



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“Community Service”
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A part of my Bat Mitzvah process was to do community service. I had to do thirteen hours, each hour representing a year of my life. My first choice was to work with animals because I thought it would be fun, but most shelters wouldn't let me volunteer because of my age. Instead, I found a place called The Good Dog Foundation, where they train dogs in pet therapy. What I volunteered to do was in the category of education, which in Hebrew is *cheenuch*.

The woman who ran the pet therapy class told me that I would be her assistant. My job was to walk around, distracting the dogs while the owners had to get the dog's attention. This class was the basic one and would prepare the dogs and their owners for the next level. In the advanced class, they would be learning to visit people at nursing homes.

I did not especially enjoy working at The Good Dog Foundation because I found it to be boring. It's possible that I would have had a different experience if I had volunteered at a shelter where I felt like I was making more of a difference.

The second place I volunteered was Hearthstone Alzheimer Care. The Hebrew words for this kind of service are *bikkur holim*, which means visiting the sick. What I discovered about myself is that I prefer working with people to animals.

I went to Hearthstone Alzheimer Care every Thursday after school for about eight weeks. When my mom and I first went to check the place out, I was nervous. I wasn't sure how to act around sick people, but my nervousness went away as soon as I realized that I didn't have to act differently, and that I could just be myself.

On my next visit, I went alone. I was set up with a group of six to eight “lower functioning” patients, which meant that they couldn't really talk or do things for themselves. I was supposed to paint with them, but most of them didn't want to do it, so I just painted for them. While they were physically there, they weren't really there mentally. I found working with the lower functioning patients to be really depressing because there was no connection. It seemed like they hardly knew I was there.

The next week, I asked if I could be with higher functioning patients, and so the rest of the time that I volunteered, I was placed with the higher functioning patients. I would play Scrabble, do crafts, and sometimes paint the women's nails.

One afternoon, I listened to a woman talk about how her husband died and it made her cry. She seemed to think I knew her family. I just listened and nodded, even though she was only saying parts of sentences. I think I was helping her by letting her express her feelings.

I definitely became more attached to Hearthstone Alzheimer Care over The Good Dog Foundation. I realized that there was nothing to be nervous about because they were just the same as everybody else. It felt good to be able to comfort them.

From doing my community service and thinking about which charity I would like to give to, I realized that it is important for me to feel like I am donating to a place that has personal meaning. My grandmother Helen talked to me about the importance of giving locally, and so I have decided to pledge ten percent of my Bat Mitzvah money to help fund a new hospital on Martha's Vineyard. This is where my Grandfather Daniel died. And it is where I have spent all my summers. The present hospital is 80 years old and does not have any of the modern facilities that most hospitals on the mainland have. This means that seriously ill patients often have to be flown to these other hospitals.

I think that community service is important because it gives people a chance to contribute to something they believe in. And I see that it takes a lot of time and commitment to volunteer. For me, to give in that way, I would need to find a cause that I am truly passionate about.