative Reading Week program is a flagship initiative under Residence Services, at the University of Alberta, an initial conversation with the Assistant Dean of Students, Residences, was conducted to obtain permission to focus this research on the Alternative Reading Week program and its partners. Specifically, permission was granted to utilize existing program materials from the past three years including, learning objectives (Appendix A), schedules of events (Appendix B), and participant survey questions (Appendix C). Contact information for previous community organizations that had participated in Alternative Reading Week Programs

during the past three years, was also shared. A signed agreement was completed between Residence Services and myself, articulating this sharing of information (Appendix D).

### **Recruitment and Participants**

Participants included community organizations that had previously been engaged with the Alternative Reading Week Program at least once over the past three years. Exclusion criteria for participants of this study are those community organizations which have not been involved in the Alternative Reading Week program within the past three years. Community organizations were initially contacted by email, inviting them to take part in this research study. The initial email recruiting participants was customized to each organization and included an overview of the research study, details on initial informed consent, a brief overview of the Alternative Reading Week Program (including a previous Alternative Reading Week program schedule of which the organization was featured as hosting a service placement or workshop for participants), and a section for participants to complete if they were interested in participating in the research study. There were a total of eight community organizations that received the initial request to participate. Of the eight community organizations contacted, five agreed to participate in this study (N=5). I arranged an introductory phone call or virtual meeting (using the Zoom platform), with all participating organizations, in order to answer any questions surrounding the research study and to talk through the informed consent form (Appendix E). Once the community organization representative returned a signed copy of their informed consent form, they received a link to an initial survey (Appendix F).

### **Procedures**

Participants were emailed a link to an initial online survey through the survey platform Campus Labs. Campus Labs allows participants to complete the survey anonymously, as well as

limit access to the data to myself and no other user of the platform. The initial survey questions (Appendix F) were designed to ask participants to reflect on their community organizations' role in previous Alternative Reading Week programs in regards to program design, program implementation, and program assessment. There was also a section of the survey requesting feedback on opportunities for increased involvement in the program process as well as potential barriers to their involvement. The survey was composed of open-ended questions assessing how community partners perceive their role in regards to the Alternative Reading Week program. The goal of the survey was to capture the current context of these community organizations and their experiences and perceptions in regards to engaging with Residence Services staff on the Alternative Reading Week program. The survey was seven questions in length and participants were given multiple email reminders to complete the survey before it closed. Of the five participants, four community organization representatives completed the initial survey.

After the survey data was collected, I reviewed the data to inform key areas of exploration to target in individual interviews. Individual interviews were coordinated through email with the community organization representative participating in the research. The goal of the interviews was to provide participants with the opportunity to further expand on their thoughts from the survey, to elaborate on their perspectives regarding their engagement in the Alternative Reading Week program, and to identify strategies for best practices when engaging them in the future. Interview questions (Appendix G) were shared in advance with participants, and they were advised that interviews would follow a semi-structured format. Semi-structured interviews involved an iterative process of continuing to revise and develop questions based on the previous interview. By utilizing this format, the voice of community organization representatives was able to steer future interviews. This approach provided flexibility for interview questions to be reframed or to

dive deeper into areas organization representatives identified as where and how they could be engaged in Alternative Reading Week. Interviews took approximately 45 minutes and were conducted by phone or the virtual online platform Zoom, depending on the participant's preference. Three of the community organizations participated in a Zoom interview, where two participants opted for a telephone interview. All interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim using Zoom's audio transcription function.

Memo writing was conducted following each interview and during each stage of the interview data analysis. Memos were written to record my immediate understanding of the community organization's representative's perspective on the Alternative Reading Week program and how they could be engaged in the future. Memos provided the space for me to detail what further questions their responses ignited in my research, and inspired the shaping of future interview questions. Additionally, in the memos I outlined the community organization representative's familiarity with the Alternative Reading Week program, and wrote out questions as to how the familiarity (or lack thereof) of each community organization representative may have influenced their responses. Corbin and Strauss (2015) write that memos "force analysts to ask questions of the data" (p. 110). Memos created a foundation for examining community organization representative's perspective on their potential and desired involvement in the Alternative Reading Week program by detailing my impressions of how these representatives viewed the program and their level of involvement.

Another key element of this research project was analyzing secondary data regarding the Alternative Reading Week program, which was obtained by current Residence Services staff. The documents analyzed were:

- 1) The learning outcomes for Alternative Reading Week programs for Fall 2019, Winter 2020, Fall 2020, Winter 2021 and Fall 2021 (Appendix A).
- 2) The program schedules for Alternative Reading Week programs for Fall 2019, Winter 2020, Fall 2020, Winter 2021, and Fall 2021 (Appendix B).
- 3) The program assessment questions for Alternative Reading Week programs for Fall 2019, Winter 2020, Fall 2020, Winter 2021 and Fall 2021 (Appendix C).

The secondary data documents were developed internally by Residence Services staff as guiding documents for the design, implementation, and assessment of the program. For example, the learning outcomes for each Alternative Reading Week program (Appendix A) influenced the design of the program for achieving these goals, whereas the program schedules (Appendix B) showed how this program was implemented. Lastly, the program assessment questions (Appendix C), demonstrated what the assessment for Alternative Reading Week entailed. These documents strategically informed how the program was created each semester and provided insight into the process of each Alternative Reading Week program. Use of the secondary documents was crucial in identifying where community organizations were currently engaged in the design, implementation, and assessment of Alternative Reading Week, by presenting which documents reflected the role and voice (or lack thereof) of community organizations alongside Residence Services.

### **Data Analysis**

A key objective of this research is to provide a space for the voices of community organizations and their ability to engage with the Alternative Reading Week process and to try to cultivate their recommendations for engaging community organizations in this program. What community organization representatives choose to share and the insight they provided throughout



the survey and individual interviews impacted the lens of which the secondary documents were reviewed and analyzed. In order to ensure as much of the research findings were driven by the research participants as possible, each stage of this research continued to influence and shape the next. This process relied on my ability to be reflexive throughout the research process, from data collection to analysis. As noted in the literature review, historical power dynamics can influence institutional-community partnerships and how institutions engage with community organizations (Hammersley, 2012). Hence, it was crucial that findings from this research arose from the process of engaging community organizations in this study, to prevent a top-down approach of myself (as the institution and researcher), privileging my own interpretations and perspectives over that of the community organizations participating. Grounded theory was utilized throughout all stages of the research process, in the data collection and analysis. A key component of grounded theory is that a researcher develops their theory from the data (Dey, 1999 as cited in Walker & Myrick, 2006). Grounded theory provides the flexibility needed to allow the data to guide not only the analysis process, but the collection of further data as well (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The community organization representatives' responses in the survey influenced the interview questions asked, and the interview data shaped how the secondary data (Appendices A, B, and C) was analyzed. Additionally, a grounded theory approach supported my ability to reflect on my own experiences with Alternative Reading Week and engaging community organizations. Corbin and Strauss (2015), suggest that a desire to "make sense out of [experiences]" is one of the reasons researchers choose to use a grounded theory approach (p.11). In my experience with community organizations and the Alternative Reading Week program, I had questions about how the program structure influenced community organization involvement and in turn, the benefits of both the community organizations and student participants of the program.

My first step for the data analysis process was to review the survey findings. This was done by reading through all of the survey responses and reflecting on remaining questions. Survey responses were printed off and analyzed for similarities and differences, as well as areas where further exploration was needed. Directly on the printed survey results, I underlined responses that were contrary to one another or approached the question differently from one another, circled similar responses, and made notes in the margins on further questions I had based on the data. Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland (2006, as cited in Corbin and Strauss 2015), present a definition of “focusing” which includes identifying potential concepts or areas to examine more closely in the next stage of the research process. The survey data was used to influence future interview questions needed to answer the research question. In the next chapter of my thesis, I will introduce the survey results.

The next stage of the data analysis process was to listen to the audio recordings and review the Zoom audio transcripts to make any corrections and ensure transcripts were verbatim. Secondly, I read over all five transcripts, making notes in the margins on any questions or insights I had while reading. This step is an important phase to explore the data in smaller, digestible pieces, and to question my understanding of what each participant meant in their responses. Corbin and Strauss (2015) refer to this type of coding into smaller, specific parts as “microanalysis” (p.70). Corbin and Strauss (2015) suggest that by being able to identify the many pieces of information on a smaller scale, we can eventually use this information to help us identify overarching concepts and themes. In each of my notes for the individual interviews, I made a chart with four squares: these squares were labeled: Design, Implementation, Assessment, Miscellaneous. When breaking down and identifying the individual concepts of each data-set, I attempted to sort these points into the stages of service-learning programs my research question was structured around. The former

of the categories were used to encompass key concepts that did not speak to any specific stage of the service-learning program process. Alternatively, some specific points were included in multiple categories if they spoke to more than one stage of the service-learning program process. In sorting the data from the interviews into these sections, I made note of any temporal language used by participants to help inform where specific notes should be placed in reference to the service-learning process. For instance, if a participant spoke to things that ideally would occur “before” students arrived at their organization it was placed in the Design category. The importance of time to identify key lower-level concepts is highlighted in Corbin and Strauss’s (2015) approach to analyzing qualitative data. Ultimately, the goal of this stage of note-taking about the interview data collected, was to challenge myself to refrain from assigning any assumptions or meaning to the data that was not explicitly introduced by the participants. This questioning of meaning of statements helps support the process by encouraging researchers to examine data for all possible meanings (Corbin and Strauss, 2015).

My next step was to use a colour-coding system in the memos taken on each individual interview to identify any points from the four key areas (Design, Implementation, Assessment and Miscellaneous) that corresponded to the following :

- Related to existing literature on the topic of the role community organizations played in planning, implementation, or assessment of service-learning programs (Pink).
- Complimented or related to something another participant mentioned (Green).
- Contradicted something another participant mentioned in their interview (Orange).
- Identified something unique or interesting but was not mentioned in other interviews (Purple).

These four categories of colour-coding were influenced by Corbin and Strauss (2015) techniques for coding quantitative data. Specifically, Corbin and Strauss (2015) suggest that analyzing data in relation to the literature during this initial phase of analysis can support an in-depth breakdown of the data prior to making larger inferences of meaning. Identifying the smaller components of each interview data-set that shared common characteristics or on the reverse side, alluded to differences in perspective, helped me establish high-level concepts in the data. Corbin and Strauss (2015) identify this part of the process where we lose specificity in the data for more abstract concepts. As the lower-level concepts create the basis for generating high-level concepts, these concepts remain directly linked to the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). General themes were identified in areas that were highlighted in green and I was able to utilize data highlighted in the other colours as areas to further expand on these themes or generate categories that identified areas of the planning, implementation, and assessment of the Alternative Reading Week program where community organizations could be engaged. Corbin and Strauss (2015) classify this stage of the analysis of qualitative data as “axial coding”. In comparing the different pieces of information from each interview’s data as well as how they may relate to one another, I was able to identify how the specific data contributed and related to the overall category. This process is further elaborated in Walker and Myrick’s (2006) description of axial coding, where “the researcher works to understand categories in relationship to other categories and their subcategories” (p.553) and Scott and Meduagh’s (2017) notion that this coding allows us to “organize data into a more coherent, hierarchically structured categories" (p.1). Hence, these themes identified resulted in higher-level concepts that informed the next step of the data analysis process: relating these themes to the research question.

The last stage of my data analysis process was to review the learning outcomes, schedules, and assessment questions (Appendices A, B, and C) of past Alternative Reading Week programs. Specifically, I looked for any mention in the learning objectives, schedules, or assessment questions that spoke to the role community organizations had in any of these stages. The categories established through the interview data, where community organizations identified potential areas they could be engaged or where they perceived their role in the stages of service-learning programs, inspired the recommendations for Residence Staff to better engage community organizations. This is where the data was applied to the existing processes for the planning, implementation, and assessment of alternative reading week. Walker and Myrick (2006) suggest this process is called “selective coding” and is the last step of data analysis identified by Strauss and Corbin (1994 as cited in Walker and Myrick 2006).

### **Advantages of the Methodology**

Engaging community organization representatives using qualitative research methods, provided the space to hear community organization experiences and perspectives regarding opportunities for engagement in all stages of the Alternative Reading Week program. The iterative and reflexive nature of the data collection and analysis of this research supported the role community organization representatives played in guiding areas of focus and centering their voice throughout the research process. Despite much of the data collection and analysis process was guided by community organization responses, the core stages of the Alternative Reading Week program: design, implementation, and assessment, were used to deduce themes that would lead to tangible strategies for Residence Services staff for future Alternative Reading Weeks. By approaching data analysis from both a ground-up process but within the constraints of the existing structure of Alternative Reading Week, supported the identification of possible ways community

organization perspectives on engagement could be applied. The methodology utilized in this research was intentional to not place undue burden on community organizations during a time of an international public health crisis. Due to the spectrum of understanding each community organization representative had with the Alternative Reading Week program, the semi-structured nature of interviews allowed respondents to share their perspectives on engagement in the program, without relying on an intricate familiarity of all stages of the program. For instance, community organization representatives did not require a prior understanding of all the processes within Alternative Reading Week to share their perspectives on what engagement could look like in the future. Furthermore, no Alternative Reading Week program is exactly the same. Qualitative research methods were utilized to address the uniqueness and contexts of each program, as well as individual community organization representatives' relationships with the program.

Additionally, a key benefit to the research methodology utilized, was the balancing of community organization representative voices within the context of my own experience with Alternative Reading Week. Specifically, the research question explores how Residence Services staff can best engage community organizations in the Alternative Reading Week program. The methodology provided an opportunity for community organizations perspectives to be applied into the context of higher education to identify tangible strategies for Residence Services staff to use when engaging with community partners in Alternative Reading Week. This methodology also required a thorough internal analysis as to how Residence Services staff were currently engaging community partners, through the secondary data documents. This examination of internal processes does not place the sole responsibility on community organization representatives to solve how Residence Services staff should best engage them. Reflection on why and how communities currently are or are not engaged in Alternative Reading Week, informed what steps

Residence Services staff need to make to change how they engage with community organizations to be more aligned with community perspectives on engagement. In their work exploring the possible application of a critical service-learning framework, Latta, Kruger, Payne, Weaver and VanSickle (2018), emphasize the importance of examining one's own experiences and bias, and how this impacts the partnerships we establish with communities in CSL. Specifically, they state:

The path toward social change, redistribution of power, and authentic relationships must start with the practitioner: In what ways are we orientating ourselves toward working toward these practices, allowing ourselves to imagine they are possible, or investigating how our own identities may be under-mining these efforts? (Latta et al., 2018, p. 46).

Memo-writing helped facilitate the reconciliation of what community organization perspectives on engagement and how staff view engagement in the program and opportunities to further integrate community voice. By providing opportunities to examine my own experiences in engaging community organizations in past Alternative Reading Week programs, the research challenged how Residence Staff's perspectives on engagement also influence current processes and practices for working with community organizations.

Although the next chapter of the thesis will highlight these recommendations and core themes identified through the data analysis for engaging community organizations in Alternative Reading Week, it is critical to articulate the limitations of the research study and data analysis before proceeding.

### **Limitations of the Methodology**

The very methodologies of this research process and data analysis that support its contribution to the field of service-learning literature, can also be interpreted to be its biggest threats to academic validity. A key limitation to the data analysis process is my own personal bias

and experiences, influencing the lens of which I interpreted and analyzed the data. For instance, as I have an intimate knowledge of the Alternative Reading Week program and its processes, as well as how we currently engage our partners, I may have unconsciously relied on this bias when interpreting the data. However, the very fact that I hold such a detailed level of knowledge of the Alternative Reading Week program, is what inspired this research in the first place. As Corbin and Strauss (2015) suggest, our experiences can lead us to research questions and gaps that we want to solve. However, Corbin and Strauss (2015) also caution on the potential for researchers to unconsciously influence participants through their emotions or feelings towards what the participant is saying. Although I tried to remain consistent on participant's responses to interview questions, there were moments when participants identified clear, effective ways we could work more collaboratively on the Alternative Reading Week program, where I may have been visibly excited and positively reinforced their comments. On the other hand, the type of data analysis I have chosen for my research, however, does not require a complete absence of bias. In fact, the very process of coding qualitative data using grounded theory, requires the researcher to consider their own understanding of the data in the context of the research question, their experiences and intuition and their ability to empathize with participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

Corbin and Strauss (2015) suggest that some types of research questions can be inspired from personal and professional experiences. With my personal and professional experiences with the Alternative Reading Week program in the past, I found myself questioning how the program could continue to best meet the needs of community organizations and foster positive relationships with the communities in which they engage. There is no one better to ask about how to best engage a community organization in Alternative Reading Week than the community organizations



themselves. The methodology selected for this research was intentionally designed to support centering community voice and experiences in the research findings. This was facilitated by an initial online survey and individual interviews with community organization representatives. Memo taking was utilized to reflect on interview data and to explore concepts identified through community organization representatives' responses to interview questions. A secondary data analysis was conducted to explore community organization perspectives on engagement in the Alternative Reading Week Program alongside the current inclusion of community organizations in the design, implementation, and assessment of the program.

Given the amount of flexibility and opportunity for both research participants and myself to continue to shape the research process through the open-ended nature of the qualitative interviews, there is always the possibility of individual bias to influence research findings. However, this individual bias, inspired from personal and professional experience, is also a valuable tool leveraged throughout this research to interpret data findings. My experience with the Alternative Reading Week program and working with community organizations in the past, provided me with a contextual foundation to better understand the perspectives of the community organizations and the heart of their interview responses. Grounded theory and being reflexive throughout the research process, was crucial for this research to help shape the framing of interview questions in a way that resonated clearly with community organizations and provided space for them to guide areas in which to focus. The secondary data analysis encouraged a thorough internal review as to how core elements of the Alternative Reading Week program could best converge with key concepts from community organizations on engaging them in the entire Alternative Reading Week process. The next chapter will breakdown these key concepts from community

organizations in their participation in the Alternative Reading Week program and explore possibilities for future engagement.

## **Chapter Four: Research Findings**

Once again, the primary research question is: “How can University of Alberta Residence Services staff best engage community organizations in the design, implementation, and assessment of the Alternative Reading Week program?”. Data collected in this research study identified tangible areas for further engagement of community organizations, particularly in the planning and assessment stages of the Alternative Reading Week program. All data was analyzed alongside secondary data (Appendices A, B and C) to develop a list of recommendations for Residence Services staff to utilize when engaging with community organizations in the future (See Chapter 5: Discussion). Every community organization representative interviewed identified opportunities where residence staff could further engage them throughout the Alternative Reading Week program, however the ways in which each organization preferred to be engaged was unique to their organizational needs, capacity, and internal operations. The existing and future development of the relationship between the community organization and Residence Services staff became key to informing what this engagement could look like.

This chapter will analyze key information from the initial survey sent to all research participants (N=5) and highlight how responses to this survey were utilized to refine interview questions for each community organization. Key concepts from the semi-structured interviews (N=5) and memos taken during the data analysis process are introduced and organized into the themes outlined in the research question. Communication between Residence Services and community organizations is also discussed, as this area became a clear point of discussion with each community organization. The findings from an analysis of secondary data through the lens of the key concepts and theory developed from the interviews with community organizations is

then outlined and leads to possible recommendations for future engagement of community organizations in the Alternative Reading Week program and will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Key Research Findings**

### **Survey Findings**

The survey results illuminated many perspectives community organizations held regarding their involvement in the Alternative Reading Week program and influenced individual interview questions to be more targeted in order to address the research question. Four community organizations completed the survey (N=4). The survey responses alluded to complex and multifaceted goals the community organizations hoped to achieve through their participation in the program. Specifically, when asked what their primary goals were for hosting a service placement or learning opportunity during Alternative Reading Week, some of the respondents indicated shorter term goals such as immediate help with a specific task, to longer term goals such as raising support for their organization. Similarly, some of the goals identified were written in regards to benefits the community organization hoped to achieve through their participation, whereas other respondents identified goals specific to the student participants of Alternative Reading Week. Community organization representatives who approached the question as to the benefits for student participants rather than for their organization, presented questions as to how community organization representatives viewed the partnership with Residence Services in the Alternative Reading Week program. By identifying core outcomes their organization had for student participants of Alternative Reading Week, community organization representatives presented an awareness of the impact their organization and the student participants had on one another. The difference of interpretation to the intentions behind a community organization's engagement with the program, led to the generation of individual interview questions that

specifically dove into community organization's goals for their own organization versus goals the organization may have for student participants.

Additional key findings in the survey included respondents describing their role in the Alternative Reading Week program relative to what student participants would learn from the experience and engaging with their organization. This finding influenced interview questions which were designed to further distinguish what community organizations would consider the role of the institution and the role of their organization in regards to these service placements or learning opportunities. Being able to identify community organization representatives' perspectives of the responsibilities of their organization compared to Residence Staff, highlighted areas in which community organizations already felt engaged in Alternative Reading Week.

The survey also shed light into areas of further exploration regarding community organizations' involvement in the design of Alternative Reading Week. Particularly, community organization representatives spoke to what valuable engagement in the planning stage would look like for their organization. Some community organization representatives indicated questions or topics for discussion that they felt should be included in the planning phase, whereas other respondents stressed a need for low-maintenance planning that could be done quickly with limited community organization resources. The differences in how community organizations approached the question inquiring about their ideal involvement in the planning process of Alternative Reading Week, influenced specific interview questions which broke down areas of communication, expectation setting, and goal creation further.

Community partner responses to the survey question "What is your ideal level of involvement in the assessment of a service placement or learning opportunity in the Alternative Reading Week program" were unclear and did not identify tangible strategies to engage them in

this stage of the program. Some community organizations left this question unanswered, another indicated they would like to be involved but did not identify what this could look like, and other community organizations used this space to highlight additional feedback unrelated to the question. The unclear responses to this question led to the creation of an interview question that better described the current assessment process and asked for specific strategies or areas of engagement in which community organizations may be interested.

Overall, the survey data was useful in helping shape the interview questions and identifying key perspectives of community organizations that required further investigation.

### **Interview Findings**

Semi-structured interviews with five community organizations (N=5) were conducted following the survey. Through the analysis of the interview data and memos generated as part of the analysis process, a theory regarding how individual relationships between each community organization and Residence Services staff influence the engagement of community organizations was developed. Utilizing this lens of relationships shaping community organization engagement, five core themes emerged: community organizations and the design of Alternative Reading Week, the implementation of Alternative Reading Week, the assessment of Alternative Reading Week, and Residence Services staff communication with community organizations.

### ***Interview Memos***

Comparing the five interviews with one another presented a difference in familiarity with the Alternative Reading Week program between each community organization representative. For instance, while some organization representatives referred back to their past experience with the Alternative Reading Week program to help contextualize their responses, others spoke hypothetically of their ideal engagement by Residence Services staff, based on their previous

experiences with other groups or similar programs. Individual experiences of each community organization representative influenced the way in which they approached the interview questions. A core theme from the post-interview memos connected the relationship between Residence Services staff and the community organization with opportunities for future engagement. The memos following each interview highlight an openness from each organization to be engaged in various areas of the Alternative Reading Week program or future initiatives, however this engagement needed to be done in a way that was appropriate for each individual organization and their representative. Specifically, in order to understand a community organization representative's response to interview questions, the context of the organization's relationship with Residence Services and residence staff needed to be evaluated. Community organizations expressed their unique contexts, familiarity with the program, and preferences when it came to ways they would like to be engaged in Alternative Reading Week, and articulated an overall approach to engagement from the perspective of a partnership rather than a transactional experience. For instance, community organizations spoke about engagement in Alternative Reading Week beyond single points of consultation, describing additional places where communication could occur between their organization and residence staff. Interview notes highlighted a need for Residence Services staff to create space as part of each individual partnership, to be receptive to community organization feedback and to learn more about individual organizational capacity, needs, and preferences when it comes to engagement. Memos identified that there was some additional information community organizations desired for Residence Services staff to share with them. Hence, community organizations did not only speak about engagement in regards to how Residence Staff could solicit their feedback and ideas for Alternative Reading Week, but also opportunities for community partners to learn more about Residence Services perspectives.

Memos written immediately after each individual interview were analyzed alongside memos taken when reviewing interview data, as outlined in the previous chapter. These memos introduced core concepts regarding the partnership and engagement of community organizations in the design, implementation, and assessment of the Alternative Reading Week program.

### ***Community Organizations and the Design of Alternative Reading Week***

Interview findings identified three core concepts related to community organization engagement in the design and planning stage of the Alternative Reading Week program. Community organization representatives shared an emphasis on transparent discussion related to goals of the program and how a dialogue regarding Residence Services program goals and their own organizational goals would benefit the students and ensure the program aligns with their organization's. Further, organizations shared the importance of engagement at this stage of the program, to not only support their involvement in the program through a service placement or educational workshop, but to improve the experience of student participants.

The three sub themes identified in the area of community organizations and the design of the Alternative Reading Week program include:

1. Community organizations had clear goals and objectives for participating in the Alternative Reading Week program.
2. Community organizations emphasized the need for effective engagement and communication in the initial planning phase of Alternative Reading Week, to ask questions, clarify information, and set expectations.
3. Community organizations felt that more education or proactive learning could be done with student participants prior to a service placement or educational workshop hosted by the community organization.



**Community organizations had clear goals and objectives for participating in the Alternative Reading Week program.** The interviews highlighted that community organizations naturally developed reciprocal goals when exploring their intentions behind participating in Alternative Reading Week. Specifically, all five organizations had goals associated with both what their organization would gain through participation in the program, but also how students would benefit from participating.

A common goal identified by community organizations for student participants in the Alternative Reading Week was contributing to some sense of student learning. “Our goal is always one: that you have a good time and you go out with more knowledge than you walked in the door [with]” (Organization 4). Community organization representatives suggested that student learning could look differently, depending on what Alternative Reading Week participants wanted to get out of the program and what knowledge and life experiences they bring with them. “The goal is for the students, I mean it kind of depends on what the students want. ... If you’ve lived a really, really sheltered life; if you haven’t had to deal with instable [*sic*] housing in your life or a mental illness, it’s sometimes its [*sic*] just nice to see how other people live and get more perspective on your own life through that” (Organization 7). This idea of organizations having a role in students learning about the community and social issues was articulated in other interviews. “For most of that are not exposed to a some social issues, I think it’s definitely of help for them like can [*sic*] understand what’s going on around them” (Organization 6). One organization spoke to how this education piece was a component of the advocacy their organization took on and that it included “reducing stigma, like making sure that people are more informed about the issues that surround poverty and homelessness in our city” (Organization 5). Another organization emphasized their hope that students would consider their experience engaging with the organization as

“meaningful”, and elaborated, “I think everyone’s different in what a meaningful volunteer experience [is], you know? We try to meet expectations of that when they come in, but at the end of the day, the only one that knows that they get a meaningful volunteer experience is going to be you” (Organization 1).

Organizations drew a link to how student learning was connected to benefits for their organization. Some organizations indicated short term goals for participating in the program, such as reducing staff workload or assisting with a specific task such as serving meals or cleaning spaces in the organization. This was important to the organizations because “at the end of the day, like, we [the organization] rely heavily [on] our volunteers” (Organization 1). However, one challenge with shorter term goals was organizations feeling the need to be flexible, as the needs of their organization for specific projects would sometimes change due to the unpredictable nature of their organizations. For instance, some interviewees discussed specifically how priorities of the organization may change depending on the day, recognizing, “we don’t have control over certain things, you know? ...A lot of what we do is moment by moment flexibility” (Organization 4). Other organization representatives echoed that “every day is different” (Organization 1) because “things are unpredictable a lot in our sector” (Organization 5).

Another area that organizations spoke to in regards to student learning was the hope that student participants would leave the Alternative Reading Week program with a better understanding of their organization, leading to a desire for students to engage with the organization in the future. One organization stated, “I think we do a really good job to, like, educate, give them an experience, you know? To not only learn about our place but about the community in general” (Organization 1). The organization continued to say that they hope that student participants leave their placement with the organization, “wanting to maybe do more for the agency down the road,

in whatever capacity that looks like and to be top of mind” (Organization 1). This notion of how student participants of Alternative Reading Week could become future donors, volunteers, or potentially even staff for organizations was echoed in multiple interviews. For instance, one community representative said, “It’s always great if we educate someone and they’re engaged, and they want to make a donation, either as a volunteer with their time or, like, with their money, financially. And then also, attracting, like, students, is really important, because that’s a really good prospective group of staff for us as well” (Organization 5). By connecting student learning to benefits for their own community organizations, community representatives presented goals that were truly reciprocal in nature. Community organizations understood that students who learned more about social issues and their organization could lead to additional community support and awareness. For instance, one organization emphasized, “so being good ambassadors, even if you never come back again, that you’re able to speak about us in the wider community with a little bit more knowledge is amazing” (Organization 4). This concept was also echoed by Organization 1, “I always say post-secondary students are very interesting because you’re going into the workplace. You’re going to be the new donors of tomorrow. Yeah, so if you go into, say, start up a business, and you are choosing an agency to support, hopefully we are top of mind.”

All of the community organization representatives also spoke to how their goals for the Alternative Reading Week program were assessed internally by others within their organization. These community organization representatives described a process in which the organization staff work collectively to determine what would be an appropriate way to engage the student participants, in terms of projects that align with their organization’s mission, values, and needs. Specifically, one organization representative identified that their team conducts a “cost-benefit” analysis when determining what programs to engage with (Organization 5) This community

organization representative discussed needing to review whether these goals can justify the amount of staff capacity and resources required to support their involvement in this program.

“How much is it worth it for us to bring this group of people into our space to educate them versus what kind of pressure does it put on our staff? And, like, how does it make our clients feel? And those are considerations that we’re always kind of weighing dependent on the atmosphere or what’s going on within our community or the greater, you know, social environment” (Organization 5).

Another community organization representative specified that they asked their team, “Is this going to be practical for you? ... I don’t want to, like, bring them [the students] out if it feels like we’re just, like, making work” (Organization 7).

Although each organization was intentional with their own goals for participating in the Alternative Reading Week program, how they chose to develop and engage on these goals with Residence Staff looked different for each organization, as discussed in the next key finding.

**Community organization representatives emphasized the need for effective engagement and communication in the initial planning phase of Alternative Reading Week, to ask questions, clarify information, and set expectations.** All community organization representatives interviewed identified that having opportunities to discuss their involvement prior to a service placement or educational workshop in Alternative Reading Week is important for the success of the program. However, the format of this initial discussion looked different for each community organization representative. For example, one of the organization representatives was adamant that attending the organization in-person was the most effective form of communication, rather than email or telephone (Organization 7). Other organization representatives described their preferred engagement methods as telephone calls, email correspondence, virtual meetings, or a combination

of multiple forms of communication. One community organization representative had their own internal system already created to engage with groups of participants that wanted to collaborate on service placements, through an online form (Organization 4). Similarly, community organization representatives discussed differing capacities and resources their group had to invest in these planning stages. For example, one organization representative emphasized wanting efficient communication to ensure the organization's staff were not utilizing too much time and resources into their participation in Alternative Reading Week (Organization 7). Other organization representatives highlighted the benefit of exploratory planning and brainstorming between Residence Staff and their organization in developing a service project (Organization 1, Organization 5). One community organization representative even stated that in an ideal situation they would engage in "collaborative planning" with Residence Services staff (Organization 5). Similarly, organization representatives had slightly differing timelines as to when initial conversations should take place. The majority of organization representatives felt as though it would never be too early to begin conversations on their involvement in Alternative Reading Week, while others indicated a need for shorter timelines that allowed for flexibility due to the unpredictability that impacted their organization's work.

Despite differences in preferred methods of communication, each community organization representative highlighted the importance of clarifying key questions and expectations and having Residence Staff share more context into the program, prior to their involvement in Alternative Reading Week. Particularly, every representative discussed the importance of any questions being raised to the community organization in the planning process and to clarify what Residence Staff expected from the community organization during these initial conversations. Community organizations also identified that these planning discussions could provide a space for them to

confirm what administrative tasks Residence Services staff would need to take on prior to the service placement or educational workshop, such as confirming logistics, sharing key policies, collecting paperwork, or learning materials. One community organization representative indicated how crucial it was for the Residence Services staff to be open to feedback during these planning conversations and to directly acknowledge to the community organization that it was appropriate for them to offer feedback during this stage (Organization 5). This community representative further emphasized the importance of these early conversations by reinforcing that “sometimes we have people with the best of intentions, but the language they used, or like, some of the ideas that they have, are not really in alignment with how we work” (Organization 5).

All of the community organization representatives interviewed identified how being made aware of the goals Residence Services staff had for the Alternative Reading Week program, would potentially strengthen their engagement in the program by allowing them to tailor their involvement depending on the goals, student skills, or what student participants hoped to learn. Specifically, one of these community organization representatives described how conversations about goals can provide opportunities to “use their talents, their passions, their skills, to volunteer in a different way that maybe we don’t think of” (Organization 1). This community organization representative pointed out how through conversations about goals for engaging with their organization, a service project could be developed that neither the Residence Staff, nor the community organization had done before (Organization 1). Additionally, some of the community organization representatives spoke that knowing what students and Residence Services staff hoped to learn from the organization, could help ensure these goals were met. In fact one organization representative clarified, “we love people who want to do anything” but they also wanted participants to vocalize when there was something specific they wanted to learn or see at the

organization (Organization 4). Another community organization representative stated that it was important for their organization to be informed by the Alternative Reading Week program goals in order for their organization to identify if they are the most appropriate resource (Organization 6). For instance, if a goal is learning about Indigenous history in Canada, this organization representative identified that there would be more appropriate experts on this topic at other organizations (Organization 6).

In addition to being more aware of the goals Residence Services had in mind for student participants, organizations indicated that having additional information about the capacity and experiences of student participants could help support their own organizational planning. In fact, Organization 7 clarified that one of their biggest challenges with the program was, “never knowing the capacity of people that come to serve you in a service learning context.” They continued that, “Sometimes you get people who have a lot of skills for what you need help with in terms of service learning. And then sometimes, you have people who are going to need a huge amount of support in that service-learning” (Organization 7). Similarly, another organization confirmed knowing the education and background of participants could help the organization plan better, particularly knowing if participants were coming to workshops with “a really thorough background knowledge” on the topic (Organization 6).

Overall, community organization representatives spoke to this initial planning stage of Alternative Reading Week as being an important starting place for a successful program, however, each community organization indicated specific questions, timelines, and methods of communication for having these initial conversations, which was unique to their organization.

**Community organizations felt that more education or proactive learning could be done with student participants prior to arriving at a service placement or educational workshop hosted**

**by the community organization.** A clear theme that arose in every interview was the need for student participants to be appropriately prepared and educated prior to engaging with the community organization. Each interview outlined key ways Residence Services staff could best prepare their student participants, and a common thread was that this preparation was crucial to the students' learning. Specifically, each organization representative spoke about student participants needing some context or foundational knowledge about the organization or their area of focus, in order to ensure they were prepared for the service placement or educational workshop. Some community organization representatives identified the benefits of student participants reviewing the information on their organization's websites (Organization 1, Organization 4, Organization 7). Particularly, reviewing the website was explained as a key way to help students prepare for the environment of the community organization, to ensure that students "know what they are coming into and they're not, like, shocked" (Organization 7). This need for student participants to be prepared for the context of the community organization and their clients, was emphasized by each community organization representative who hosted a service placement in Alternative Reading Week. Particularly, these representatives spoke to the responsibility Residence Services staff had in preparing students prior to physically coming into the community organization's space. For example, one organization described, "I feel that, you know, like groups whenever [*sic*] come in here and their intention is to help, right? In whatever capacity that is. I feel like a lot of people sometimes come in and they're unaware of the environment that they're placed in, which I think is sometimes a barrier" (Organization 1). This organization clarified that this barrier was caused by students being shocked or uncomfortable by the environment of the organization if they did not have appropriate prior context. Another organization indicated that without receiving information prior to a service placement, individuals can sometimes be



overwhelmed by the scale of their organization, particularly “how big we are and how busy we can be” (Organization 4).

All of the community organizations indicated there was some learning students should partake in prior to engaging with the community organizations. Specifically, one organization representative said, “it is always great to have a few little pieces of knowledge ahead of time before you’re coming into that space, so that you can be culturally relevant and respectful” (Organization 7). This community representative continued with explaining why this proactive education was important not only for the students, but to protect the community organization’s members as well. For instance, they talked about students being aware of why it was important to use gender neutral terminology in their organization, clarifying, “It hasn’t really been an issue for us in with your students directly, but I could see one day just having a well intentioned student that didn’t know some of that nuance coming into that space and not being familiar with that” (Organization 7). An organization who hosted a past educational workshop for Alternative Reading Week, indicated that participants should have a general understanding of the workshop topic, at least in “layman’s terms” or at the “lowest level” to “make it easier for everybody to learn” and that everyone is “on the same page” (Organization 6).

Hence, each community organization representative identified how the proactive learning of student participants was a crucial aspect of Alternative Reading Week, to foster a positive interaction between students and the community organization, as well as to support the student experience. All community organization representatives spoke about the responsibility of Residence Services staff in appropriately preparing student participants, however a few of the organization representatives also identified how they could further compliment this preparation of participants through on-site orientations, tours of their facilities, or opportunities to ask questions

of the organization. Although each community organization representative had specific topics or competencies they would like student participants of Alternative Reading Week to have background knowledge in before engaging with them, Residence Services staff exploring with the community organization what adequate preparation of students would entail was highlighted as a common key step in the planning process for community organizations.

### ***Community Organizations and the Implementation of Alternative Reading Week***

The core theme that developed from interviews with all the community organization representatives, was that community organizations led the service placement or educational workshop they were hosting in Alternative Reading Week. Community organization representatives rarely spoke about the role of Residence Services staff in a service placement or educational workshop. One organization representative summarized it in this way, “once they are in Organization 4, they become the responsibility of Organization 4” (Organization 4). Some of the community organization representatives interviewed stated that they begin their involvement in the program by providing students with an orientation to their organization, while another community organization representative described providing students with key information and instruction upon their arrival at the organization. However, ultimately community organization representatives saw themselves as the primary leaders during the service placements and educational workshops. Organization 5 described their role by saying, “it’s our job to create an agenda for the day of, like, how that event will run, and offer the guidelines and set expectations of behaviour in our space, or what we are expecting out of you guys and what’s what [sic] expectations you can have of us” (Organization 5). In describing their role of hosting an educational workshop, Organization 6 outlined that they were responsible for sharing content that was “accessible” and facilitating the presentation in a way that “makes learning really easy”.

Comparatively, the role that community organizations described Residence Services staff taking during a service placement or educational workshop was administrative or supportive in nature, if mentioned at all. For instance, organization representatives talked about the importance of Residence Services staff being present during a service placement to help support the student participants who may be triggered, have behavioral issues, or to help triage lower level questions. One organization elaborated that it would be helpful for Residence Services staff to be “present just to see how the students are in the space” (Organization 7). Another organization described Residence Services staff as taking on the “administrative or HR things” when it came to the service placement in the program (Organization 5). Although most community organization representatives identified value in having Residence Services staff present during the service placement or educational workshop, this stage of Alternative Reading Week highlighted where community organizations engaged in leading the facilitation of these activities.

### ***Community Organizations and the Assessment of Alternative Reading Week***

The interviews highlighted two key areas of the assessment of Alternative Reading Week, in which community organization representatives felt they could be more engaged. These areas included a debriefing session or feedback opportunity between Residence Services staff and the community organization, as well as the community organization representative providing insight and questions into the Alternative Reading Week assessment for student participants.

**Community organizations felt there was opportunity to debrief with Residence Services staff following a service placement or educational workshop in Alternative Reading Week.** Every community organization representative suggested that some type of check-in following the conclusion of the Alternative Reading Week program would be beneficial. Organizations felt that hearing feedback from Residence Services staff and students would provide them with valuable

information to improve their volunteer experiences or presentations to other groups as well as for future Alternative Reading Weeks. Organization 1 identified that they would like to know, “about your experience and the good and the bad” and what students “learned from the experience” because “getting feedback from volunteers is always good for us [the organization] because it helps benefit the program”. Getting feedback allows community organizations to respond to the experience of participants, and “adjust and make sure that they cover” anything that was missed “in the future” (Organization 4). This theme of community organizations utilizing feedback was repeated in Organization 6’s response that they want to know “what we can do better” and to know that their “awareness has been passed on to, like, the people learning”. Ultimately, there were opportunities for community organizations to assess their own goals through feedback conversations. For instance, one organization highlighted, “Any agencies that have advocacy work or education on their priority list, like understanding how that’s being received is really important” (Organization 5).

Despite agreeing on the importance of having a space to debrief and engage in feedback following Alternative Reading Week, each community organization representative had different methods or preferences as to how this feedback could be conducted. For instance, some organizations recognized and emphasized the role of Residence Services staff in soliciting this feedback process. One organization said that they would share their experience with Alternative Reading Week, but that it would “be on the group to contact us [the organization] and set up that follow-up” (Organization 1). Another community organization representative emphasized that due to how many groups and individuals they connect with, it is helpful for Residence Services staff to indicate that there would be space for the community organizations’ feedback prior to the

completion of the service placement, because “we only really notice when things are exceptionally good... or when something wrong happens, but most people fall in the middle” (Organization 4).

Further, community organization representatives highlighted different capacities for engaging in feedback. Some organization representatives indicated that simple email or phone correspondence following Alternative Reading Week would be most efficient in how this feedback could be facilitated. For example, one organization stated that although “that knowledge is really, really important” they wanted this process to be as efficient and simple as possible (Organization 7). Another community organization representative described, “it could be as simple as an email or quick phone call, a 5-10 minute [*sic*], a few days after you book an event, to kind of follow-up because that way it is still fresh” (Organization 1). Conversely, one community organization representative indicated that they would be interested in sharing their internal processes of a debrief with student participants and that it would be “something that we would make space for” in their involvement with the program (Organization 5). All organization representatives were open to providing their feedback to Residence Services staff regarding their involvement in the program and the student participants, and to have the opportunity to receive feedback from Residence Services staff on the experience. This feedback conversation was deemed important for all community organization representatives, with one organization indicating that it was important for the partnership, stating, “It is a two-way street. It seems obvious to do that” (Organization 4).

**Community organization representatives felt there was opportunity to contribute to the participant assessment questions in the Alternative Reading Week program.** Every community organization representative expressed an interest in engaging in helping create, provide feedback, and receive data on participant assessment questions following the Alternative Reading Week program. One community organization even spoke to how they could utilize their existing

volunteer survey questions to be asked as a part of Alternative Reading Week, to get information that would be helpful to their work (Organization 1). Some organizations could describe example questions they would be eager to ask student participants in alternative reading week that would be valuable for them, such as, if students felt they had developed skills for working with the specific community (Organization 7). Another organization representative explored example questions to assess their organization's goals for participating in the program, from "how interested people are in, like, learning more" or engaging with the organization in the future, to assessing broader goals of reducing stigma and educating the community about social issues (Organization 5). Similar to how each organization had a different vision for how they could debrief the experience following Alternative Reading Week, each organization was interested in differing levels of involvement in contributing to the assessment survey issued to student participants. Some organizations were eager to jointly collaborate on developing assessment questions, with one organization simply stating, "we'd be interested in helping create questions for sure" (Organization 5). Other community organization representatives simply wanted an opportunity to provide feedback on questions Residence Services staff created and to have access to assessment data relevant to their organization. Overall, each community organization representative felt that the data shared following the assessment would be valuable to improve their own programs and services.

### **Residence Services Staff and Communication with Community Organizations**

The importance of communication between Residence Staff, student participants, and community organizations, was a key topic of each interview. All community organization representatives interviewed suggested that the greatest barrier in engaging in the Alternative Reading Week program was some concern related to communication. As presented in the first

three interview findings, communication in the planning stages of the program was particularly important to community organization representatives, to prepare student participants for the service placement or educational workshop.

The majority of the community organization representatives spoke to communication outside of the Alternative Reading Week program, such as on additional programs they could foresee the two groups collaborating on or to keep one another updated with any organizational changes. Further, organizations identified that a lack of communication between Alternative Reading Week programs was a barrier, with Organization 1 stating, “once the opportunity is over, then you don’t hear back”. The benefit of ongoing communication between Residence Services staff and community organizations outside of Alternative Reading Week was that it could “grow the partnership” by ensuring the organization was “in the loop” regarding future opportunities to connect (Organization 6). Organization 5 elaborated that investing in regular communication could foster a stronger relationship between the organization and Residence Services staff, by “having that relationship between our organizations and departments just more consistent, so if something comes up or you have a great idea, it doesn’t seem awkward to send a message or to give a phone call”. Providing space for more regular communication, would make partners feel more comfortable engaging in frequent communication, because there would be “a channel that was just constantly flowing” (Organization 5).

The ways in which community organization representatives felt communication could be improved was unique to each organization, as each interview focused on different barriers related to communication. However, knowing how to best communicate with an organization could positively benefit not only the Alternative Reading Week program, but the relationship between Residence Services staff and the community organization. One organization emphasized that it

would be more effective for staff to physically come into the organization's space for a conversation about Alternative Reading Week, instead of email (Organization 7). This organization emphasized that ideally Residence Services staff should "try to keep people involved that have a historical institutional knowledge" of the program and how their organization prefers to be communicated with (Organization 7). Contrastingly, another community representative highlighted how email was the preferred method of communication for their organization, as they could easily share this information with their team members (Organization 5). Some community representatives agreed that having designated Residence Services staff, who were able to build a relationship with community organizations, would benefit communication. Specifically, Organization 1 expressed the preference of having one point of contact within Residence Services to communicate with and Organization 5 highlighted how having one person "they could build a relationship with" would lead to a greater understanding of their organization. Similar to many of the above research findings, communication barriers and specific preferences were unique to each individual organization's context and capacity, however effective communication was identified as being an important part of the partnership for all community organizations.

### **Secondary Data Findings**

An analysis of the secondary data identified areas where community organizations were currently excluded or left unreferenced. Specifically, the learning outcomes for Alternative Reading Week were not representative of the reciprocal nature that the service-learning program intended to provide. Only the most recent learning objectives (Appendix A.5) connected student learning with a community organization. Further, the learning outcomes did not include a reference to the goals community organizations held for participants. In the secondary documents analyzed, there was no reference to the benefits or goals for the community organization in participating in



the program. The goals outlined for the past three years of Alternative Reading Week were focused solely on the student participants' learnings and did not connect with the benefits for community organizations in participating in the program. Similarly, over the past three years, only one assessment survey specifically referenced any of the community organizations. The most recent Alternative Reading Week survey did provide space for students to indicate whether they felt a specific community organization should be included in future programs and whether they found their involvement engaging. These questions did not speak to the areas of assessment in which community organization representatives highlighted in the interviews as being valuable for improving their programs. The current assessment questions do not refer to the goals community organizations had for the learning of student participants and were formatted into quantitative questions that would not identify areas for community organizations to improve. The vast majority of assessment questions were focused on broad concepts such as "poverty" or "homelessness" and the role students understood for themselves in tackling these social issues. However, these concepts were not tied to a specific community organization's involvement in the program or their organization's roles in engaging with these social issues. Further, while the assessment for these programs did inquire about student participants' interest in pursuing additional volunteer opportunities, it did not identify how or which organizations students may choose to engage with in the future. In reviewing previous schedules, the only space in which community organizations are specifically referenced is with regards to the service placement or educational workshop they hosted. In the materials shared with student participants of the Alternative Reading Week program, it was not always clearly identified whether Residence Services staff or a community organization was facilitating a workshop. Based on the research findings that community organizations were interested in engaging in aspects of both the planning and assessment of the program, the full scope

and role community organizations have in supporting the Alternative Reading Week program, could better be reflected in these documents. Hence, secondary data documents presented where community organization voice was not currently incorporated into the design, implementation, and assessment of Alternative Reading Week.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the research findings identified key areas where community partners could be or already are engaged in the planning, implementation, and assessment of the Alternative Reading Week program. Specifically, Residence Services staff could engage these partners on their program goals, preparation, and expectations for these programs, the role of one another during the program, as well as the opportunity to debrief and assess student feedback and learning following the program. A key finding from this research was that each community organization presented differing methods and preferences on how Residence Services staff could engage their organization throughout all stages of the program. How a community organization wanted to be engaged at each stage of the program was influenced by their organization's capacity, representatives' individual preferences, and the organization's internal systems. All community organization representatives interviewed identified that the most areas and opportunities for engagement took place prior to the Alternative Reading Week program and that this engagement was key for a successful program and experience for all. In reviewing the secondary data, key findings identified areas where Residence Staff are currently not engaging community organizations and where they could clearly indicate the community organization's role and involvement in the program to better represent the partnership between the community and institution. Recommendations based on the above research findings were created to summarize

potential areas for engagement community organizations felt Residence Services staff could utilize in the Alternative Reading Week program and will be discussed in the final chapter.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions**

The findings identified in the previous chapter can be utilized to help improve engagement of community organizations in the Alternative Reading Week program by identifying potential areas for further collaboration. This last chapter will dive deeper into the findings and the literature in developing recommendations for the future of Alternative Reading Week by breaking down each recommendation and elaborating on potential opportunities and areas of consideration when engaging with community organizations in the future. The findings suggest the best way to learn how a community organization prefers to be engaged is to create space throughout the partnership to ask questions and learn from the organization. In doing so, Residence Services staff can invest in their relationships with individual community organizations, using engagement as a tool to continuously strengthen partnerships and explore opportunities for collaboration throughout the program. Engagement with community organizations in Alternative Reading Week cannot simply be a templated checklist of areas in which Residence Service staff incorporate each community's voice for collaboration. Instead, engagement with community organizations on Alternative Reading Week needs to occur in the context of the ongoing relationship between the two partners; where more opportunities to further align community and institution perspectives present themselves as the community and Residence Services staff's understanding of one another grows. There is no one size fits all for community engagement in service-learning. Each organization requires the investment of Residence Services staffs' time and openness to feedback to establish a real reciprocal partnership. The recommendations, which were created through analyzing the research findings, integrating the literature, and intended for Residence Services staff to utilize when engaging with community organizations in the Alternative Reading Week program, align with core themes in existing literature regarding community organizations and service-learning

programming. After exploring the key recommendations, this chapter will identify potential areas of future research. Study limitations and ethical considerations for this research study then lead into a summary of the conclusion and discussion to end this chapter.

### **Discussion**

The literature review, the findings from the interviews, as well as secondary data analysis, supported an exploration of future considerations for further incorporating community organization perspectives in Alternative Reading Week and fostering positive relationships between Residence Services and communities.

### **Recommendations for Residence Services Staff When Engaging With Community Organizations in Alternative Reading Week**

Using the research findings, the following recommendations are generated to support how Residence Services staff can best engage with community organizations in the Alternative Reading Week program:

1. Start a dialogue with community organizations to best understand how they would like to be engaged in the Alternative Reading Week program.
2. Ensure each partners' goals are shared between Residence Services staff, student participants, and the community organizations.
3. Identify and discuss with community organization representatives the appropriate preparation needed for student participants prior to attending a community organization's service placement or educational workshop.
4. Implement different mechanisms for debriefing the Alternative Reading Week program that meet the community organizations' needs and preferences.
5. Create space to engage the community organizations in the assessment of student participant feedback and learning.

6. Invest in improving communication with community partners.

*Start a dialogue with community organizations to best understand how they would like to be engaged in the Alternative Reading Week program.*

Although the research findings identified key areas where community organizations saw opportunities to be more engaged, the ideal methods used to engage each community organization was unique to their individual organization. The only way in which Residence Services staff could know how to best engage a community organization, is to explore the organization's preferences on a case by case basis. As the context of each community organization, in regards to staffing, mission, and internal systems, is different from one another, how they may choose to engage with Residence Services staff is different for each organization as well. Two authors, from the service-learning literature, echo the importance of communication during the planning stage of a service-learning program (Hacker, 2013; Cameron, 2010). Through the interviews, it became clear that organizations held varying levels of capacity to dedicate to the Alternative Reading Week program. In the past, the Alternative Reading Week program would engage different community organizations each semester, depending on schedules and organizational capacity to participate in the program. Prioritizing ongoing partnerships with community organizations by engaging with the same partners each year, may support Residence Services staff's learning and capacity for accommodating how to best engage each community partner. Focusing on ongoing partnerships with a select few organizations may also lead to additional benefits. For instance, the existing literature suggests community organizations may be more willing to invest time and resources into programs that are ongoing (Tryon & Stoecker, 2008). Hence, community organizations may be more inclined to get more involved in Alternative Reading Week, if they had assurance that their organization would be regularly involved in the program.

Further, as each community organization and their representative may have differing levels of familiarity with Alternative Reading Week, some organizations may be more or less comfortable identifying all the components that encompass the program. It is the responsibility of the staff behind the Alternative Reading Week program to investigate with each community organization where the organization sees opportunities for collaboration in the partnership and to regularly reassess if the community's perspective on where and how they would prefer to be engaged changes over time.

***Ensure each partners' goals are shared between Residence Services staff, student participants, and the community organizations.***

The intended purpose of the Alternative Reading Week program is similar to all service-learning programs, in that the program should be mutually beneficial to the institution as well as the community organization. However, the current Alternative Reading Week program learning outcomes do not reflect this value. Although program staff may be aware of the intention of the Alternative Reading Week to be a reciprocal program, this concept might not be as clear to student participants. By directly presenting the goals each partner has invested in the program, Residence Services staff might take steps in reaffirming the relationship between Residence Services and the community organizations.

Residence Services staff may consider sharing their intended goals outright with community organizations as well as clearly reflecting community organizations' goals back to student participants. The importance of sharing goals that both the community organizations and the Residence Services staff have is reflected in existing literature on CSL (Kezar & Rhoads, 2001, Yancey, 2016). For example, Kezar and Rhoads' (2001) research emphasizes how engaging community organizations in developing goals can lead to service-learning programs that best meet

the community's needs. Community organization representatives spoke in their interviews about the importance of being introduced to residence goals for the program, to ensure these objectives align with their organization's mission and capacity. Being made aware of the goals the institution had for the program would also allow community partners to potentially better tailor their role in the service placement or workshop to better align with these objectives. As Alternative Reading Week is not tied to a specific curricular course, there may be opportunities for Residence Services and community organizations to further collaborate on the creating program goals. Existing literature outlines the tensions in curricular CSL programs between campus and community partners, as institutions try to balance engaging the community and institutional pressures for CSL courses to maintain academic legitimacy (Butin, 2006; Taylor & Kahlk, 2017). In this regard, CSL programs outside of academic courses may have additional flexibility to develop more collaborative goals between the institution and community partners, which will better prioritize reciprocity in program objectives.

***Identify and discuss with community organizations the appropriate preparation needed for student participants prior to attending a community organization's service placement or educational workshop.***

Each community organization representative had specific information they believed would be beneficial for student participants to have access to ahead of the service placement or educational workshop in order to gain more from the experience and be more prepared. As each community organization outlined different key information and mechanisms for engaging in this preparation, Residence Services staff might engage the community organization in a discussion around how they can best prepare students for their community organization's experience and how the community organization prefers to be involved in this preparation process. Some of the



community organization interviews identified a concern for how unprepared students or staff from Residence Services could potentially cause unintentional harm without the necessary prior education on working within their specific community. This idea is echoed in the literature, where community organizations want to ensure service-learning projects and participants do not take advantage of their community members and align with their values (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Hammersley, 2012; and Sandy & Holland, 2006). In reviewing the secondary data, particularly past Alternative Reading Week schedules, the program features pre-learning around broad concepts students may encounter when engaging with community organizations. Is there potential to shape the educational sessions and classroom learning to also highlight how the context of the community organizations relate specifically to these topics? Facilitators of CSL programs should communicate with community partners to question the type of preparation and pre-education partners feel is needed prior to a service-placement or community-led workshop. Further, discussing the preparation stage of CSL with community partners could open the door to exploring any interest community partners have in being involved in this process, such as through co-presenting, sharing information with facilitators, or reviewing information about their organization. An interesting related theme in the literature is ensuring that service-learning staff from the post-secondary institution are familiar with the community organization to better prepare their students (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Cushman, 2002; Gazley et al., 2013; and McDonald & Dominguez, 2015). Preparing students for a CSL program starts with program facilitators connecting and learning more about the community themselves. By engaging further with community organizations using the first two recommendations, Residence Staff could create more opportunities to familiarize themselves with an organization's goals and contexts, in turn improving their facilitation of the program and the experience of student participants. Therefore,

not only does engaging communities in the early stages of a CSL program to identify foundational knowledge students need benefit the community, it also helps strengthen the institutional-community partnerships in the program by increasing facilitators' understanding of and connection to the community.

***Implement different mechanisms for debriefing the Alternative Reading Week program that meet the community organization's needs and preferences.***

As each community organization was interested in receiving and sharing feedback following their involvement in the Alternative Reading Week program, Residence Services staff may consider exploring how each community organization might like to participate in this debrief. It is crucial to note that how a community organization may choose to debrief could be dependent on organizational capacity as well as individual preferences. By asking questions in the initial planning phase about what type of reflection and debrief the community organization may find valuable and be interested in participating in, community organizations can be prepared to deliver and engage in this feedback once the program concludes and Residence Services staff can proactively explore how this feedback can best be facilitated in a mutual way. However, it is important to recognize that although each community organization felt that some type of closing of the loop after an Alternative Reading Week program would be beneficial, organizations had different levels of capacity and time they could invest in this process. As there is a large scope of what community partners may perceive and consider debriefing, it is important to work with communities in establishing what this process could be like for their specific organization.

***Create space to engage the community organizations in the assessment of student participant feedback and learning.***

Based on the literature, interview findings, and along with the secondary data analysis, there is an opportunity to better incorporate assessment questions the community organizations could use to evaluate if the Alternative Reading Week program met the community partners' goals. Both in the literature and these research findings, community organizations perceive CSL programs as an opportunity to increase awareness and students' long-term investment in their organization (Tryon & Stoecker, 2008). There is further opportunity in CSL to ensure program assessments incorporate questions assessing whether community organization objectives were met. Further, being able to share assessment with community partners that demonstrates how their tangible outcomes are being achieved through the CSL program, could reinforce and further support the institutional-community partnership. If community organizations are able to demonstrate value for their organization in participating in a CSL program, they may be more inclined to invest further time and resources into collaborating on these types of programs. Cameron (2010) speaks in their research about how underutilized assessment is, in regards to not working with community organizations to consult with on valuable data or share existing results. Not only is it important for CSL facilitators to work with communities to develop assessments that benefit both the institution and the community in being able evaluate the value of the program for each partner, but it is crucial that institutions connect with communities on how to best communicate this information back to their organizations. Further, the Alternative Reading Week program typically features a pre-learning assessment, gauging student comfort levels and understanding of social issues, prior to participating in this program. This data has never been shared with community organizations, but rather used internally to calculate differences in learning following a student's participation in the program. However, the data of a pre-learning assessment could be valuable to a community organization to best understand the skills and knowledge of

student participants prior to hosting a service placement or educational workshop; an area community organization representatives indicated that they would like more information on. Ultimately, the data collected before and after the Alternative Reading Week program could serve a much greater purpose and be further utilized if consulted and shared back with community organizations. Institutions facilitating CSL programs should make an intentional effort to explain their current data collection processes to community partners, and discuss any opportunities for assessments to be improved to better suit the community organization's interests.

***Invest in improving communication with community partners.***

Residence Services staff may consider exploring opportunities to communicate with community organizations inside and outside of the Alternative Reading Week program to further grow their partnership and relationship with these community organizations. Considering the goal all organizations had of raising awareness of their organization in the community, it makes sense that additional touchpoints between the institution and community would support this goal. Further, establishing regular points of contact could continue to grow and deepen the partnership between Residence Services staff and the community organization. As noted through the memo analysis, community organization representatives held differing levels of familiarity of the Alternative Reading Week program. Investing time into sharing more information about the Alternative Reading Week program with community organizations prior to their involvement, could help orient community organizations in recognizing and articulating additional or preferred ways to be engaged in the future. The literature suggests that positive relationships with community organizations in service-learning programs takes time and trust (Taylor & Kahlke, 2017; Cushman, 2002; Worrall, 2007). CSL programs can foster the development of institutional-community partnerships by identifying additional opportunities for communication and

collaboration. For example, each community organization representative interviewed had a specific area of communication they would emphasize or like to see improved. Residence Services staff may consider connecting with each organization on a case by case basis to learn what strategies for communication have worked well in the past and how each specific organization prefers to be consulted. Focusing on communication and specifically looking at communication as a component of individual relationships with each community organization rather than a singular step in the CSL process, could not only help improve relationships but also minimize the challenges experienced by organizations. As the literature identifies communication being a key component of community-university partnerships (Worrall, 2007), institutions should dedicate time to explore deeper how communication influences the engagement with individual partnerships.

### **Engaging Communities in Community Service-Learning**

An overarching response to the research question is that each community organization representative was able to identify ways in which engagement may be improved or look different in future Alternative Reading Week programs. However, there is no singular process or checklist that can be generated for every CSL program to ensure that organizations have been appropriately engaged. The challenge of not being able to identify a single strategy for how to best incorporate community voices in CSL, could possibly explain the gap in the existing literature around tangible best practices for engagement. If every community and university partnership is different and every community has varying preferences on the ways in which they like to engage in CSL programs, depending on their individual contexts, it becomes difficult to create a standardized guide on working with all communities for social change.

When I began this research study, I was eager to uncover an improved method of engaging with organizations in Alternative Reading Week to shift the program towards being more community-centered. What I have uncovered is a newfound understanding of why using community engagement in service-learning with the intentions of having these programs prioritize social justice over charity, is not simply achieved through a change in how service-learning is practiced. It is rather a change in the approach of how we look at partnerships with communities and providing space for individual and customized ways of collaboration that takes the lead from the community organizations. How to best engage a community organization in a CSL program is dependent on the individual relationship with each community organization. In a parallel vein, every time an institution explores opportunities to collaborate and engage community organizations in a CSL program, the relationship between the partners grows.

In Mitchell's (2008) work on defining critical service-learning, they emphasize that authentic relationships are established through challenging power imbalances by incorporating community perspectives into all stages of the program. When CSL programs initiate conversations with communities on how to best collaborate with them in all stages of a CSL program, institutions are taking a step towards fostering more genuine partnerships. Each time a community organization engages with the institution on the design, implementation and assessment of a service-learning program, it is deepening the relationship by challenging traditional power dynamics and reinforcing reciprocity. In this sense, the influence engagement and relationships between community organizations and institutions have on one another is cyclical and always evolving. This connects with existing research highlighting how ongoing partnerships and every successful CSL program, can contribute to better relationships with communities (Cushman, 2002; McDonald & Dominguez, 2015; Sandy & Holland, 2006).

As community organizations and institutions gain additional understanding of one another's contexts and preferred roles in the program, it will continue to be important to evaluate how the relationship and engagement is going. Sandy and Holland (2006) recommend that institutions participate in ongoing conversations "about partnership process and outcomes" (p. 40). Institutions should be intentional with creating space to reflect on and explore with communities regularly, how the partnership has changed, possibly inspiring changes to how they collaborate with one another in the future.

In the research findings, all community organization representatives identified the leadership role their organizations held in hosting service placements and educational workshops as part of Alternative Reading Week. At the same time, community organization representatives also identified engagement they would like from Residence Services staff during this implementation phase of the program. Similarly, Sandy and Holland's (2006) qualitative research on community organizations' experience and attitudes towards institutional-community partnerships found, "community partners indicated that their greatest challenge in partnering with campuses is to find ways to interact directly with faculty through ongoing, reciprocal relationships, become collaborators in designing the service-learning curriculum, and engage with faculty more deeply" (p. 37). Hence, when exploring engagement through a relationship lens, it becomes apparent that engagement cannot be considered a one-way street. Institutions should question whether they have created space for communities to also identify where they would like additional engagement from the institution.

Latta et al. (2018) elaborates on how the existing research "often positions traditional and critical forms of service-learning as binaries rather than a spectrum of practices" (p.33). Expanding on this concept of a spectrum for CSL, perhaps engagement could also be explored through a lens

as to how integrated the community is in each stage of the process instead of whether it is or is not occurring. For instance, a CSL program may experience a time when it engages the community organization less when there is staff turnover for either the institution or community organization, and the relationship needs time to rebuild. In other words, programs may find their levels of engagement with communities is naturally fluid. Moreover, looking at engagement with communities in CSL through the perspective of how it connects to institutional-community relationship development, leads to further opportunities to revise and reevaluate the original research question.

### **Research Question and Findings**

The following section addresses potential for reframing the original research question in future research. Specifically, the findings suggest a complex answer to the research question, “What are community organization’s perspectives on how the University of Alberta Residence Services staff can best engage them in the design, implementation, and assessment of the Alternative Reading Week program?” Community organization perspectives were unique to each community’s context, goals, and capacity. The research methodology also relies on the assumption that individual representatives from each community organization were able to speak on behalf of their organization. After conducting this research, the research question itself should be revised to replace “how” Residence Services staff can best engage community organizations with “Where can University of Alberta Residence Services staff best engage community organizations in the design, implementation, and assessment of the Alternative Reading Week program?” The reframing of this question accounts for each organization's specific needs, capacity, and context, while still identifying areas where their perspective could be present in all aspects of the program.



The research findings suggest that community organizations have differences in how they prefer to be engaged in Alternative Reading Week. However, engagement can refer to a spectrum of activities, time, capacity, and investment of resources where each community organization may place their preferred role and involvement differently. Residence Services staff need to be flexible when working with community organizations. In general, to improve relationships with community organizations, staff may need to consider acknowledging that each relationship with a community organization is different and needs to be treated on an individual basis. In the existing literature, community partners repeatedly emphasize the importance of relationships between their organization and the institution in CSL (Taylor & Kahlke, 2017). How can community organizations feel as though they have a relationship with an institution, if the institution is approaching each organization in the same way? A relationship alludes to the notion that a pre-existing rapport is developed that inspires interactions moving forward. Rather than focusing on how to best engage community organizations in the Alternative Reading Week Program, future research could assess how relationships with community organizations impact engagement. Additional areas of future research are explored in more detail in the next section.

### **Areas for Future Research**

This research represents a step towards adding to the growing area of literature around community partners' perspectives of service-learning programs. This research is important, as it ultimately will lead to better service-learning programs and increased benefits to all stakeholders.

The Alternative Reading Week program is unique in that it considers itself a CSL program, however it is not situated within academia at the University of Alberta. Particularly, the Alternative Reading Week program is not associated with a particular course or faculty and participants receive certificates of completion rather than academic credit. Another difference between curricular CSL

programs and the Alternative Reading Week program, is the short-term, condensed nature of the Alternative Reading Week program. Specifically, dissimilar to curricular service-learning, students participating in Alternative Reading Week only interact with community organizations during Alternative Reading Week rather than over the course of an entire academic semester or for a designated number of hours. Additionally, rather than participating in a predetermined number of hours at one specific community organization over the course of a semester or academic class, Alternative Reading Week participants engage in an intensive program featuring multiple community organizations over the course of one week. Although this research was focused on exploring the community role and engagement in this particular service-learning program, future research could dive deeper into co-curricular service-learning activities. Particularly, how does engagement and institutional partnerships with communities look differently in the curricular versus co-curricular spheres? What opportunities does co-curricular service-learning programs provide to address some of the barriers curricular CSL programs face in engaging with community organizations when situated within the academic realm of an institution?

Something that came up frequently in the literature, but was not a common theme in the research findings, is the challenge community organizations face when engaging in service-learning programs rooted in institutions. Although two community organization representatives did emphasize that having students spend additional time with their organization would increase benefits both to the organization and the learning of students, no organization spoke explicitly about the challenges of the timelines, dates or week-long structure of the Alternative Reading Week program. The Alternative Reading Week program is rigid in its dates and timelines and dependent on when the week-long breaks in the fall and winter semesters fall in the institution's academic calendar. While there is the possibility that this topic simply did not get investigated, as

the research question was examining how community organizations could be engaged in the existing structure of the Alternative Reading Week program, it could also be possible that the co-curricular nature of the program helped eliminate some of the challenges typically presented in curricular CSL programs. Further research could explore this further, and remove limitations to community organization feedback by asking how community organizations would change the existing program or by exploring the differences of community organization experiences between curricular and co-curricular CSL.

Lastly, narrowing in on a specific topic related to the research question, would be also a beneficial area of future research. This would allow for a deeper dive into one area of focus, rather than exploring the entire scope of Alternative Reading Week and community organization involvement. For example, future research could examine one stage of the Alternative Reading Week program individually, such as engaging community organizations in the planning phase. By limiting the scope of the research to one specific stage of the program, there may be more space for additional core themes and recommendations regarding how community organizations perceive their role in this process, and what their ideal engagement could look like. Along the same notion of reducing the scope of the existing research, it could be valuable for future research to define the concepts related to the research question. For instance, the primary research question is focused on how Residence Services staff engage community organizations. Engagement can be defined as very differing levels of involvement and connection and future research could dive into community organization's perspectives on what engagement means to them in service-learning.

### **Study Limitations**

Qualitative research methods were utilized to create space for community organization representatives to shape the research findings in their own voice, inspired by their experiences and

perceived organizational roles in the Alternative Reading Week program. However, due to the large amount of other service-learning and volunteer programs these organizations participate in, organizational staff turnover, a change in operations due to COVID-19, as well as individual organizations having various levels of past involvement in the Alternative Reading Week program, questions were more open and hypothetical for future Alternative Reading Week programs. In the effort of making this research accessible to the community organization representatives who chose to participate, survey and interview questions prioritized accessibility by focusing on the community organization representative's ideal perspective on engagement, rather than their past involvement with the Alternative Reading Week program. To help mitigate risk to the research design, I aimed to frame the interviews with participants by beginning with an introduction to the Alternative Reading Week program and how their organization has engaged with the program in the past. However, this process of aiming to help participants contextualize the questions in the sphere of Alternative Reading Week rather than other service-learning programs, could potentially have influenced participants responses and contributed to bias, if participants felt that past engagement was a standard or expectation for future partnerships on this program. Although there was the possibility that highlighting the community organizations' past involvement in the program would influence feedback to fit within the scope of the already existing model for Alternative Reading Week, it was important for research participants to be familiar enough with the program to identify tangible opportunities and examples for future engagement.

Another key limit to this study is the limited number of participants. As only organizations with past experience with the Alternative Reading Week program were included, the sample size of this research study is very small. However, qualitative research should not be generalized regardless. In fact, the more a study is replicated or data and literature added over time, data is then

able to be applied more widely in relation to one another (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Therefore, this research study should be considered as an initial exploration of the role community organizations play in the design, implementation, and assessment of Alternative Reading Week, and inspire additional future studies that dive deeper into these topics.

Another limit that impacted this study's findings is the COVID-19 pandemic. During the time of completing this research, the Omicron variant was forcing many community organizations to adapt to new governmental regulations and public health measures. It is possible that the demands on community organizations to meet the needs of their community members during this challenging time, was rightfully prioritized over participation in this research project. Just over half of the community organizations requested to participate in this research project (N=8), chose to engage. Multiple organizations refrained from responding to requests to participate altogether or indicated that previous staff members were no longer with the organization. The COVID-19 pandemic also had dramatic effects on how the Alternative Reading Week program was conducted in Fall 2020, Winter 2021, and Fall 2021. Specifically, previous opportunities to connect with community organizations in-person were required to adjust to public health measures and possibly move to online platforms. The changes to the Alternative Reading Week program curriculum to shifting to a primarily online experience, undoubtedly impacted the program's relationships with community organizations. For example, there were some community organizations that were unable to accommodate online service-placements, and that unfortunately were not able to engage in the Alternative Reading Week program in its past renditions. Due to staff turnover within community organizations and some community organizations not engaging with the program over the past year due to the pandemic, there were a few community organizations less familiar with the program than others. Although I was able to provide additional context for the program during

the interviews, some comments made by community organization representatives showed a lack of familiarity with the current structure of the Alternative Reading Week program and where it was situated within the University of Alberta.

Although this research provides an intriguing introduction into examining an co-curricular service-learning program and represents a step towards introducing a more community-centered approach to the Alternative Reading Week program, there are many areas for future exploration needed to continue to improve Residence Services and community organizations relationships as well as the value of this program to communities.

### **Ethical Considerations**

There are multiple ethical considerations that influenced this research study. In regards to working with community organizations it is important to acknowledge which community organizations I hold pre-existing professional and personal relationships with and how this may influence the research findings. I tried to recognize what potential power dynamics were influencing my relationship with these organizations in this study and establish a safe and confidential environment for them to express their feedback and insights without fear of potential repercussion or harm to their current relationship with the institution. Part of this was done by ensuring aspects of the study that could be anonymous were done as such and confidentiality was articulated and enforced throughout the process. In fact, confidentiality was described in the participant consent form at the start of the research study and explained at the beginning of individual interviews.

Another ethical consideration for this research is my role at the University of Alberta in residence, as a supervisor of the office that coordinates the Alternative Reading Week program. I acknowledge that I have a vested interest in the success of this program and its partnerships with

community organizations. However, my belief is that my involvement and experience with the Alternative Reading Week program, benefited this research study and its ability to contextualize the data in relation to the program. On an opposing thread to my expert knowledge of the Alternative Reading Week program, an ethical consideration I proactively tried to address was community organization's misunderstanding of the research and my role. I was clear in my interviews and communication that this program was through Residence Services at the University of Alberta and tried to provide as much additional context as possible without potentially biasing the research. For example, I shared previous Alternative Reading Week schedules with research participants to help identify their role and relationship to the program in the past.

Further, in regards to ethical considerations for all participants, the research did take time away from their current work capacity and priorities, which may already have been impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic which was in another wave of infections and governmental restrictions that undoubtedly impacted these organizations. I tried to address this concern by clearly outlining the ability for a participant to withdraw from the study at any point in time of the study. Further, I aimed to be as flexible as possible when providing deadlines or potential timelines for participants to engage with the research study. Overall, the ethical considerations for this study helped inspire the research design and how community organizations were engaged throughout the research process.

### **Conclusion**

I first developed the Alternative Reading Week program, after witnessing firsthand how service-learning programs could contribute to substantial learning and be a positive and transformative experience for students. A large part of my role in residence is exploring how we can support students' learning and development outside of the classroom and foster their current

leadership skills to help prepare them for being contributing members of the community once they leave university. The Alternative Reading Week program became a successful avenue to directly engage students in applying their learning in a non-academic setting and support their individual exploration of the role they can play in supporting their community. However, the more I have learned over the years about service-learning programming, community relationships, and how these programs impact the communities they are rooted in, I have been eager to learn how we can improve these programs to do better and reduce unintended harm and contribute to sustainable social change. This research was an important first step in shifting this program towards a more community-centered and justice-oriented approach. By incorporating community organization perspectives into the Alternative Reading Week program, the program will become more beneficial to the community organizations they engage in and hopefully support more long-term, sustainable partnerships with these organizations. In previous years of the Alternative Reading Week program, staff such as myself were often asking *if* community organizations would be willing to engage in X component of the program. This research represents a shift towards the more appropriate questioning of *how* and *where* community organizations would be willing to engage in the Alternative Reading Week program. The research findings provide some foundational areas that community organization voice can be more included in Alternative Reading Week. The future of the Alternative Reading Week program should support utilizing the recommendations provided in this research, to work independently with each community organization on exploring how they would like to be engaged.



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## **Appendix A: Alternative Reading Week Learning Outcomes**

### **Appendix A.1 Fall 2019 Learning Outcomes**

- Evaluate their identity, values, and roles in relation to social issues and social justice in the Edmonton community
- Analyze stereotypes and stigma individually, and societally, in relation to the cycle of poverty
- Apply leadership skills such as teamwork and values-based action to connect with peers and others in the community
- Develop a sense of citizenship and recognize the role that individuals have in creating positive change in the community

### **Appendix A.2 Winter 2020 Learning Outcomes**

- Evaluate their identity, values, and roles in relation to social issues and social justice in the Edmonton community
- Analyze stereotypes and stigma individually, and societally, in relation to the cycle of poverty
- Apply leadership skills such as teamwork and values-based action to connect with peers and others in the community
- Develop a sense of citizenship and recognize the role that individuals have in creating positive change in the community

### **Appendix A.3 Fall 2020 Learning Outcomes**

- Evaluate their identity, values, and roles in relation to social issues and social justice in the Edmonton community
- Analyze stereotypes and stigma individually, and societally, in relation to the cycle of poverty
- Apply leadership skills such as teamwork and values-based action to connect with peers and others in the community
- Develop a sense of citizenship and recognize the role that individuals have in creating positive change in the community

### **Appendix A.4 Winter 2021 Learning Outcomes**

- Evaluate their identity, values, and roles in relation to social issues and social justice in the Edmonton community
- Analyze stereotypes and stigma individually, and societally, in relation to the cycle of poverty
- Apply leadership skills such as teamwork and values-based action to connect with peers and others in the community

- Develop a sense of citizenship and recognize the role that individuals have in creating positive change in the community

### **Appendix A.5 Fall 2021 Learning Outcomes**

- Explore their own identity, values and roles
- Identify social issues that impact their local community
- Discuss the complexity of houselessness
- Discuss at least two houselessness interventions
- Describe role as an active citizen in your community
- Identify at least two local non-profits in Edmonton that are addressing social issues
- Increase sense of connection to Edmonton community (more of a program objective than learning objective)

## Appendix B: Alternative Reading Week Schedules

### Appendix B.1 Fall 2019 Schedule

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>10:00am:</b> Icebreaker activity</li> <li>● <b>10:30am:</b> Travel to service placement at Organization 1</li> <li>● <b>11:00am:</b> Service placement at Organization 1</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Return to campus</li> <li>● <b>1:30pm:</b> Lunch and reflection</li> <li>● <b>2:00pm:</b> Poverty 101 Classroom Lesson</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm:</b> End of Day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>12:00pm:</b> Travel to Organization 2</li> <li>● <b>12:30pm:</b> Social Issues Walk and Reflection at Organization 2</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm:</b> End of Day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>9:30am:</b> Travel to Organization 3</li> <li>● <b>10:00am:</b> Service placement at Organization 3</li> <li>● <b>1:30pm:</b> Return to campus</li> <li>● <b>2:00pm:</b> Lunch and reflection</li> <li>● <b>2:30pm:</b> Privilege and Poverty Workshop</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm:</b> End of Day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>9:30am:</b> Life Maps activity</li> <li>● <b>10:15am:</b> Social Justice vs Charity Lesson</li> <li>● <b>12:00pm:</b> Lunch</li> <li>● <b>12:30pm:</b> Travel to Organization 4</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Service placement at Organization 4</li> <li>● <b>4:30pm:</b> End of Day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>8:15am:</b> Travel to Organization 5</li> <li>● <b>8:45am:</b> Service placement at Organization 5</li> <li>● <b>12:30pm:</b> Return to campus</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Lunch</li> <li>● <b>1:30pm:</b> Final Reflection</li> <li>● <b>2:30pm:</b> Break</li> <li>● <b>5:45pm:</b> Travel to venue</li> <li>● <b>6:00pm:</b> Program Graduation</li> <li>● <b>7:30pm:</b> Return to campus</li> <li>● <b>8:00pm:</b> End of Day</li> </ul>

## Appendix B.2 Winter 2020 Schedule

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 3	Day 4*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>3:00pm:</b> Introduction to Service Learning and Team Builders</li> <li>● <b>4:45pm:</b> Break for Dinner</li> <li>● <b>5:00pm:</b> Intro to Poverty</li> <li>● <b>6:00pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>12:30pm:</b> Blanket Exercise Workshop</li> <li>● <b>2:00pm:</b> Break</li> <li>● <b>2:30pm:</b> Travel to Organization 3</li> <li>● <b>3:00pm:</b> Service Placement at Organization 3</li> <li>● <b>6:00pm:</b> Reflection and return to campus</li> <li>● <b>6:30pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Day off</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>10:15am:</b> Meet and Travel to Organization 1</li> <li>● <b>11:00am:</b> Service Placement at Organization 1</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Return to campus</li> <li>● <b>1:30pm:</b> Lunch and reflection</li> <li>● <b>2:00pm:</b> Poverty 101 Lesson</li> <li>● <b>4:30pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>9:30am:</b> Meet and travel to Organization 2</li> <li>● <b>10:00am:</b> Icebreaker, Orientation, Rules and Safety, Tour and Boundaries</li> <li>● <b>11:30am:</b> Lunch</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Relief vs Development Workshop</li> <li>● <b>3:00pm:</b> Work project</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm:</b> Community speaker</li> <li>● <b>5:30pm:</b> Boundaries and service project at Organization 2</li> <li>● <b>9:00pm:</b> Debrief</li> <li>● <b>10:00pm:</b> End of Day, stay overnight at Organization 2</li> </ul>

Day 5*	Day 6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>8:00am:</b> Breakfast</li> <li>● <b>9:00am:</b> Social Issues Walk at Organization 2</li> <li>● <b>11:30am:</b> Life Maps activity and lunch</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Social justice workshop and final reflectio</li> <li>● <b>3:30pm:</b> Final debrief</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm</b> Return to campus</li> <li>● <b>4:30pm</b> End of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>6:00pm:</b> Travel to venue</li> <li>● <b>6:15pm:</b> Graduation Dinner</li> <li>● <b>7:30pm:</b> Return to Campus</li> <li>● <b>8:00pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>

\* Participants did not receive detailed schedules for day 4 and day 5, but had a schedule that indicated the overnight retreat and time to be spent at Organization 2



### Appendix B.3 Fall 2020 Schedule

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>10:00am:</b> Welcome and Virtual Icebreakers</li> <li>● <b>10:30am:</b> Break</li> <li>● <b>10:45am:</b> Poverty 1.0</li> <li>● <b>11:30am:</b> Lunch Break</li> <li>● <b>12:30pm:</b> In-Person Cohort Meet to travel to Organization 2</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Social Issues Walk</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>10:00am:</b> Community Member Story</li> <li>● <b>10:45am:</b> Break</li> <li>● <b>11:00am:</b> Life Maps</li> <li>● <b>12:15pm:</b> Break</li> <li>● <b>12:30pm:</b> Reflection over lunch</li> <li>● <b>1:15pm:</b> In-Person Cohort meet to travel to Organization 1</li> <li>● <b>2:00pm:</b> Service placement at Organization 1</li> <li>● <b>5:00pm</b> Service placement at Organization 1 Part 2</li> <li>● <b>6:30pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>12:30pm:</b> Privilege Workshop</li> <li>● <b>1:15pm:</b> Break</li> <li>● <b>1:30pm:</b> Documentary “Us and Them”</li> <li>● <b>3:30pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>10:00am:</b> Reflections and Thank yous</li> <li>● <b>10:30am:</b> Break</li> <li>● <b>10:45am:</b> Certificate in Service-Learning</li> <li>● <b>11:30am:</b> Lunch break</li> <li>● <b>12:30pm:</b> Poverty 2.0</li> <li>● <b>1:15pm:</b> Break</li> <li>● <b>1:30pm:</b> Social Justice Presentation</li> <li>● <b>2:15pm:</b> Break</li> <li>● <b>2:30pm:</b> Final Reflection Activity</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>

### Appendix B.4 Winter 2021 Schedule

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>10:00am:</b> Welcome and Icebreakers</li> <li>● <b>11:00am:</b> Listen Moment</li> <li>● <b>12:00pm:</b> Lunch</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Virtual KAIROS Blanket Exercise</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>10:00am:</b> Poverty 1.0 Workshop</li> <li>● <b>10:50am:</b> Wellness Activity</li> <li>● <b>11:10am:</b> Poverty 2.0 Workshop</li> <li>● <b>12:00pm:</b> Lunch and Travel to Organization 2</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Social Issues Walk at Organization 2</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>10:00am:</b> Social Issues Walk Reflection</li> <li>● <b>11:00am:</b> Community Organization Member Story</li> <li>● <b>12:00pm:</b> Lunch</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Privilege Workshop</li> <li>● <b>2:00pm:</b> “Us and Them” Documentary Viewing</li> <li>● <b>4:30pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>10:00am:</b> Reflection and Thank Yous</li> <li>● <b>10:45am:</b> Presentation on Certificate in Service-Learning at the UofA</li> <li>● <b>11:30am:</b> Social Justice Workshop</li> <li>● <b>12:00pm:</b> Lunch</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Community Partners Panel</li> <li>● <b>2:15pm:</b> Final Reflection and Closing Ceremony</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>

### Appendix B.5 Fall 2021 Schedule

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>9:00am:</b> Welcome and Icebreakers</li> <li>● <b>10:00am:</b> What is Social Justice?</li> <li>● <b>11:00am:</b> Anti Homelessness in Edmonton</li> <li>● <b>2:15pm</b> Break</li> <li>● <b>2:30pm:</b> What is Mutual Aid and how do you contribute</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>10:00am:</b> Reflection</li> <li>● <b>10:30am:</b> Break</li> <li>● <b>10:45am:</b> “A Road Home” Documentary</li> <li>● <b>12:00pm:</b> Lunch</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Organization 7 Primer and Transit</li> <li>● <b>2:00pm:</b> Service Placement at Organization 7</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>9:00am:</b> Organization 6 Presentation</li> <li>● <b>10:30am:</b> Break</li> <li>● <b>10:45am:</b> Care Packages</li> <li>● <b>12:00pm</b> Lunch</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Organization 5 Presentation</li> <li>● <b>2:30pm:</b> Reflection</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>10:00am:</b> Reflection</li> <li>● <b>12:00pm:</b> Lunch</li> <li>● <b>1:00pm:</b> Service Placement at Organization 8</li> <li>● <b>4:00pm:</b> Break</li> <li>● <b>6:00pm:</b> Closing dinner</li> <li>● <b>7:00pm:</b> End of day</li> </ul>

## Appendix C: Alternative Reading Week Assessment Questions

### Appendix C.1 Fall 2019 Assessment Questions

- What motivated you to apply to participate in the Engage Edmonton Program? (*Open Ended*)
- How many Engage Edmonton events did you attend? (*Select One*)
  - 1
  - 2-3
  - 4-5
  - More than 5
- As a result of participating in Engage Edmonton, to what degree...

*Scaled Questions on a scale of 1-5 (5 indicating a great deal)*

- Are you able to better identify social issues that impact our local community?
- Are you able to better identify opportunities to positively contribute to your community?
- Do you feel more connected to your Edmonton community?
- Do you better understand your role as an active citizen in your community?

*Scaled Questions on a scale of 1-5 (5 indicating strongly agree)*

- As a result of participating in Engage Edmonton, I have a greater knowledge of local non-profits in Edmonton that are tackling social issues.
- As a result of participating in Engage Edmonton, I am more likely to seek future volunteer opportunities.
- How did you benefit from participating in the Engage Edmonton program? (*Open Ended*)
- As a result of participating in Engage Edmonton, did you meet anyone new? (*Select One*)
  - Yes
  - No
- Would you recommend to a friend or peer to participate in Engage Edmonton? (*Select One*)
  - Yes (please explain) (*Open Ended*)
  - No (please explain) (*Open Ended*)
- Any additional comments about the Engage Edmonton Program? (*Open Ended*)
- Would you like to be entered to win a \$50.00 UAlberta bookstore Giftcard? (*Select One*)
  - Yes

- No
- If Yes: (*Open Ended*)
  - First Name:
  - Last Name:
  - Email Address:

## Appendix C.2 Winter 2020 Assessment Questions

- Year of Study: *(Select One)*
  - First year undergraduate
  - Upper year undergraduate (Second year or higher)
  - Graduate student
- Are You an International Student? *(Select one)*
  - Yes
  - No
  - Prefer not to answer
- How did you hear about Engage Edmonton's Alternative Reading Week? *(Check all that apply)*
  - Residence Newsletter
  - Residence Website
  - Engage Edmonton Facebook Group
  - Student Staff Tabling
  - My Residence's Facebook Group
  - Word of Mouth
  - Other (please explain:) *(Open Ended)*
- What motivated you to apply to participate in the Alternative Reading Week? *(Open Ended)*

### *Scaled Questions on a scale of 1-5 (5 indicating completely)*

- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree were you able to better explore your own identity, values and roles?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree are you able to better identify social issues that impact our local community?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree are you able to better understand poverty and poverty interventions?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree do you feel more connected to your Edmonton community?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree do you better understand your role as an active citizen in your community?

### *Scaled Questions on a scale of 1-5 (5 indicating strongly agree)*

- Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, I have greater knowledge of local non-profits in Edmonton that are tackling social issues.

- Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. - As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, I am more likely to seek future volunteer opportunities.
- What was the most beneficial part of Alternative Reading Week for you? (*Open Ended*)
- Which service placement during Alternative Reading Week was your favourite? (*Open Ended*)
- What is one thing you learned from participating in Alternative Reading Week? (*Open Ended*)
- Overall, I felt the time commitment for Alternative Reading Week was: (*Select one*)
  - Too much
  - Neutral
  - Too little
- Any comments regarding the schedule for Alternative Reading Week? (*Open Ended*)
- Would you recommend to a friend or peer to participate in Alternative Reading Week? (*Please explain*)
  - Yes (*Open Ended*)
  - No (*Open Ended*)
- Any additional comments about the Alternative Reading Week Program? (*Open Ended*)

### Appendix C.3 Fall 2020 Assessment Questions

- Year of Study: *(Select One)*
  - First year undergraduate
  - Upper year undergraduate (Second year or higher)
  - Graduate student
- Are You an International Student? *(Select one)*
  - Yes
  - No
  - Prefer not to answer
- Did you participate in any in-person service events during Alternative Reading week?
  - Yes
  - No, I participate online only
- How did you hear about Engage Edmonton's Alternative Reading Week? *(Check all that apply)*
  - Residence Newsletter
  - Residence Website
  - Expedition: Connect
  - Engage Edmonton Facebook Group
  - My Residence's Facebook Group
  - Word of Mouth
  - Other (please explain:) *(Open Ended)*
- What motivated you to apply to participate in the Alternative Reading Week? *(Open Ended)*

#### *Scaled Questions on a scale of 1-5 (5 indicating completely)*

- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree were you able to better explore your own identity, values and roles?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree are you able to better identify social issues that impact our local community?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree are you able to better understand poverty and poverty interventions?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree do you feel more connected to your Edmonton community?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree do you better understand your role as an active citizen in your community?

#### *Scaled Questions on a scale of 1-5 (5 indicating strongly agree)*



- Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, I have greater knowledge of local non-profits in Edmonton that are tackling social issues.
- Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. - As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, I am more likely to seek future volunteer opportunities.
- What was the most beneficial part of Alternative Reading Week for you? *(Open Ended)*

*Scaled Questions on a scale of 1-5 (5 indicating very engaging)*

- How engaging did you find the online presentations?
- What is one thing you learned from participating in Alternative Reading Week? *(Open Ended)*
- Overall, I felt the time commitment for Alternative Reading Week was: *(Select one)*
  - Too much
  - Neutral
  - Too little
- Any comments regarding the schedule for Alternative Reading Week? *(Open Ended)*
- Would you recommend to a friend or peer to participate in Alternative Reading Week? *(Please explain)*
  - Yes *(Please explain): (Open Ended)*
  - No *(Please explain): (Open Ended)*
- Any additional comments about the Alternative Reading Week Program? *(Open Ended)*
- Please feel free to use the space below to write thank you messages to any of our community partners or presenters. These messages will be compiled onto a digital thank you card. *(Open Ended)*

## Appendix C.4 Winter 2021 Assessment Questions

- What has been your understanding of: **Poverty**?
  - I'm not too familiar with this term
  - I can define it but can't explain how it affects my community
  - I know a little bit about it
  - I can define it and easily explain its interconnectedness to other concepts
- What has been your understanding of: **Homelessness**?
  - I'm not too familiar with this term
  - I can define it but can't explain how it affects my community
  - I know a little bit about it
  - I can define it and easily explain its interconnectedness to other concepts
- What has been your understanding of: **Social Justice**?
  - I'm not too familiar with this term
  - I can define it but can't explain how it affects my community
  - I know a little bit about it
  - I can define it and easily explain its interconnectedness to other concepts
- What has been your understanding of: **Privilege**?
  - I'm not too familiar with this term
  - I can define it but can't explain how it affects my community
  - I know a little bit about it
  - I can define it and easily explain its interconnectedness to other concepts
- What has been your understanding of: **Intersectionality**?
  - I'm not too familiar with this term
  - I can define it but can't explain how it affects my community
  - I know a little bit about it
  - I can define it and easily explain its interconnectedness to other concepts
- What has been your understanding of: **Indigenous - Canada relations**?
  - I'm not too familiar with this term
  - I can describe it but can't explain how it relates to me or my community
  - I know a little bit about it
  - I can describe this topic and explain its importance
- What has been your understanding of: **strategies to address poverty**?
  - I don't know where to start in addressing this issue
  - I can name ways to tackle poverty but don't know what I can personally do
  - I can name some root causes of poverty but not sure how to tackle it
  - I can name different approaches to tackle the issue
- What has been your understanding of: **examining my privilege**?
  - I don't know where to start in understanding privilege
  - I can define and explain privilege but not sure what I can personally do
  - I understand privilege a little bit but not sure what to do about it

- I can name different ways to recognize and use my privilege to help others
- What has been your understanding of: **social justice vs. charity?**
  - I'm not sure what either of these terms mean
  - I can define both these terms but I don't know the difference
  - I can explain one of these terms
  - I can explain the difference between social justice and charity
- What has been your understanding of: **the interconnectedness of hunger, lack of education, homelessness, and poverty?**
  - I'm not too familiar with one or more of these terms
  - I can explain all of these terms but not how they relate to each other
  - I know some of these terms but not how they are interconnected
  - I can explain the differences and interconnectedness of all these terms
- What is one thing you learned from participating in Alternative Reading Week?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, I am more likely to seek future volunteer opportunities:
  - Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, I have greater knowledge of local non-profits in Edmonton that address social issues:
  - Strongly agree
  - Agree
  - Disagree
  - Strongly disagree
- 1. Would you recommend to a friend or peer to participate in Alternative Reading Week?

## Appendix C.5 Fall 2021 Assessment Questions

- Year of Study: *(Select One)*
  - First year undergraduate
  - Upper year undergraduate (Second year or higher)
  - Graduate student
- Are You an International Student? *(Select one)*
  - Yes
  - No
  - Prefer not to answer
- How did you hear about Engage Edmonton's Alternative Reading Week? *(Check all that apply)*
  - Residence Newsletter
  - Residence Website
  - Expedition: Connect
  - Engage Edmonton Facebook Group
  - My Residence's Facebook Group
  - Word of Mouth
  - Other (please explain:) *(Open Ended)*
- What motivated you to apply to participate in the Alternative Reading Week? *(Open Ended)*

### *Scaled Questions on a scale of 1-5 (5 indicating a Great Deal)*

- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree were you able to  
- Better explore your own identity, values and roles?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree were you able to  
- Better identify social issues that impact our local community?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree were you able to  
- Better understand houselessness?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree were you able to  
- Better understand different houselessness interventions?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree were you able to  
- Better understand your role as an active citizen in your community?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree were you able to-  
Feel more connected to your Edmonton community?
- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, to what degree were you able to-  
Increase knowledge of local non-profits in Edmonton that are addressing social issues

### *Scaled Questions on a scale of 1-5 (5 indicating strongly agree)*

- As a result of participating in Alternative Reading Week, I am more likely to seek future volunteer opportunities.
- I felt welcomed and appreciated during my time in Alternative Reading Week.

*Scaled Questions on a scale of 1-5 (5 indicating very engaging)*

- The presentation from Organization #5 was engaging and added to the quality of programming for Alternative Reading week.
- The presentation from the Organization #6 was engaging and added to the quality of programming for Alternative Reading week.
  
- To what degree I recommend the following organizations for future service placements. - Organization #7
  - Strongly do not recommend
  - Strongly recommend
- To what degree I recommend the following organizations for future service placements. - Organization #8
  - Strongly do not recommend
  - Strongly recommend
  
- What is one thing you learned from participating in Alternative Reading Week? (*Open Ended*)
- What was the most beneficial part of Alternative Reading Week? (*Open Ended*)
- Overall, I felt the time commitment for Alternative Reading Week was: (*Select one*)
  - Too much
  - Neutral
  - Too little
- Would you recommend to a friend or peer to participate in Alternative Reading Week? (Please explain)
  - Yes (Please explain): (*Open Ended*)
  - No (Please explain): (*Open Ended*)
- Do you have any suggestions for future ARW themes? (*Open Ended*)
- Any additional comments about the Alternative Reading Week Program? (*Open Ended*)
- Please feel free to use the space below to write thank you messages to any of our community partners or presenters. These messages will be compiled onto a digital thank you card. (*Open Ended*)

## Appendix D: Residence Services Information Sharing Agreement

### Statement of Research

The key purpose of this research project is to assess how the Alternative Reading Week program currently engages community organizations. Through this research, a list of recommendations will be generated based on interviews with community partners on how Residence Life staff can best engage their organizations in this program to ensure the community's needs are being met and the program fosters positive social change. These recommendations will be shared with the Residence Life team.

### Information Sharing Agreement

This Agreement made this June day of 8, 2022. For the AGREEMENT OF INFORMATION EXCHANGE BETWEEN Caitlin McLeod, "Primary Investigator" And Campus Services, "Residence Services".

Information created and maintained by Campus Services (via Residence Life), may be shared with Caitlin McLeod in relation to research being conducted in fulfillment of a Masters of Arts in Community Engagement at the University of Alberta.

This information may be shared with Caitlin McLeod for the purpose of providing background for her study, regarding the Alternative Reading Week curriculum, community stakeholders and assessment criteria. Ancillary Services retains the right to request information collected by Caitlin McLeod for a period of up to 1 year. The data will be kept for 5 years as per University of Alberta ethics policies.

#### Scope of the Data Request:

- Alternative Reading Week Schedules from 2019-2021, including a list of community partners who previously hosted Alternative Reading Week
- Alternative Reading Week Learning Outcomes from 2019-2021
- Alternative Reading Week Assessment Questions from 2019-2021


**The scope of the data does not include any student information, responses to program evaluation, or internal residence assessments of program success.**

The information will be provided by electronic file to Caitlin McLeod by the Community Education and Leadership Office.

Each party agrees to maintain their responsibilities in this Agreement. Each of the parties will give to the other party reasonable notice of any change in policy, regulations or statutes relating to their respective programs or services that is likely to affect this Agreement.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator  
Caitlin McLeod

June 8, 2022  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Campus Services, University of Alberta  
Laura Huxley  
Manager, Residence Life & Education

June 13, 2022  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix E: INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM

**Study Title:** Engaging Community Organizations in the Design, Implementation and Assessment of The University of Alberta Residence Services' Alternative Reading Week Community Service-Learning Program

**Research Investigator:** Caitlin McLeod

**Supervisor:** Dr. Kyle Whitfield

### Background

- You are invited to participate in this research study because your organization hosted a service-learning placement as part of the University of Alberta Residence Services' Alternative Reading Week program between the years 2019-2021
- Your contact information was obtained from our previous Alternative Reading Week contact list
- The results of this study will be used in support of my thesis and create recommendations for future Alternative Reading Week programming
- Before you make a decision, one of the researchers will go over the details of this form with you over the phone. You are encouraged to ask questions if you feel anything needs to be made clearer. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

### Purpose

- Purpose of research is to add to a body of literature examining service-learning programming from a critical lens that highlights community perspectives on service-learning programs and their involvement throughout the programs from planning to assessment.

### Study Procedures

- A 10 minute anonymous online survey
- A 45 minute long semi-structure, individual interview conducted via online video platform or phone
- Overall time commitment for participating in this research is an hour
- Data collected will refer to your experiences, insights, and feedback regarding the role of your community organization in engaging in the Alternative Reading Week program, and opportunities and barriers to ensuring this program is more community- centered.

- Stored data will not contain any identifiable information
- This data will not be used for future studies.
- University policy recommends data be stored for five years, after which the data will be destroyed.

### Benefits

- Your organization will benefit from this study by providing feedback and insight that can help shape the Alternative Reading Week program and future relationships with how Residence Services engages you in this program.
- I hope that the information we get from doing this study will generate recommendations and strategies for Residence Services to better meet the needs of community organizations and their desired engagement levels in the Alternative Reading Week program.
- This study will add to a limited area of research of examining service-learning programming from the perspective of community partners.

### Risk

- There may be risks to being in this study that are not known. If we learn anything during the research that may affect your willingness to continue being in the study, we will tell you right away.
- Participate information will be kept confidential and any possible identifiable information will be removed from interview data, to help mitigate any potential risks to social relationships or reputation.

### Voluntary Participation

- You are under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary
- All questions in the online survey and interview are optional and you are not obliged to answer any specific questions even if participating in the study.
- Even if you agree to be in the study you can change your mind and withdraw at any time. Your interview data can be withdrawn from two weeks after the interview was conducted and removed from the study.
- Participants can request to be removed from the study or to have their interview data withdrawn by email ([caitlin.mcleod@ualberta.ca](mailto:caitlin.mcleod@ualberta.ca)).

### Confidentiality & Anonymity

- You or your community organization will not be personally identified in any of the research findings.



- Research findings will be used to generate my Masters thesis, create a high-level summary of research findings shared with all participants and used to create recommended strategies for future Alternative Reading Week Programming.
- Only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to the data.

**Contact Information**

- If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact:
  - Caitlin McLeod
  - [caitlin.mcleod@ualberta.ca](mailto:caitlin.mcleod@ualberta.ca)
  - 780.231.6282
- "The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers."

**Consent Statement**

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name (printed) and Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

## Appendix F: Initial Survey Questions

1. Have you previously acted as the primary contact for your organization in coordinating your organization's involvement in the University of Alberta Residence Services' Alternative Reading Week program? *(Select One)*

- Yes
- No
- Other (please explain):

2. What are some of your organization's primary goals for hosting a service placement or learning opportunity in the Alternative Reading Week program? *(Open Ended)*

3. Please describe what you view as the role of your organization in hosting a service placement or learning opportunity as part of the Alternative Reading Week program? *(Open Ended)*

4. What would your organization's ideal level of involvement be in the planning of a service placement or learning opportunity in the Alternative Reading Week Program? *(Open Ended)*

5. What would your organization's ideal level of involvement be in the assessment of a service placement or learning opportunity in the Alternative Reading Week Program? *(Open Ended)*

6. What barriers are there for your organization when engaging with Residence Services staff on hosting service placements and/or learning opportunities? *(Open Ended)*

7. Any additional comments regarding how Residence Services staff could best engage and work with your organization when coordinating service placements and/or learning opportunities as part of the Alternative Reading Week program? *(Open Ended)*

## Appendix G: Interview Questions

1. Please describe your previous experience with the Alternative Reading Week program or service learning programs.
  - a. What goes well
  - b. What are the challenges, barriers or areas to improve
  - c. Where are opportunities to do things differently
  
2. What goals and/or outcomes do you hope to achieve for your community organization by participating in service learning programs such as the Alternative Reading Week Program?
  - a. Do you have goals and outcomes in mind for the students who participate in these programs?
  - b. Do you feel like your organization's goals and needs are represented in these programs?
  
3. What does engagement in these types of programs mean to you?
  - a. What does your ideal engagement with Residence Staff on these programs look like?
  - b. What is your ideal engagement timeline?
  
4. How would you describe your ideal role in service learning programs such as Alternative Reading week?
  - a. What is your ideal role when engaging with the student participants?

- b. What is your ideal role when engaging with University of Alberta Residence Staff?
5. Are there areas in the planning process of service learning programs such as Alternative Reading Week that you would like to be more involved in?
  - a. What type of preparation (if any) should be facilitated prior to students engaging with your organization to best orient them to the unique culture, environment and community that you work with?
  - b. What are barriers or challenges to staff engaging your organization during the planning stages of these programs?
  - c. Any strategies or ideas to overcome these challenges?
6. What opportunities are there to better engage your organization in the assessment of these programs?
  - a. Is there any feedback or assessment of learning (such as survey questions, knowledge checks, etc) that you would like to assess in regards to the student's learning that would be helpful for your organization?
  - b. How can Residence Services staff best engage your organization in the reflection and feedback process of these programs?
  - c. Do you feel as though there is space created to provide feedback to staff on your experience? Is this something you would be interested in?
7. Time and capacity can be a concern for both the university's staff as well as the community organization. Are there strategies or suggestions you have in how staff can most effectively or efficiently engage with your group?

8. How can Residence Staff strengthen relationships with community organizations when engaging together on service learning programs such as Alternative Reading Week?