



Mark
Pan

Mark Pan became deeply involved in the issue of homelessness in high school; he created a camp for homeless youth, immersion experiences to educate on the issue, and a formal community workshop that grew out of his research. He also managed the high school branches of California's American Cancer Society, served as class president, and represented California in the US Public Service Academy. At Penn he developed further interests in educational issues and has been active in scores of ways. He teaches hip hop dance at local elementary schools through the CityStep Program, helps staff a self-empowerment community resource center (LIFT), engages in student government policymaking as an elected member of the Undergraduate Assembly (where he initiated the UA's Civic & Community Engagement Committee) and has been a peer and residential advisor through the College House system. Mark graduates as an Urban Studies major and Urban Education minor in the College.

CAPSTONE PROJECT

An Illusion of Safety: Background Checks for Philadelphia and Penn Students Volunteering in Public Schools

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In 2007, Pennsylvania public schools started requiring all volunteers in its schools to annually pass three background checks: the Pennsylvania State Police Request for Criminal Records, the Federal Criminal History Record, and the Child Abuse History Clearance. The sum of these checks comes out to \$56 per year. Several issues soon arose. The first is safety; to what extent do background checks prevent and deter criminal behaviors in volunteers? Are there people of certain demographics that are more likely to have criminal backgrounds? The second is volunteerism. Is volunteerism stunted because of the background check process, or is it as efficient as it could be in balancing volunteerism with safety? Third, how efficiently are these background checks being processed? This includes the early stages of instructing volunteers to submit the forms, receiving processed checks and storing them in secure spaces. Finally, why do the three checks cost as much or little as they do?

With these questions in mind, this thesis analyzes to what extent background check practices and policies are aligned with practicality and safety. The primary claim is that although background checks are a significant hindrance to volunteerism, universities and their service centers are doing little to assist in the process in terms of both information and financial support. Sub-claims include that background checks' efficacies are unproven and merely illusions of safety. Furthermore, many unnecessary and duplicate checks are being conducted by volunteer groups.