

When we read Anne Frank's diary in 8th grade, this one phrase stood out to me most. The reason I chose to use it today is because it was monumental in forming my views on what service is and why it's important. I also used an Anne Frank quote because I realized through reading her diary that I too wanted to be a journalist.

While the lessons that I've learned through service are innumerable, the three that have made such a great impact on who I am today are that I've learned to be patient, I've reaffirmed my career choice, and I've begun to understand the concept of social responsibility.

These are three of the kindergarteners that I've worked with a lot this year. The past few months, we've been working on blending the sounds of letters to form words. This is under any circumstance a challenging task; imagine the task when it involves three rambunctious five year olds who don't know English as their first language. A couple of weeks ago, we were sitting outside of the classroom blending letters with those little laminated sheets and some dry erase markers. Usually what I do is have two boys write their letters while I work with the one on sounding it out, that way they each get a little bit of individual attention. So I'm working with Jowan, the one on the far right, and I look over and Cesar, the middle one, is blinking uncontrollably saying "I'm alright Miss Taylor, I'm alright. I'm alright." Then I look a little further and see that Christian, the one on the far right, is holding his dry erase marker like a dart and has that exact smile on his face. I came to find out that while Jowan and I were blending letters, Christian was poking Cesar in the eye.

After Christian apologized to Cesar and we had finished the activity, I couldn't stop thinking about how much more patient I have become over the course of this year. I learned that working with other people means you can't always have a set plan, especially with kids. **They really taught me that being laid back does not mean being passive.**

Another big lesson I've learned is that I'm now so sure of the career path I've chosen. A big reason for that is what I've learned from Diego. For our Global Youth Service Day Project, my group had all of the fifth graders at Elm write a letter to a soldier serving overseas. I was reading through the

letters when I came across Diego's. One part of it says **"I was born in Mexico with my brothers, except the youngest was born in Ohio. When I grow up, I want to be a soccer player and have a nice life."** The reason this kind of stopped me in my tracks was that even if Diego's family isn't undocumented, I know there are so many families like his. I can't imagine finding out that Diego and his older siblings and parents were sent back to Mexico, and his little brother, a citizen, was separated from his family and placed into foster care in the US. I don't know how any voter or government representative could ever justify that this solves the immigration problem. This really made me aware of the power of our voices, and made my desire to be a journalist and use my voice to influence change so much more prevalent.

Next year at Miami I'll be studying journalism and Spanish with a minor in Latin American Studies. The big reason I chose Spanish was because of Angel. My first few months at Elm Angel and I worked together with a Spanish and an English version of a math textbook. I could tell that he really wanted to learn, but he just had so much difficulty understanding. You see, my first week at Elm was also his; he had just moved from Puerto Rico. I look back and I can't even believe how far he has come. He went from not even understanding how to type on a computer to, yesterday, finishing a science fair project that he had designed completely on his own. Seeing how devoted he really has become to learning English made me realize how important it is for me to learn Spanish. He's had some family issues and tomorrow is leaving back for Puerto Rico for the summer. Yesterday was the last time I'll see him at Elm, and I told him when we were working on his science fair project that when I come to Heritage next year, he better be there and he better be getting good grades. He rolled his eyes at me, like he always does, and said "yeah yeah yeah." Being given the opportunity to play a part in Angel's fifth grade experience was something that I will never, ever forget.

The final lesson that I want to talk about is the fact that I think I've begun to understand what social responsibility is all about. Eva, who Rachael talked about on Wednesday, has become really important to both of us. I don't know when it was that things clicked between us, maybe we had just walked behind her one day while she was working and said "that looks

good so far, Eva. Keep working.” But for whatever reason, Eva has become one of the biggest reasons we’re always so excited to go to Elm. Mr. Soeder met her when he came to Elm last week and he can testify to how quiet she really is. But whenever Rachael and I walk in the room, she walks straight over to us and gives each of us a hug. Eva’s taught me that being there for someone is not a hard task, but it takes effort. She’s always extremely shy around her classmates, but the fact that we unknowingly made an effort to make her realize that we do notice her, she really has become a big part of our experience there.

Social responsibility, I’ve found, also means simply giving what I have to offer. For Joshie’s mom at Su Casa, this really just meant giving her a break. Life at Su Casa is a lot of things, but it’s definitely not quiet. There are so many kids running around everywhere, and I know this doesn’t help the stress that so many of the parents are already under. Joshie’s mom I think had heard me speaking in Spanish to one of the kids, and came over and asked me if I could just watch Joshie and Nathan in the Sala Grande for a while, because she needed to rest. I know it really wasn’t that big of a deal that I said yes, and that in the long run it didn’t make much of a difference, but she was just so grateful that I did say yes. I learned that giving even a little can help a lot. I can’t imagine the life that she had already had, and giving her just an hour or so of quiet, was the least I could offer.

If there’s one thing that I can be positive I’ve taken with me from my experience with service, whether it was at PSL or Leadership Lake County or Youth Philanthropy and Service at Case, it’s the service is absolutely, 100%, NOT about generosity. It’s not charity. Service is about responsibility, and while I know I have so much more to learn, I’m so glad that I’m beginning to understand that.