



*Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students*

**“Community Service”  
by Kyra Zimmerman  
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For my community service, I did several different activities. I wanted to find activities that would help those in need generally, but would also be of personal importance to people in my life. All the different activities were meaningful to me and will effect me forever. My first activity involved an animal shelter. Sabrina who is my bat mitzvah class and I walked homeless dogs that live in a shelter. For those few hours, I had a dog!

At first, all the shelter rules and restrictions, like having to be 18 years old to walk a dog, and where you could go with the dogs made it seem that Sabrina and I would get to do nothing! But, when we got there we were permitted to walk a dog named Alfred. He was a little crazy but very cute. We walked him around Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which was cool. Then we brought him back and were allowed to walk the cutest of cute puppies. After a while he got tired so we carried him back to the shelter. The cats needed help also. So we brushed them and fed them. I held two kittens that were so adorable. There were so many it was “raining cats and dogs” but mainly cats. I was glad to help out there.

After Hurricane Katrina I participated in two specific community activities to assist the victims of the terrible disaster. I wanted to help those who had been so terribly affected by the tragedy. My friend Liana, who is like my sister, and I, did a dance to raise money to send to New Orleans. This was different than other community service projects where you join an existing activity because Liana and I planned, publicized and held the event ourselves. With some assistance from Liana’s mother, Paula, Diane from Dance Inc. donated her studio and snacks for the dance. We created the flyers and circulated it to our friends. It was great! Liana and I love to dance so this event seemed like the perfect way to combine raising money for an important cause, involving our friends, and having enjoyment. The event was on a rainy Friday night. Not that many people came and some of the boys who were too shy to dance, played poker. But I am proud that we raised \$695. I also had my friends learn and contribute to this important effort, and at the same time have fun!! My friends definitely know how to get a party started.

Another way I helped after Hurricane Katrina was to contribute to a school campaign that was collecting knapsacks filled with supplies for students in New Orleans. This made the realities of all that had been lost due to the hurricane come alive. Imagine having books, pens and pencils destroyed in an instant and no way to easily replace them.

Much closer to home literally and figuratively, last February, I volunteered to spend a morning working in the Brooklyn Family Court Children’s Center. If you don’t already know, both my parents work in Family Court and have worked there for over 19 years!! I wanted to help kids in some way and it felt like an extension of the family tradition.

The Children's Center is a place where children stay while their parents have cases in Court. The children can be protected from the courtroom proceedings. Some of the children were scared, and others angry and others were oblivious to where they were. I read to them and colored with them. One girl asked if "I had a case in Court too" I did not know how to answer so just said "No" quietly. This was such a moving experience. It made me think about what brought them here, and what they were thinking, and what their lives were like? But I did not ask. I also noticed how kind and patient the Children's Center staff was to me, and all the children there.

My most recent community service was in the Fall, 2006 when along with cousin Andrea and some Shire Village Camp friends; I walked in the Breast Cancer Awareness Walk in Central Park. This was one of the most touching activities I did. I am coming to the age where I am realizing how scary it is when people get life threatening diseases. This was highlighted to me because two close friends and a relative have had breast cancer, and I know how hard it was from them and their families to deal with it. I raised over \$400 which will be used to raise awareness, promote prevention and for further research about breast cancer.

In August, 2005 after I had let my hair grow more than 10 inches from my neck, I cut it off to donate it to LOCKS FOR LOVE. LOCKS FOR LOVE is an organization that manufactures real hair wigs from donated human hair. The wigs are for children who have hair loss because of disease or from treatment of disease.

This was my most personal community service activity since I have to admit I really like my hair!! I am the only member of my immediate family to have straight thick hair and I think it's really cool!! So giving up so much of it was very, very hard to do. Not only did I like my long hair, I was concerned about whether my friends would like my hair short. When I sat in the salon chair I was not aware if I was breathing. As I heard the first snips I almost shouted for her to stop. But I knew this was something I wanted and needed to do. I also knew that how I looked and what my friends thought should not stop me when their were children who needed the wigs. My hair would grow back. And it has!

Through these experiences I have had my eyes opened to how lucky I am. These community service activities have taught me to look at things in new ways. It is like when Whoopi realized once her daughter became pregnant that pro-choice is more than just words. Community service is more than just doing a "set of hours". It is a way of lending a helping hand to someone, and leaving an imprint on the world. Grandpa David says he likes being a doctor because he hopes to leave the world in a better place than it was, when he arrived. When I think about all I did, it's hard to compare their relative importance. But on close reflection, I made the greatest personal sacrifice and helped an individual, when I donated my hair. So to me, it is the most meaningful.

The activities also reinforced to me that no matter how difficult and frustrating I think life is, there are many who have real hardships. Recently I read an article in the New York Times about families in Africa "selling" there 10 year old or younger children to businesses to raise money to feed their own families. It was so sad. I am therefore donating 10 percent of my bat mitzvah money to the Heifer organization that provides animals to poor families in Africa so that they can start income producing and livestock farms, and hopefully stop children from being sold into terrible lives just to survive. I think that everyone can help someone, just by being a better person and treating everyone with respect.

But, the true meaning of community service became clear when I was out shopping with my mother. What does shopping have to do with community service? Well...nothing. It was a warm sunny day and I was walking with my mom and we passed a shop filled with glass hearts. In the window was a quote “We’re changing the shape of the world, one heart at a time.” At that moment I realized what community service was all about. It wasn’t just doing “good” deeds. It was my having my eyes opened to the world around me, realizing all my capabilities and powers to help others and affect the world. By trying to be compassionate and caring to everyone around me, I hope that this triggers them to do the same, so each of us can change the world “one heart at a time.”