My name is Rylee Brooke Kamahele and I am the founder of The Catalyst's Club, a nonprofit based in Hawaii that has been operating since 2016, when I established it at the age of 8. I am thrilled to share the incredible journey of our organization and the impact we have made in our community. The Catalyst's Club began with a deep-rooted passion for helping others and an understanding and compassion for those facing injustices and hardship. From the inspiration behind the project to the execution of various initiatives, we have strived to fulfill our mission: to create and provide opportunities for children and youth to be a catalyst for change that makes a positive impact on the world. This report will delve into the key components of my civic engagement project, highlighting the growth and understanding I have experienced in my role as a change-maker.

Inspiration

The Catalyst's Club was built upon the foundations of my personal experiences and upbringing. My involvement with a Christian program called Life 360, which served at-risk youth, exposed me to the transformative power of service from an early age. Volunteering alongside my parents instilled in me a profound sense of purpose and ignited my drive to create meaningful change. Winning the title of Miss Hawaii Elementary America 2016 at just 8 years old shed light on the challenges young individuals face in participating in community service projects. Undeterred, I persevered and demonstrated my dedication to various organizations. Furthermore, my family’s resilience in the face of financial hardships stemming from my father’s car accident, caused by a drunk driver, taught me the value of empathy and support for those in need.

This led to the creation of the Love is a Verb Foundation and later, The Catalyst’s Club which is now an umbrella 501c3 for eight youth-run organizations I founded, including The Secret Santa Project Hawaii, Promise to our Keiki, Mogul in the Making Initiative, Cultivate Hope in Hawaii, SySTEMs Driven by Impact, The Catalyst Cubs Community Leo Club, and Catalysts Leadership Academy. Each organization fulfills unique roles in serving the community and simultaneously cultivates leadership skills in youth through their respective programs.

Project Plan

Our project had a clear vision: to establish a network of youth-led organizations, each dedicated to a specific aspect of community service, advocacy, leadership, and empowerment. I started with establishing the Love is a Verb Foundation and then co-founded The Secret Santa Project Hawaii. With unique missions and programs, these organizations aimed to make a difference in
various areas, such as providing joyful Christmas experiences for children in need, fighting for environmental conservation, and addressing animal welfare. To amplify our impact, we formed partnerships with trusted organizations.

Recognizing that community service alone has its limits, I took a step further and co-founded Promise to Our Keiki, focusing on advocating for legislative changes that aligned with our missions and tackling social injustices. As our influence grew, we united all these initiatives under The Catalyst's Club, welcoming five more youth-run organizations in 2023. Together, we strive to create positive change and empower our communities.

Details of the Projects Execution

Having been established in 2016, our organization has a substantial history of both past and ongoing projects. Within the timeframe of May 15, 2022, to May 22, 2023, we have undertaken numerous impactful initiatives. For the purpose of this report, I will narrow my focus to highlight one specific service project from this period.

The Secret Santa Project Hawaii has brought the joy of Christmas to thousands of children in need. Through donation drives and personalized gift deliveries, we aim to create memorable experiences for children and their families. Our events provide not only gifts but a true Christmas experience. We have served over 500 children and their families each year since we began in 2016.

The annual Secret Santa Project of Hawaii never fails to leave us with cherished memories and make a tremendous impact. What sets our program apart is its unique approach. It is entirely managed by youth, with even 4-year-olds joining us as volunteers. Additionally, we operate on a tight schedule, with just two weeks to prepare. This timeframe allows us to focus on programs and children that may be overlooked or underserved by larger, well-funded organizations. Within this limited period, we organize large events at shelters or adopted program sites, and we share individual wishlists from each child on our social media platform, enabling Secret Santas to fulfill their wishes through personalized shopping experiences.

In December 2022, our Secret Santa Project kicked off with our familiar two-week rush. We received requests from various families, including individual households, the Waianae Civic Center Shelter, Malama Kulana Hospital, and Life 360. We established our operations at Hawaii Self Storage, where they graciously provided us with multiple units as our basecamp for the duration. To ensure a smooth donation process, we strategically established multiple donation sites across the island. As items were dropped off by donors, our responsibility included timely pickups and transportation of the donated items to our storage facility. This logistical coordination allowed us to efficiently gather all contributions and consolidate them in one central location.

This year marked one of our smallest endeavors, with fewer recipients, and it posed a unique challenge as we encountered difficulties in securing donations. As the week before Christmas
approached, only a third of our wishlists had been fulfilled. With a modest budget of $5000, we had to orchestrate two events, purchase gifts for nearly 200 children, and acquire essentials such as tape and wrapping paper. To ensure we stayed within our financial limitations and could provide presents for our recipients, our team devoted several days to intensive shopping, tirelessly working from morning till night. Our aim was to meet both the wants and needs listed on each wishlist. It is always striking to see that many of the kids request items that most children tend to take for granted, such as toilet paper, school supplies, shoes, and blankets.

After completing the shopping phase, we labeled and delivered the items to the storage facility, where our dedicated youth volunteers wrapped and organized the gifts. Every single wishlist was successfully fulfilled, but our work did not end there.

Our attention then turned towards ensuring a memorable Christmas experience for each family and ensuring the delivery of all gifts. Our plans involved organizing two events, one for Life 360 and another for Waianae Civic Center. Additionally, we aimed to assemble care packages comprising family activities for both individual families and those in the hospital. Given the high-risk health conditions of the children in Kulana Malama, we were unable to host a party-style event. Nevertheless, we sought to enhance their holiday season by providing supplementary gift packages featuring delightful items such as gingerbread houses, Christmas activities, and board games.

The days leading up to Christmas were filled with meaningful moments and impactful actions. We began by delivering gifts to a brave young boy fighting medulloblastoma, a type of cancer. Collaborating with Yuri Williams and Rodney Smith Jr., we organized a special surprise for him. They adopted his wishlist and embarked on a shopping spree, culminating in a heartwarming event at a hotel ballroom where his family was treated to an impressive display of toys and a tablet for him. We ensured his family had a Christmas activity kit and fulfilled all the need items on his wishlist.

Next, we made our way to Kulana Malama and did individual family deliveries. Loaded with presents, our team visited the hospital, engaging with the children through the hospital glass window. Delivering gifts to individual families was a more intricate task. We divided into two groups to deliver across Oahu, and diligently brought joy to households over a span of two days. Additionally, with the help of a community partner, we transported a bicycle and several gift boxes to Hilo on Hawaii Island, reaching a family there.

Our event at Waianae Civic Center, two days prior to Christmas, was a highlight. After renting a U-Haul truck to transport all the gifts and party supplies, we gathered donated food and refreshments from sponsors. At the shelter, we set up an array of activities including games, performances by Love is a Verb's Team Hawaii Takeover, a prize redemption center, a family photo booth, and dedicated tables for essential items and donated goods. The atmosphere was festive, featuring gingerbread houses, Christmas tree ice cream cones, cornhole and other games, and even a Kona Ice shaved ice truck for families to enjoy. The night provided an opportunity for families to experience a genuine Christmas together, momentarily forgetting
the challenges they face. Our dedicated youth volunteers ensured smooth operations and that every child had a memorable time with their loved ones.

Lastly, on Christmas Day, we held an event with Life 360 at a gym. The setup included games, activities, a photo booth, and delicious food and refreshments, including the addition of a Kona Ice truck. In total, our efforts reached approximately 500 children.

Examples of Demonstrated Impact on the Community

Over the years, we have executed numerous community service projects, advocacy campaigns, and leadership initiatives. Here are a few examples:

1. Since its establishment in 2016, Love is a Verb Foundation has played a crucial role in offering youth valuable opportunities to volunteer and lead. Through our 12 programs and collaborations with other organizations, we inspire young individuals to transform their passions into meaningful contributions. Our diverse range of programs encompasses important areas such as animal welfare advocacy through the Hashtag Speak Up Movement and environmental conservation promoted by The Plastics Project. By addressing these pressing issues, we not only make a positive impact but also nurture leadership abilities among young people. Moreover, we extend our outreach through programs like Alohi Strong for children with medical needs, Heart for Hawaii to assist families in need, and Goals in Reach to promote sports outreach, among other impactful initiatives. Some of our annual activity includes at least one major beach or community cleanup where youth remove several tons of plastic and debris from Hawaii’s coastlines, personalized services to 2 to 4 children facing medical challenges such as providing funding for iPads, performance outreaches, or raising money for treatment, and we participate in the rescue and rehabilitation of countless animals as well as provide educational outreach to several schools about animal welfare.

2. Promise to our Keiki, founded in 2018, focuses on creating young leaders who advocate for change through education. We engage in issues related to environmental conservation, climate change, social injustices, the preservation of Native cultures, and the overall well-being of our communities. Our programs, such as Make your Mark and Leave your Legacy, provide educational opportunities and platforms for youth to amplify their voices and drive positive change. We empower youth to be active in legislative processes, public speaking, and creating impactful documentaries and books. Most recently, we played a large part in passing Hawaii’s plastic phase out law, the Pledge to our Keiki initiative, and educational initiatives for incoming visitors to the islands. Additionally, I have personally challenged the State of Hawaii’s Department of Transportation in a legal battle concerning their contribution to climate change through increased carbon emissions, which contradicts the state’s mandated deadlines for reducing Hawaii’s environmental impact.
Growth in Understanding of Civic Virtue, Knowledge of Communities, and Impact

My journey with The Catalyst's Club has been transformative, fostering personal growth and deepening my understanding of civic virtue, community knowledge, and the ability to support my community and make an impact. Through our initiatives, we have demonstrated growth in civic virtue by upholding integrity, empathy, perseverance, and collaboration as we work towards creating positive change. Engaging with various organizations and community members has given me clear and valuable insights into their needs, enabling us to tailor our initiatives for maximum impact. As we continue to expand and make a lasting difference, The Catalyst's Club is dedicated to empowering young leaders, promoting community engagement, and addressing pressing social challenges.