



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Community Service”**

**by Alex Rawitz**

**February 23, 2008**

Community service. It's something that everyone *should* do. It's something many people *feel* like doing, but make excuses not to. And in the end, it's something most people just *don't* do. In our society, warped as it is, community service is seen as a punishment, on par with probation or AA meetings. When you do something illegal, *that's* when you have to give back to society. To some in our society, community service is seen as preferable to a jail sentence, but worse than a fair amount of things we have to do every day. Of course, not everyone feels this way. I have met people who do great things just to benefit others. They ask for nothing in return, but end up receiving gratitude, which is truly priceless. What follows are some of my community service experiences, going from the earliest to the most recent.

When I was in second grade, our class went to mulch trees in Central Park. I don't remember much about it, other than the fact that even then I felt like I was doing a good thing. I also think I did community service when in 2002, my family and I protested a proposal by the MTA to build an electrical transformer substation in our neighborhood.

Many environmentalists feel these substations transmit possibly carcinogenic radio waves and pollution. I still feel strongly about the environment and work hard to keep it clean and safe.

More recently, all last year, I tutored 2<sup>nd</sup> graders every other Wednesday afternoon at P.S. 163 on the Upper West Side. These were children from poor or working class backgrounds who were not meeting grade level in math or reading and writing, which is what I taught. I worked with different children, going over the worksheets, having them write and pronounce words, and reading books with them. Over the course of the year, I sensed improvements and felt that I was making a difference. At the same time, I love reading, and being able to help someone else appreciate it and enable them to use reading and writing skills later in life is one of the great things I think someone can do.

I received a more sobering, if still very rewarding, view of education and volunteering when I worked in the JCC Manhattan Summer Education Program at the same school this past July and August. It was a different process: we would time the children and see how many words they could read or pronounce in one minute. It was the same with math, where we would see how many problems they could complete within one minute.

Again I worked with different students, and again there was some progress. As I was working with children in grades 4 through 6, skill level was varied, and sometimes disappointing. I worked with an 11 year old who struggled to add 5 plus 4. Many of the children spoke English as a second language, and it was hard for them to read or pronounce syllables correctly. Progress was slow, but I honestly think that the other people who worked there and I made a difference.

I would like to ask everyone here to donate to the tutoring program, the Gift of Literacy, I worked for, or to consider donating to the wonderful organization City Harvest, which delivers food to over 600 community food programs in all 5 boroughs. We have the information on the Kiddush table, or you can ask my mother. Any help you can give is greatly appreciated, by me, and by the people you help.

It made me feel good to know that people work hard to make things better for others, and it made me feel even better to do this, too. The community service I have done helps put life into perspective: it makes me feel thankful for all that I've been given, and it helps other people. If everyone gave part of his or her time to help others learn, this world would be a better place.