



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Community Service”**

**by Emily Dyke**

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At first, seeing the list of community service options that I could choose from was a bit overwhelming, but exciting at the same time. I wanted to try everything and didn't really know where to start. I decided to go for variety and range of experience. However, once I completed my service requirement, I realized that anything I chose would have been special in some way. All of my experiences were enjoyable and made me feel great! Of course, some made more of an impact on me than others but I was glad to have done them all.

One of my service experiences was tutoring an eight-year-old boy in math. This is considered an educational service. This boy was so sweet and fun to work with! He started out having trouble with subtraction and not even knowing multiplication or division. By the end of our work together, he mastered addition, subtraction and multiplication and learned most of his division. In addition to working hard together, we also had fun using the cool flat screen T.V. as a computer for math games after we finished his homework packet. On our last day together we went out for ice cream and hung out in our town.

Another experience I had was with Project Cicero, an organization that provides donated books to New York City teachers from schools that could not raise enough money to buy them. This community service would also fall under the category of educational services. My mom and I went there expecting a small book fair where we would simply help show the teachers to the different sections. When we arrived we found thousands of books and close to one hundred volunteers! We could not believe the massive scale of this organization. We helped empty boxes of books and place them in the correct sections and cleaned up and organized after each group of teachers cleared the room. It was pretty hard {PS - I know I say phrases like this too – but “pretty” and “hard” are a funny combination. Instead, I'd say, “very hard”} physical labor, lifting boxes and carrying loads of books to the correct tables. Not to mention the challenge of figuring out which books belonged in which categories—there were about 30 different categories of books. We ended up having a fantastic time and have already started looking into helping out again next year.

For my third service experience I worked with my KidSchool class for an organization called Dorot. Dorot consists of many different kinds of programs but the one that we volunteered for brings food for the Jewish holidays to elderly people who cannot leave their houses. Two girls from my KidSchool class and I brought a package of food to a lovely elderly woman. My classmates and I hung out in her living room for about an hour and a half listening to stories and looking at pictures of her family. I could see how much it meant to her to be able to share her stories and I had a great time delivering the food and getting to know her.

I shared my fourth service experience with both of my parents. We participated in something called the Tap Water Walk which is sponsored by Unicef. The walk takes place in Battery Park in Manhattan and is for the purpose of raising awareness and support for children around the world who suffer from a lack of readily available clean water. We were given an almost empty jug of water to symbolize the water that some women and children have to carry great distances to bring to their homes everyday. We were then informed about their living conditions and how our donations could help. For a certain amount of money they could build a tap for water in a village so the villagers would not have to travel for clean water. The walk was short but the cause was worthwhile, as was the impact on me. I am so used to simply turning on my tap at home whenever I am thirsty or turning on the water in my bathroom for a shower. I became aware, through this walk, that these are luxuries that many people in the world do not enjoy.

For my final community service experience I worked at the soup kitchen at The Grace Church in White Plains. I was expecting to see tons of volunteers in a large kitchen with some guests there for food. When my mom and I arrived, I was surprised to find a small kitchen with only 4 volunteers, including us, two employees of the church, and a few assistants who were also regular recipients of food at the soup kitchen. One of the volunteers was Jerry. Jerry works at the soup kitchen at least once a week and knew every person who came for food. We learned that most of the people who come to this soup kitchen are brought in groups by nearby agencies serving individuals with major psychiatric issues as well as developmental disabilities. When my mom and I arrived I was immediately put up front in charge of serving the main dish. It was intimidating at first and I felt awkward interacting with the people around me. But Jerry was so helpful; she was friendly and inviting both to the guests and to me and showed me what I was supposed to do. One of the kitchen workers, Anna, was filling a bag with some food and told me that, though she's not really supposed to give the food away, there are people there who don't have any food at home so she gives them a few things to take with them. This is when I decided that I would ask many of you (PS: why "many" – why not, "ask my guests today") to bring food here so I could help refill the pantry at the soup kitchen. They always need donations and are so appreciative of anything they get! I ended up having a great time, chatting with the guests and the other volunteers, and I felt great knowing I was really helping other people. I know that this is something I will do again.

In general, I found my community service experiences to be both fun and rewarding. I have gained a new awareness of the great need that exists, whether for food or for easy access to clean water. I am planning to make community service a more regular part of my life and I will definitely continue to work at some of the organizations I discovered this year. Tutoring the boy in math was the most rewarding experience for me because I got to see directly how I was helping him over time and witness his amazing transformation. I also got feedback from his teacher and parents about how our work together made a difference in his school performance. I am so grateful that I got to know this wonderful kid and to feel the pleasure of helping another person in this way. Though I have completed community service activities for different topics, I don't feel like I did much to help improve the environment; that is why I am planning to donate a percentage of the money that I get to a fund to contribute to repairing the world, or Tikkun Olam.