



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

**“Community Service”
by Mattori Birnbaum
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Community service is important to my family. My grandparents used to give food to people when they visited their butcher shop, even if the shoppers didn't have enough money, as I mentioned in my Family Values paper. My parents and I are very proactive about donating to charities that help people (and animals) in need.

The first community service work I'll talk about is volunteering at my local soup kitchen. In my Family Values paper I mentioned how my father started volunteering at our local soup kitchen at St. Ignatius Church 20 years ago. This soup kitchen feeds hungry people by handing out bags of food that the people then take to eat elsewhere. It is open on Saturdays and Mondays.

I've been helping out since I was around two years old. In the beginning, my parents would hold me while I handed bags of food to the people in line. We distribute sandwiches, PB & J or tuna fish. There are also soups, which vary depending on what supplies the soup kitchen has on hand, and sometimes small chocolates or candies. On Saturdays we make and prepare the food distributed on that day and on Monday. When we prepare the food it is a lot like an assembly line: one or two people do one job, like put tuna fish on bread, others bundle the sandwiches and put them in bags, and still others place eating utensils in bags. Right around Halloween and Valentine's Day my family buys holiday candy and adds that as an extra treat in the bags. Around the December holidays we buy coffee and donuts from Dunkin' Donuts and we give that out too.

There are a few different types of people who come through the line. Some of them are homeless and others are better off. Some push around large carts of recyclable bottles and other odd items. Some have pets that they take along with them and some have bags with clothes or personal possessions. Also, not all of them are homeless. There are some who may have a place to live but are just really hungry and unable to support themselves in that way.

Some people may think that it's not fun or that it's scary to hand out sandwiches and soups to people in a food line. But believe it or not, it's actually not half bad. The people are generally very nice and considerate of others. There *are* some that don't speak much or at all and there *are* some that aren't as polite as others. The ones that don't speak may be shy, uncomfortable, embarrassed, or just don't want to talk. On the other hand, there are some people who are pretty lively and like to talk to the volunteers, and many say “thank you” or “God bless you.” But as a whole, the people who come for the food are pretty pleasant and it's very much worth helping them out in their time of need. I will continue to give my time to the soup kitchen. It feels like I really am helping out people in my neighborhood.

Another opportunity I had to help my local community was a little over a year ago. I volunteered at PS 75 on the Upper West Side with my family as part of a larger group of UBS Financial Services employees working with New York Cares. The group as a whole updated and improved the educational

tools used by teachers, cleaned, painted, organized books in the school library, and did other projects the school needed done.

My family and I were part of a team of 8 people who replaced the blackboards with whiteboards. We cleaned off the very old, worn blackboards, scraping them first to remove old glue and tape. Then we did our best to put on the whiteboard texture without having any wrinkles or bubbles. I originally thought that would be super boring and I might die. I'll admit, it was a bit tedious, but it wasn't really that bad. The process did take a lot of concentration. In the end it was really just a matter of determination. It was hard work and it took some coordination and patience but I think it would be worth doing again to help out kids without the resources we commonly have in private schools today. I made an impact on hundreds, if not thousands, of kids' educations.

The last community service project I'll talk about involved my former pre-school, Columbia Greenhouse Nursery School. This past May, 8 years after I graduated from pre-school I went back to help out at their Spring Fair. I volunteered to take care of one of the games, the cardboard maze. The children would pay me one ticket, then they could crawl around the maze all they wanted. Some of you may assume that it was difficult to take care and keep track of all these preschoolers. Once again, I must say that it wasn't as bad as I assumed. The kids were really great and they looked like they were having fun. The parents generally kept an eye on their children so that my job was mainly to stand and make sure the sign didn't fall over and to repair the maze when pieces started to fall apart from use. I would definitely do it again if I had a chance. It felt good to help my old preschool raise money in an event where the kids had a ton of laughs. I just don't *ever* remember being that small!

All three of the community service activities were interesting, helpful to the community, and left me with a feeling that I had done something really good. The soup kitchen provides meals for people in need of food. The New York Cares project helped clean and improve school facilities in support of education for kids. The Spring Fair was a fundraiser for my former preschool, which in turn used the money to provide educational supplies for kids. I really can't say which was my favorite because I liked them all, and they all were important in making a difference to people.

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