



Celebrating the Outstanding Work of our Students

“Community Service”

by Sam Lewis

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For my community service I decided to do many different short activities so I could experience different kinds of giving and volunteering instead of one long term project. One of my projects turned out to be long term anyway. I wanted to concentrate on Tikkun Olam, which means Bettering the World. I believe it is important to raise money, send food, and help out for causes that are important to me.

The first project I did was to organize and participate in a carwash to raise money for the victims of the Darfur conflict. The problem in Darfur is that the Sudanese government is supporting Muslim militia who are killing and displacing civilian African people in the region of Darfur.

One day after school about 10 friends and I went to my house. Because it was hot, we wanted to get wet and be cool. So I said, “Why don’t we have a carwash to raise money for a cause”. Because my friend, Alex’s Dad works for the UN in Sudan, and we wanted to choose a worthy cause, we decided to raise money to help the victims of the genocide in Darfur. I believe that Darfur is just as bad as the Holocaust because although it is on a smaller scale this time none of our leaders want to acknowledge it as a problem and it really needs our help. Over four hundred thousand people have been killed and over 2 million people have been displaced and left without a home or even a village.

We went into my house made a large sign, and set up for a carwash. We all held different posts, holding the sign, washing the cars, going to businesses in town to ask for other donations. We charged three dollars a car, but many people donated much more. The carwash took place over three days and different friends of mine were there each day but a few were there every time and they’re all here today.

At the end we raised over four hundred dollars. We sent one hundred dollars to the American Jewish World Service Darfur Action Campaign and three hundred dollars was donated directly to Sudan through Alex’s Dad. This winter Nicholas Kristoff wrote an op ed in the New York Times titled Car Washes and Genocide, about how kids and car washes make a difference in helping Darfur. I feel really good about what I did because I have always wanted to organize a way to make a lot of money to give to charity and I finally did that.

Now that I have accomplished that goal, I have no intention of stopping. I felt really good when my parent’s showed me the op ed and it let me know that my friends and I were doing was helping. I am going to donate 10 percent of the money I receive from my bar mitzvah to this cause through the American Jewish World Service, Darfur Action Campaign, because I learned so much about it and feel so strongly about it.

A project that turned out to be long term is called Family to Family. We are sponsoring Samuel Green and his son Marquese who is 9, in Pembroke, Illinois. Pembroke is Illinois poorest town. Pembroke’s roads are mostly paved with sand or gravel. Many of its homes are crumbling shacks with dirt floors and no running water. Forty percent of people live without running water. The average income is only nine thousand seven hundred dollars. Pembroke doesn’t even have a bank, supermarket, or real medical facility. Many families can’t afford food for the whole month.

Each month, my Mom and I go out, buy food, pack it up in a box to send to the Green family.

I write a letter to Marquise every month telling him about myself and what I like to do for fun and in school. After three months I finally got a letter back from him. Now I get a letter every few months. Even though the town they live in is so poor, Marquise sounds like a normal kid who would be living anywhere in world, rich or poor. This shows that even though some people are living without some necessities they still find ways to have fun and live life without being worried about money.

This is my most meaningful service. It feels really good not only to give to people who need it, but also getting a response back and finding out how happy they are for it.

I am also working at a warehouse called Food Patch where we pack food for different agencies that distribute it to people who cannot afford to put food on the table every night in Westchester. Our first project was unpacking a load of lunchboxes that FEMA had put together for Katrina victims. FEMA had packed too many of them so the food needed to be taken out of the lunchboxes and bulk packed. Bulk packed means to put all similar things together, like pastas in one box, and beans in another so that other food agencies could distribute it to homeless shelters and other places that need the food.

The second time I went was interesting because the food we needed to bulk pack was from a food drive. So I got to see what happens next to the cans and boxes of food you drop off at your school when there is a drive. I couldn't believe some of the weird things people donated. But I also was amazed at how much gets delivered. Every time I go, I do a different project than the last time and every time it shows me how generous people can be and how many people sign up for community service.

One last donation to charity I made was in early May when I bought a camel with the bar mitzvah money I will be receiving. It will be donated to the Thorn Tree Schools in Northern Kenya, which are being built so all the children can go to school. Camel milk is more nutritious than cow's milk. The camel makes 8 times more milk than a cow. The camels can also live in an area that is often drought stricken. Enough camels were donated this year to ensure that each child will have at least one glass of milk each day.

To me community service is a real way of helping people who need it the most and unlike donating money, which is still great, you actually get to see and know how your service will help the people. I will continue doing it because I learned that there are people who need it so much and I have the time and resources to give. I want to help in the best way possible and maybe try some new charities and services.