

**Question 4: Describe a problem you've solved or would like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma- anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.**

**Foundation:** If it could be anything in the world, I'd love to eliminate domestic/sexual abuse and all it entails. Since the summer leading into my junior year, I've been working with a program called Start Strong that works to promote healthy relationships and prevent dating violence among teens. And being both a victim and an advocate regarding domestic violence, I can attest to its detrimental entrapment and the aftermath of its wrath. Being with Start Strong, I try everyday to enforce the the importance of healthy relationships, especially to those grade 7 and up. Because the children truly are our future, and by instilling this into them now, it'll hopefully ensure the safety and prosperity of our adolescents and the generations to come.

- 1. What does a typical work day look like?** During the school year, we work Tuesday-Thursday from 3:30-6 pm. Tuesdays we check-in, icebreaker, general business, and then we split up into our community center groups to prep for Wednesday. Wednesday we go straight to our assigned community centers and are there same time (3:30-6) and teach whichever lesson was prepared for that day. And Thursday, check-in, icebreaker, and then we usually have guest speakers or workshops or something of the sort.
- 2. How would you characterize your work?** I'd say empowering or fulfilling. And super educational
- 3. Do you feel your sense of purpose here?** Definitely.
- 4. How would you bring this work to your college campus?** Honestly, I'm not sure. Like I know the information and lessons will always be instilled in me, but if I had the time, I wouldn't mind like starting a group or whatever helping people who are survivors or worried about a friend or anything of the sort to come and get real and efficient information.
- 5. What do you wish every teen would realize about relationships *before* the relationship became violent?** That every relationship isn't the same, so you can't base your experience off of someone else's and that you should always have a support system, even without you being in a relationship, everyone needs support.
- 6. What do you think are the main causes of domestic violence and how do you counsel a victim to a place of safety?** I think the main causes are distorted or neglectful childhoods/pasts and any bullying or maltreatment. You never tell a victim what they should do, you as a friend or loved are to somewhat guide them to the realization without them knowing what you're doing so it's more like they figured it out for themselves.

**VOCAB:**

**Parasite**

**Domestic Violence**

**My trauma**

The first time I met Jonathan, he'd walked in with Ace; a coworker, great friend and the closest embodiment to the heart of Boston I can imagine. They were both engulfed in the abyss of gang violence and omnipresence of poverty. Ace knew there wasn't much left to be done for himself, already 18 and barely staying afloat in his last year of high school. But Jonathan was only 16; we'd hoped to wrestle him from underneath the mountain of stigmas regarding men of color and the realities they created. I'd never met someone so eager to learn, soaking up every morsel of material we threw at him, in hopes of it negating all that the hood had ingrained into him. But it wasn't enough, his decomposition had already begun. I met Jonathan in October of 2014, and by June, I was standing on the corner of Fuller St. placing a candle at his memorial.

For the past 2 years I've been a Peer Leader 3-4 days a week in a program called Start Strong--based out of the Boston Public Health Commission--that works to promote healthy relationships and prevent dating violence among teens and adolescents. We delve into topics that vary from trauma, pornography, and government; recognizing their prominent roles in today's society and the minds of our youth. But the depth of what we do comes into play on Wednesdays. There's about 25 of us who lead the lives of Peer Leaders; we're assigned to different community centers throughout the city, and disseminate the philosophy we've been trained to teach. Over a course of 16 weeks, we inform inner-city youth about the benefits and relevance of healthy relationships and self-advocacy. We explore the possibility of a sex-positive world and how race, class, and gender specifically influence the LGBTQ community. This is a line of work that saves lives. And through it, these children absorb, interpret, and learn to live healthier lives, despite the environments in which they find themselves. We erect bonds with each and every child; making them a part of our lives just as much as we are now a part of theirs. Through Start Strong, we're able to rehabilitate the coming generations and ensure a better tomorrow.

I've found so much of who I am while working with Start Strong and can't imagine the person I'd be without them. They're my family. And from the dealings with my own trauma, I know of the undetectable masses, aimlessly wandering throughout life, fragmented and hindered by innumerable burdens they feel cannot be surmounted. And now, I'm trained not only to identify, but support that slighted influx. I hope that wherever this path takes me, I can assemble a unit that serves as a safe space to those in need and an informant for whomever seeks service. I aspire to make that connection and leave an impact of ineffable magnitude at your institution, just as Start Strong has for me. This passion is in no way related to the coursework in which I wish to pursue in my collegiate career, but is of equal if not exceeding importance. Domestic/sexual violence and abuse are affairs of comparable significance to those such as homelessness and poverty. Epidemics that sweep not only our nation, but the 196 countries that form this Earth. And out of all those people, it only takes one; to break the rose-colored glasses we've all become accustomed to using and shed some light on the gore that is reality. One to repudiate the ways of a patriarchal hegemonic society that has become our norm. *Someone* has to provide a voice to those who've been silenced, *someone* has to pave the way, and *today*, that someone is going to be me.