



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

**“Community Service”
by Alanna Olken
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As far as my community service activities go, the occasions are many. Since before I could stand, I have participated in marches and walks, first in a stroller, then in a wagon, then on roller blades, then on a scooter. I’ve been strolled, rolled, and walked through the Aids Walk, The Breast Cancer Walk, and numerous Labor Union marches that ensure primarily female, minority workers’ fair benefits and wages.

The early involvement and constant encouragement from my parents to pursue these good deeds have stayed with me, and now I am an active community service contributor on my own.

Three recent projects have motivated me to further pursue my community service:

First, about once a month, I volunteer as a teacher’s assistant at a low-income school on the Upper West Side for pre-school and Kindergarten students. Because of the largely unbalanced ratio of students to teachers, which is about 25 to 1, I feel that my services are desperately needed and greatly appreciated.

During this process, I have developed a strong bond with many of the children and teachers and plan to continue volunteering. I really enjoy spending time with little kids so I think that this community service is very suitable.

Next, one of my greatest accomplishments is my active participation in a group called *Girls Learn International*, originally founded by a small group of concerned girls from the international community.

Girls Learn International is a non-profit service that engages American girls in the efforts for global girls’ education. The goal is to provide human rights education to young student women and foster global communication and cross-cultural understanding. We keep an active relationship with students from other countries by “snail mail” writing about our culture, our family, where we live, gender roles, and other interests. Most importantly, we encourage young women to become advocates for positive social change.

We also organize fundraisers and collect and donate much needed school supplies to our “partner classroom”, in Kenya, called Top Ride Academy. Recently our school’s G.L.I. chapter raised \$1,400 with a bake sale! That’s a lot of cupcakes!

I’ve taken an active leading role in this organization, starting last year as the only 7th grade participant out of 20 students. I joined so that I could further my knowledge of other cultures and to form a relationship with someone I normally wouldn’t get the opportunity to. I feel it’s a very worthy cause because I fully support education for all people, especially girls who don’t have equal rights such as the students in Kenya.

Finally, for the past two years I have been growing my hair long for an organization called *Locks of Love*. I will donate ten inches of my hair to make a hairpiece for a child under eighteen who suffers from a disease called alopecia or permanent hair loss. This is very personal to me because although I don't know who I'm donating my hair to, I still feel I will have a special connection with whoever receives it. I feel that I'm physically giving a piece of myself to a child who needs hair more than I do and I feel very lucky to even be able to grow hair.

Most people take this privilege for granted, which is why I personally think it is important to be aware of something most people ignore. I also feel proud to be participating in this cause because, frankly, it's time-consuming. But, in the end it will be worth it! The recipient's self-esteem and ego will be greatly boosted, even for a short time.

All of these volunteer activities (social, educational, cultural, physical) have brought me a great sense of accomplishment while benefiting others. I now have a wider view of other cultures, both here in New York City and abroad, and have a greater understanding of those who are less fortunate.

This follows the Jewish obligation for *Tzedakah*, which means "righteous giving" as it is based on the Hebrew root *Tzedek*, meaning justice. So, in a way, *tzedakah* is giving charity to improve the world or work towards justice,

And in the spirit and tradition of the generations before me, I plan on actively continuing with my volunteer services throughout my entire life.