

Section 7:

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Perry Service Learning

Final Speech

I thought working with kids would be an easy A and relatively laid back, which is why I chose to pursue a volunteering experience in the Children's Morning Out program, at the YMCA. However, as my service experience throughout the year carried on, I began to have a great change in feelings for both volunteering and the actual children I served. I no longer disliked volunteering. In fact, PSL's way of teaching in its entirety have allowed me to take away more life lessons than any other class I've taken throughout all of my schooling to this point. During my volunteering experience, I've learned more from these children and co-workers than I feel I could ever give back to them. I knew my service wouldn't last forever and I most likely won't work with kids for my career, but what I took away from this has changed the way I think and feel about life in ways that will last forever.

When I first started my service, I will say that I had no intentions of enjoying it. I felt awkward, out of place, and would often find myself asking "Why am I working here for free?". I found it very hard to relax and truly be myself around my co-workers. I felt as if they were bosses who would report any flaw I had to Trent and Soeder. As the weeks went on, I saw that Laura and Lisa would become some of the most genuine and heart warming individuals I have ever met. They made a conscious effort to make me feel at home every time I came in, and it definitely worked. I remember the first

Christmas party we had for the children, and this is where I started to realize that I have an opportunity that not many can relate to. I remember the parents from two of my class favorites, personally coming up to me with their children, giving me gifts and thanking me for all the time I spend working with them. The gifts made me happy, not because of the materialistic reward, but more of a reminder that my service here has made these parents think of me enough to pay for something out of their own pocket. I saw that even the simplest of tasks really could brighten the faces of these children, as well as give the parents and my co-workers peace of mind. This is where I really began to fall in love with my service. As the days went on, I would wake up on Tuesday and Thursday mornings smiling, knowing that I will have a great day with the kids. Laura and Lisa have always made a point to make me smile no matter how busy the day, or how wild and rowdy the kids may be. They have become far more than just co-workers, I now consider them good friends or even mothers to me. As of very recently, I would say I'm guilty of choosing a few favorites in the class. One of them in particular has made a memory in my head that I believe will never leave me. All of the boys in the class have seemingly become partial to me, but one of the youngest boys named Zeke has especially. He came into the class at only three to join his older sister, Elia. At first, he was very quiet and didn't speak to the other kids very much, but that quickly changed. He began to sit with me during play time, story time, and even during work sheets. I saw him successfully write some of his first letters, finish some of his first puzzles, as well as assemble numerous lego structures and train sets. Last week when I took him to the bathroom to wash his hands, he asked "Are you going to leave soon Mr. Anthony?" and

I told him that sadly I will be leaving in a few short weeks. Zeke replied "oh...well I'm going to miss you Mr. Anthony!" and then proceeded to hug my leg. This was an experience and feeling I don't think I could ever have again until I myself become a father. His mother has told me several times that Zeke has asked if he will see me today, and this made me feel a type of unconditional love that I can't explain. Not only Zeke, but all these children have grown so much in such a short time. I see the very basics and foundation for our next generation, being solidified by my instruction. Knowing that my service is meaningful and has an impact, has given me hope. These kids have taught me patience, persistence, and even parenting skills. My service in the program was short, but I can honestly say I now love working with kids. Seeing how innocent and stress free they are, has shown me that life is a beautiful thing, and to take advantage of every second you can.

My volunteering, as well as PSL as a whole has been the most meaningful, and life changing class I've ever taken. I believe the individuals I serve have given me more than I feel I could ever give back. I know the service I did was life changing, because I impacted the lives of these children by instilling the building blocks of what it takes to be successful, and a great person in life. My co-workers were some of the most encouraging people I have ever known, giving me hope that I will be successful in whatever I choose to pursue in life. This time was just not enough for me, so I chose to take a job working with kids at the YMCA this summer. They may not be the same children, but the same feeling and opportunity to feel young and stress free exists. I have encouraged upcoming PSL students to serve here, hoping that they will

experience the change that I did. The very way I think, feel, and act have been pushed positively in all aspects of life, and these are things that will never leave me.

**I am from Perry
A big house on river road
Where I grew up
Where I rode my first skateboard.
But before that,
I was born in Painesville
A little house on North St. Clair Street
Across from Huntington School
It's torn down now
And new people live in the house
This is where I played in the sandbox
Or in the garden with my toy dinosaurs
This is where I'm from.
My life is changed now
I'm 18 years old now
And I know that
Every helping hand makes a difference
No matter how big or small
Serving is one of the greatest lesson in life**