

Final Presentation

By: Brendan Corey

A quote I found that really meant something to me was “To the world you may be one person, but to one person you may be the world”. This quote really meant something to me because before volunteering I was just a normal person, doing normal things, pretty much just rolling with the flow. I didn’t think much about volunteering either, I just thought it was a good deed done by good people, but now I understand that it is a lot more than that.

Now I sort of have a big family, I have four brothers and a sister and they are all younger. The oldest one besides myself started school when I was in fifth grade and since then I have been helping my younger siblings with schoolwork and extra stuff. So the first semester I chose to volunteer at the Salvation Army Learning Zone. I didn’t think much when I was driving there the first day, I thought this was just another afterschool program, and yeah I was a little nervous on the ride there but I figured I was going to be a pro at this since I have helped with kids homework and projects for the last seven or so years. But it was more than an afterschool program, it was like a little family. They got along like a family, had their fights like a family (the kids of course), and had deep conversations like a sibling to another sibling. And that goes for the kids, supervisors, and the families of the kids that went to this. Everybody seemed really close but something that really stood out to me was when it was just before Christmas and I was having one of the kids read to me. One of the mom’s walked in and she started talking to the main supervisor Mrs. Donna. I didn’t think much about it but the woman must have been going through some hard times Mrs. Donna went into the back room and brought out a box with canned food and food for the holiday in it with a couple wrapped gifts on top. The mom broke down in tears and hugged Donna immediately and was thanking her, and it was just a small thing like that that made the biggest difference for this mom at the time. They were still talking when I left but it really showed how much more of a family the Learning Zone is then I knew and how it impacts more than just the kids that go to it.

Another thing that I thought was great at the Learning Zone was that I was helping this kid named John, he is in second grade and we were working on the alphabet. He still didn’t know his alphabet that much and this is a big problem to have as a second grader. So my goal was to help him learn his alphabet. Every day I worked with different kids on different things, but I always helped John with his alphabet. After about a month he had the alphabet down and he was able to say his ABC’s and was able to recognize what letter was what, he was so excited. The day that he showed me I congratulated him and jokingly said now you just have to learn the alphabet backwards and you will be a step ahead of everybody. Well he saw that as a challenge because the rest of the week and the weekend he learned the alphabet backwards and when I saw him on Monday he came up to me and was like “Guess what? I am a step ahead of you with the alphabet now.” And I was confused at first but I went along and said “And how’s that?” This part made me laugh because he just said “This is how” And he just started saying the ABC’s backwards. I was completely shocked that he took my joke and now was the only person in the Learning Zone that could say the Alphabet backwards and probably the only one in his school.

The second semester I volunteered at the Re-Education Center in Perry. I didn't know what to expect and wasn't sure how I was going to handle working with kids that had autism. I never really talked with anybody that had autism so I wasn't sure how I was going to deal with just the simple things like conversing. But the first day was a huge view of what goes on and how this building that I went by everyday played a huge role with the family and people with autism from Ashtabula County to places near Kent, Ohio. Now I didn't always do the one on one stuff that I did at the Salvation Army and there was more doing errands for the teachers. But I still worked with all of the kids and became great friends with all of them. The best times were when we went to the gym to play kickball. It got really intense and they all would have so much fun and would try to kick homeruns and catch the ball to get someone out. One of the kids Richy would say to every kicker on the other team to kick it to him and he'll get them out, now a caught ball was rare in this gym class. One day though, I was up and Richy was out in what you can call shallow left field. He said the usual, "Kick it to me Brendan, I'll get you out". Now I coincidentally kicked it up in the air his way and sure enough he caught it. The look on his face was priceless and he and all the three other kids in the class went nuts because of the caught ball. Well later on when we came back to class, Richy had a spelling test and I graded it in front of him. He ended up missing quite a bit and I handed it back to him explaining what he did wrong. He had a sad face at first but then all of a sudden he had this grin come across his face and I said "What's so funny?" and he looked at me and said "I still caught your ball". I laughed and realized that this day could not go wrong for Richy because he got me out in a game of kickball.

Both of the places I volunteered at showed me how community service can change lives or just make someone's day whether it's with a simple lending hand during hard times, or learning your ABC's, or even getting someone out during a game of kickball.