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## Coastal Waccamaw Stormwater: Education Consortium

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Kove Lambert

Coastal Waccamaw Stormwater: Education Consortium

The Village Group in Georgetown

Since working at the Coastal Waccamaw Stormwater Education Consortium at The Village Group in Georgetown, I realized that there are hundreds of thousands of young students who do not have fun educational experiences to do in the summer. That is exactly why Mr. Funnye created what is referred to as The Village Group, a summer program for students from second all the way up to ninth grade. Their mission is “to serve as a bridge in Georgetown County for Youth and their families toward education, college and career readiness to make positive changes in their lives as well as develop a sense of urgency, identity, and self-value, resulting in a more resilient and sustainable community (The Village Group, 2021).”<sup>1</sup> Not only does The Village Group allow students from Georgetown County to come but also from Horry County and other surrounding areas. “According to Kids Count, nearly 40% of children in Georgetown County were living in single-parent households, many of them existing below the poverty level. These single parent households are struggling to make a living, let alone pay for their children's education (The Village Group, 2020) .”<sup>2</sup> However, with implementation of The Village Group, students will now have out-of-school summer day programs to tutor students, provide books, a special reading space, prep students for state/national (ACT, SAT) testing, expand their cultural horizons, expose them to new career paths, and encourage good citizenship all while discouraging drug use. Unfortunately, there are very few, if any, other programs available that are as comprehensive as or that bring this large a range of collaboration to the

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academic needs of their youth. As you continue to read on, you will learn that without proper education for the 2-3 months of summer, most student fall behind academically by years. That is why I truly believe that more counties all around the world should adopt The Village Groups model for education and start molding their youth to become outstanding citizens, not only during the school year but during the summer as well.

The Village Group has connections with so many of the Sustainable Development Goals it is hard to choose just one. With all the field trips, books, laptops, activities and food being covered by the donations from various companies, officials and programs. Children and their parents do not have to worry about many expenses at all and that correlates directly with #1 No Poverty. In order to stop poverty or greatly decrease it, it starts with the youth. Teaching them and allowing children to have a good education will substantially decrease the poverty rate in 2030. Target 1.1 of the sustainability goals states, “By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day (United Nations, 2021).”<sup>3</sup> Although my students are all students and do not own their own property or know what microfinancing is, their parents do, and the village group is all about saving their parents money and educating their child. This is directly related 1.4 “By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance (United Nations, 2021).”<sup>4</sup>

Normally in summer camp the students must bring their lunch, however at The Village Group they not only serve lunch but also breakfast and dinner to all the children. By providing

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all three meals to every student that directly correlates with #2 Zero Hunger. Since most schools only run from September to June, that leaves 2 full months out of the year where some students may not be getting the sufficient supply of meals daily. This is directly the opposite of sustainable development target 2.1 says, “By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round (Howard, 2015).”<sup>5</sup> However since The Village Group is during the summer it allows the students and faculty members to eat 3 meals a day year-round.

With multiple outdoor activities like bike club, basketball, flag football, swimming ...etc. as well as a zero-drug tolerance policy #3 good health/ well-being is taken care of. There is multiple fun, athletic and safe activities for the students at The Village Group to participate in, while also learning about STEM related fields. Mr. Ray Funney, the Executive director of The Village Group, believes that the health and well-being of his students is extremely important, which is why there are multiple outdoor activities for the students to do, so they can release all their stress and get exercise as well. He completed a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering Technology from Savannah State University, then went on to work for an engineering firm in Atlanta. After several years he worked for several other companies in that area in engineering, construction, transit and other fields, he even worked in the U.S. Virgin Island for some time. He then came back home to Georgetown where he became the Director of the Public Service Department, “now managing about 100 people and oversees a \$12.2 million operating budget and \$10.4 million capital improvement budget (United Nations, 2021).”<sup>6</sup> Although he has accomplished so much, he is a very humble, generous, kind and compassionate man who is completely against drug use and wants nothing more than to see his students succeed in life. Like

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most of the children in The Village Group Mr. Funney was born in Georgetown with humble beginnings, but he is such a big role model to all the students because of what he has accomplished. By having a role model in The Village Group like Mr. Ray Funney, students will be more likely to care about their health and well-being and less likely to do drugs. Not to mention there are signs on every hallway that states, “Choosing to be DRUG FREE is an AWESOME way to be!” This promotes healthy choices for the children to follow. As well as a poster that gives the long- and short-term effects of opioids and gives students tips on how to refuse using opioids if ever offered. All this correlates directly to target 3.5 “Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol (United Nations, 2021).”<sup>7</sup>

For the most important Sustainable Development Goal that The Village Group covers #4 Quality education. The Village Group hosts so many fun and educational activities the children do every day during the summer such as visiting local museums and industries such as Boeing, BMW and Port authority. Since my students in The Village Group range from 2-9th grade, that means I teach children early-childhood development and pre-primary education in order to prepare them for primary education which is directly related to. Target 4.2, “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education (United Nations, 2021).”<sup>8</sup> Students will also visit Historic Sites in/near Washington, DC such as Smithsonian National Air and Space Museums. All these field trips allow the students to make connections between what they have been learning in school and how it applies to the real world. Target 4.1 “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to

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relevant and effective learning outcomes (United Nations, 2021).”<sup>9</sup> Students who come to The Village Group will improve on the math and reading abilities, along with an improved understanding of and aptitude with technology. “Not to mention skills in appearing before people, playing sports or increasing an understanding of teamwork, improves self-discipline and appropriate public behavior while reducing an individual’s anxiety in these situations (The Village Group, 2018).”<sup>10</sup> Target 4.4 “By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.”<sup>11</sup> Broadening these students' view on how what they learn actually relates to the real world, increases knowledge, helps mold positive attitudes, and potentially could raise their own self- expectations.

The Village Group like many other summer programs does not discriminate against any race, gender, sexual orientation, person with disabilities and certainly not against children in vulnerable situations. Which directly hits the target 4.5 “By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations (United Nations, 2021).”<sup>12</sup> Also Target 4.a “Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all (United Nations, 2021).”<sup>13</sup>

Almost everywhere in the entire world will have rich, middle class and poor families. However not everywhere in the world will provide the proper education to certain poor families

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because they can't afford it. The tenth sustainable development goal is to # 10 reduce inequality, by certain schools and areas refusing children to be able to acquire a proper education simply because their parents can't afford it, is handicapping these bright young children from becoming the best versions of themselves. Most of these children who come to The Village Group are below middle class and 40% of them come from a single parent household. Their parents do not have the money to send their children to a prestigious middle or high school, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't be getting the same education as those other children. A study by Harvard economists rates Georgetown, SC, as a county where "poor children have the most difficulty in the country climbing the income ladder (The Village Group, 2018)."<sup>14</sup> The link between lack of education and poverty is profound. In fact, "52% of Georgetown residents who did NOT GRADUATE from high school live below the poverty level (The Village Group, 2018)."<sup>15</sup> Just about 90% of the children of The Village Group are African American, however they are very inclusive to all sex, race, religion, disability...etc. This directly correlates to the target goal of 10.2 which states "By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status (United Nations, 2021)."<sup>16</sup> Former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said the nation's dropout rate is "unsustainably high for a knowledge-based economy and unacceptably high in our African-American communities (The Village Group, 2018)."<sup>17</sup> This is partially due to loss of schooling during the summer months, mostly for young low income students who are learning to read and write. As students keep not learning during the summer months, the lack of educational months will slowly catch up to them. By fifth grade, children will be about 3 years

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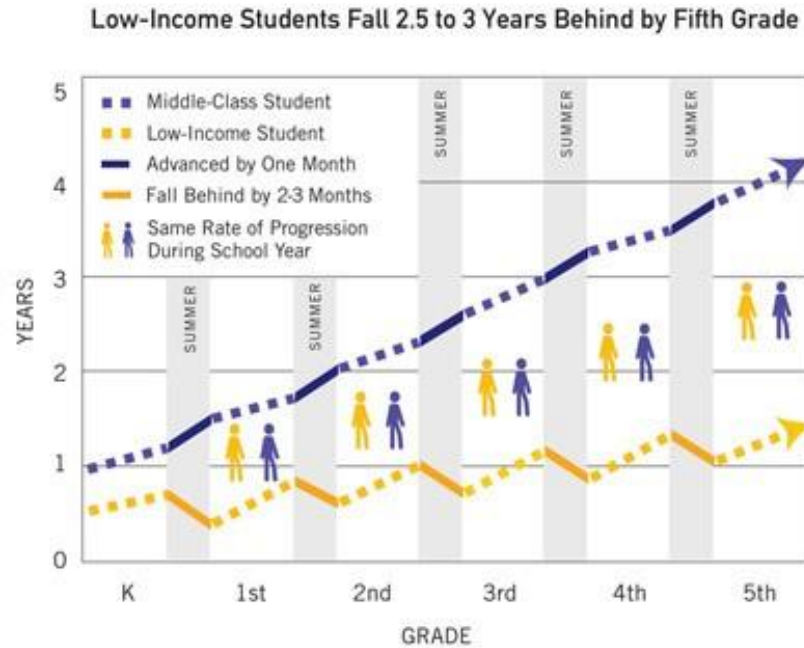
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behind in reading and writing, then the other students who continue their learning throughout the summer months, even if it is just 6 weeks out of the summer, this is called the achievement gap.



Source: Cooper, H., Borman, G., & Fairchild, R. (2010). "School Calendars and Academic Achievement." In J. Meece & J. Eccles (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Schools, Schooling, and Human Development* (pp. 342-355). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

“The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college-completion rates, among other success measures. It is most often used to describe the troubling performance gaps between African-American and Hispanic students (Ansell, 2020).”<sup>18</sup> As you can imagine by the time these students hit high school there are multiple levels behind and therefore the dropout rate for low-income African Americans is so high. The Harvard study authors, Raj Chetty and Nathaniel Hendren, concluded, “The broader lesson of our analysis is that social mobility should be tackled at the local level (The Village Group, 2018).”<sup>19</sup>

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This is precisely why The Village Group was created, to give those students in our community who didn't have the money for a proper education, books, field trips... etc. a fighting chance to break free from that poverty line. This is exactly what the county of Georgetown wants, like many other historic counties all over the world. Georgetown wants to grow larger and wealthier while keeping in tacked to their history. What better way to do that than by having the children of Georgetown County grow up to be successful leaders and politicians of Georgetown. That way there are people who have lived their whole lives and care so much about their home running Georgetown County in the near future. That is why The Village Group of Georgetown County, is composed of community leaders, parents, elders and concerned citizens with one common interest: To improve the community and build a brighter future for their children. The Village Group provides a stepping-stone for their youth to move to a brighter future. Their belief is that if they care for their youth, they will give back to the community in the future. One example of a student giving back to the community is Rayshaud Brown, he was a member of the first session of The Village Groups summer academy. He loved to be challenged by the multiple different curriculums like reading, language arts, math skills and other STEM related topics. Soon Rayshaud became a very crucial part of The Village Group when he started working there as a paid staff member. Even after graduating from Carvers Bay Highschool, he continued to work for The Village Group every summer because "He believes this key program feature of The Village Group can help other kids and adults in Plantersville and throughout Georgetown County grow in their person and in being a productive part of the community (Courier, 2021)."<sup>20</sup> The Village Group inspired him to become an elementary school teacher for Forest Heights Elementary School in Columbia.

In fact, Georgetown County wants their youth to succeed and get a great education, so they provided WIFI hotspots to local students located at the Plantersville Cultural Center and the Plantersville Community Center. Since the children were all out of school last year due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, all of them had to work on their computers from home. Georgetown takes the initiative to provide every student with a Chromebook even when their learning is not remote. However, many students in that area do not have access to good internet connection, if even at all, which as we all know would make eLearning very difficult for lots of these children as well as their families. So, HTC and The Village Group provided “Wi-Fi hotspots, which will be accessible in the centers’ parking lots Monday-Saturday from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. (Howard, 2015).”<sup>21</sup> This allows the students optimal amount of time to do their online eLearning education in a safe well socially distance area. Mr. Ray Funnye, executive director of The Village Group, said. “With these Wi-Fi hotspots, we’ll be able to continue to support our local children virtually and help ensure they finish out the school year successfully (Courier, 2021).”<sup>22</sup> This is just truly amazing how both organizations came together to fully bridge the digital gap in a safe and affordable way, for students and families in Plantersville.

Unlike most STEM related camps, The Village Group is an in-person camp that buses their students, to and from home as well as fieldtrips. They also allow for all the students to learn about all different types of topics relating to stem instead of just one particular field for the entirety of the camp. STEM Builders Learning Center is a program that holds multiple different summer and winter camps for children of all ages but for all different subjects. The camps consist of accelerated math, senior robotics camp, Program and build drones, ect... The downfall about this is that a student must pay for one specific camp for 2 weeks and learn about that

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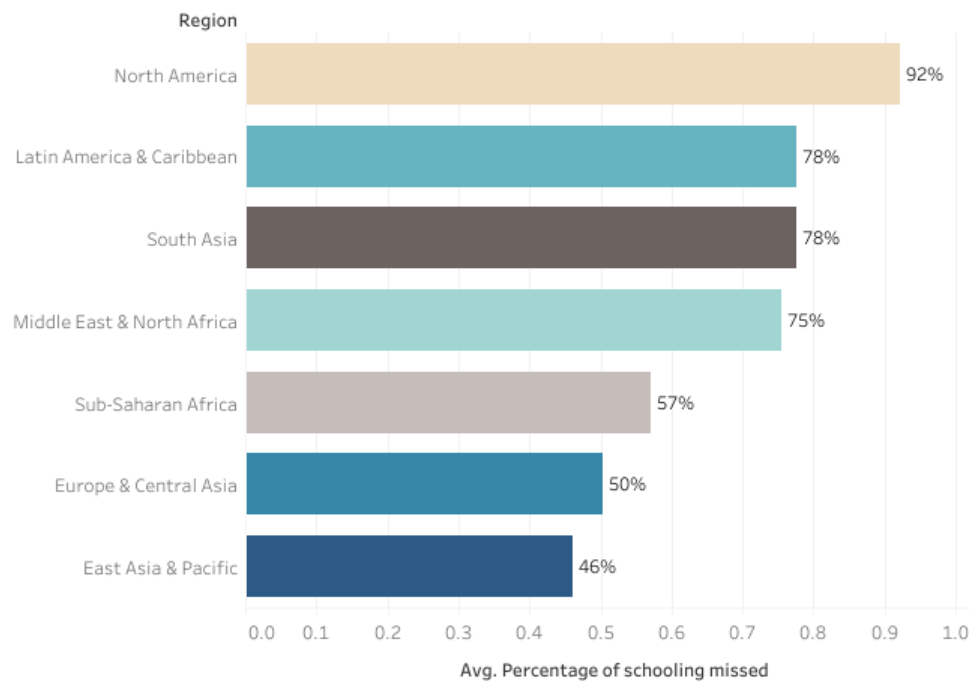
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singular topic. There are no educational fieldtrips that the students will be attending, and they are either virtual or driven by their parents if a location is reasonably close to them. Both programs have professionals for each field teaching the students, however with The Village Group, students will be presented with multiple different subjects and fields that will either pique their interest or allow them to realize they do not particularly like that subject. With STEM Builders Learning Centers, a student is stuck in one camp for a limited time, learning about a particular subject day in and day out. This style of education could eventually burn out the student's interest in the subject all together and cause them to resent it, or the opposite will happen, a student will live and breathe that topic ultimately becoming obsessed with it. Although both ways of education are useful, I truly believe that exposing students to multiple subjects and allowing them to choose for themselves what they love is better than the opposite. Another aspect about The Village Group is that it is a 6 weeklong program that will not only teach their students about STEM topics but allow them to speak with professionals who are working in the career field there learning about. Therefore, the field trips are so important because it takes the students out of there comfort zone and forces them to learn outside of the classroom.

As the Coronavirus continues to keep our world in a quarantined state, low-income areas with low-cost schools are being forced to close due to loss of faculty and staff without virtual learning available (Perakis and Erin 2021). This is having a horrible education impact on the students because instead of missing the typical 2-3 months of schooling during the summer, they could be missing months of school during the school year. Children in North America have had the least in-person education: on average schools have been fully open for just 8 percent of the last 12 months (Perakis and Erin 2021). As you can see from the figure below, almost

Average Percentage of Schooling Missed



every student across the globe had lost 46% if not more in-person schooling due to the pandemic. Now this is not that big of a deal for high income areas because of online learning abilities although it did provide to have a learning curve. However, for low-income areas like sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia where some schools didn't have access to online learning, they missed approximately 4-5 months of their normal school year. This will cause a major setback on these students learning outcomes for months if not years. As I said in previous paragraphs students who do not do summer education programs for just 2 summers, fall just

about 1 year behind other students who do summer education programs. Now these children in low-income areas who have completely missed about 50% of education during the regular school could fall behind by months if not years due to the coronavirus. The impact that lack of education through missed schooling will have on the students around the world still has no data since some schools still have not opened yet. As schools due start to open back whenever that may be, I suggest that they require all students to go to a summer academy program just like The Village Group even if it is just for 6 weeks out of the summer. This way students can try and make up for the achievement gap that they did not choose to have.

Although The Village Group is a small non-profit of 50 staff members and about 150 students, it has a decently large impact on the people of this world and how they treat it. About 200 students from all around Georgetown and Horry County come every summer for The Village Groups 6-week program. They get taught Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Reading, Writing, Robotics...etc. While learning about these subjects, students get to go on field trips all around to certain places that directly correlate to what they have been learning about in class. When the students start to make connections between what they do in the classroom and how/what it is used for in real life, they really start to learn and understand how and why things are done. This allows the students to become more intelligent and wiser at a young age, giving them a leg up from all the other students. Some students will meet someone they admire on one of the field trips and be inspired to want to become that person's occupation.

My first week interning for Coastal Waccamaw Stormwater Education Consortium at The Village Group in Georgetown, we were teaching the children what a watershed is and how water from the rain ends up in our lakes, rivers and oceans. We had two huge watershed replicas, a coastal and homestead one. They were each 1000 dollars and came with little buildings, boats,

cars, tractors, trees, animals...etc. The children got to set it all and play with them, we also gave them their own watersheds to paint, and they absolutely loved it. But as I was interning there, I realized that these students most like other students love to learn about real world things that occur during their everyday lives. Also, they learn the best when it doesn't feel like learning, what I mean is when a student is having fun and pretending to make it literally rain on a small watershed. They observe how the fake soil turns the water brown and then slowly flows down into our bodies of water that they see every day. As I watch the students laugh and scream with joy when water gets on their clothes, or they spray the fake farm animals. It gives me joy knowing that they're subconsciously learning that when rain falls on parts of the earth with loose soil, that water can become contaminated with different bacteria and end up in our water sources. This exercise that we use to teach the children about watersheds is directly correlated to sustainable development goal #6 water/sanitation. Then after all the fun is over, we explain to them why that occurs and how that directly correlates to our everyday world.



Target 4.7, “By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development (United Nations, 2021)”<sup>23</sup>, is being fulfilled everyday by multiple teachers and field trips that the students go on. All the knowledge the students are learning is to help them gain skills that are needed to promote sustainable development for all of those. I recently went to a science presentation by a few children from The Village Group. It was in the middle of a very busy street in Georgetown at The Rice Museum. These children were

presenting what they had learned just weeks earlier to anyone off the street who was willing to listen to these 2-6 graders. The students were teaching people all about the Gullah-Geechee



people, who were a group of people from thousands of years ago that were indigenous to west Africa. “Gullah/Geechee people are descendants of enslaved Africans from various ethnic groups of west and central Africa brought to the United States and forced to work on the plantations of coastal South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida (Howard, 2020).”<sup>24</sup> I learned about their culture, language, lifestyles, food, crops and how they used aquaponics to help their crops grow and stay alive during the summer months when there was little rainfall. This was all about culture diversity and the cultures contribution to sustainable development. Since the students had to use an iPad to show people more pictures and spoke to tens of random people. This presentation the children had to do also related directly to target 4.4 “By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (United Nations, 2021)”<sup>25</sup>

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After speaking very briefly with the Executive Director of The Village Group Mr. Ray Funnye, I figured out that he is a trained Civil Engineer and worked for years at a firm. He absolutely loves students and wants all of them to succeed to their fullest potential which is just part of the reason why he started The Village Group. His love for STEM related learning is why lots of the classes and field trips are based around STEM related topics. I was talking to him after watching an amazing BMX show held by The Village Group in order to teach the children about Newton's Law of Conservation of Energy. It was incredible, and I only got to see the last 5 minutes of it. Anyway, it got me thinking that we should have a robot programmer come in and show the children what that robot can do and how he controls it. Then give them a separate class time for the EV3 Bricks so I have a little more time to teach them and get them excited to program and make their EV3 brick work. The students are already excited when they complete and run the code however showing them what that could potentially turn into would make them driven to learn how to program.

This program is only 6 weeks long in the summer and is amazing however it is currently only used in the schools of Georgetown. Which is a shame because I know that students all around the world would love to learn about everything that we are teaching them in fun and interactive ways. I truly believe that The Village Group really helps students change their lives, get out of the poverty zone and even excel in everything they plan to do in their future. More groups all around the world should adopt the teaching agenda that The Village Group offers. Everybody across the world can help their children and future by implementing The Village Group summer program into every county or village around the world as a nonprofit. By doing this it would start to take care of goal 4.b “By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small

island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programs, in developed countries and other developing countries.” With the implementation of The Village Group program into these developing countries more students would learn all about STEM related topics and become smarter therefor acquiring more scholarships all around the world.

In conclusion, students who attend The Village Group get to learn about a wide range of topics in a fun and exciting way that related directly to what they’re learning about in the up-and-coming school years. The wide range of topics will allow for students to learn about more interesting topic that could spark their interest and ultimately help them chose their career path in life. After the students learned about the subject in class, they got to meet real life professionals in that field of study at their place of work and ask as many questions as they could. In some cases that is much more valuable than anything you could learn in the classroom. Program like The Village Group are amazing because they allow for children who are less privileged than others to get the same education using the same recourses as those who are privileged. Which will give them an equal oppportunity in the real world.

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