

Alexa Roberts

Mr. Soeder/Mrs. Trentanelli

Perry Service Learning

Final Speech

I guess that you can say that I've been a volunteer for many years. I have baked cakes for the Saint James Church in Painesville; I've cleaned beaches at the Lake Metroparks, conducted a Vacation Bible School in a suburb of Cincinnati, spent over 200 hours at Camp Whitewood as a counselor and even helped sort clothes at a Salvation Army in Kentucky. Upon entering my senior year of high school, I thought I had the world of community service figured out... turns out I was wrong. I had stereotypes built up in my head of the world around me. I had a self-centered view on life, not very open to other people that did not live the normal middle-class life that I live. Community service has allowed me to break the brick wall in my mind, of the life that I thought everyone should live, and has fostered a spirit of understanding and empathy towards others that I never imagined I could have.

At the start of the school year, I had my own plan of attack. A time frame that could not be interrupted or else I would literally go crazy. Attending Lakeland Community College, participating in varsity volleyball, president of the Student Council, show choir and many other activities, I could not imagine adding four hours a week of volunteering to my already insane schedule. Quite frankly, I didn't think I could do it and I contemplated dropping out of Perry Service Learning very early on. It all changed once I began my community service.

At 7:30 on a chilly September morning, my teeth were chattering with nervousness. I thought for sure I would do everything wrong. First impressions scare me to death and not being in control of the situation I was about to enter make me very uncomfortable; turns out that I was led into the hospital with open arms. A friendly volunteer led me into the PACU, and from there a nurse named Cindy showed me the ropes. Although I did mess up, just as I thought I would, they forgave me. That cup of coffee that was dumped on the floor was the first step in the rocky road I like to call my volunteering experience. I learned everything I possibly could as a volunteer. I delivered patient charts, checked the glucometer, stocked shelves and delivered cups of ice. Every week I looked forward to walking in the PACU to see what new task I could master. Although my tasks seemed simplistic, and sometimes petty, I found that my jobs were extremely helpful to the nurses, doctors and patients around me.

Nursing is a profession that is not granted the attention that it deserves. Nurses work hard every day, accommodating patients, helping doctors and even relieving stress of the patients' families. The nurses have so much on their plate, and I was happy to come in before they start their day and have everything in pristine condition. For example, imagine going to basketball practice with all of the basketballs strewn about throughout the gymnasium. Or imagine walking into work on Monday morning, forgetting that you left your desk on Friday in a state that is representative of a tornado. I was happy to come in before the nurses and doctors came to work to clean things up before they had to start their long day. But community service is much larger than my small tasks at the hospital. Community service changes lives.

Prior to my hospital experience, I did not think that the nurses played a very big role in the hospital. But in 2008, my life was changed drastically. I was diagnosed with idiopathic scoliosis, which meant that I had a curvature in my spine that looked like an "S" shape which was there for no apparent reason. Doctors tried to correct it with a brace, but quite frankly it was just too severe to fix without surgery. So, on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2008, I underwent the surgery of a lifetime. With two rods and 16 screws, I had to relearn how to stand up, walk and run. But I could not have recovered as quickly as I did without the help of nurses. At the time, my 7<sup>th</sup> grade self was not really thinking about my future goals and aspirations, but in a way, this experience planted a seed in what I might become one day. I learned that it is not the doctors or anesthesiologists that play a big role in patient recovery, but rather the healing touch of a nurse.

I was blessed with the opportunity to visit Su Casa in Chicago. On our trip, we met some of the most amazing volunteers that exist, probably in the world. One woman in particular I remember the most. Frita was a woman who we met in the soup kitchen at a partnering organization adjacent to Su Casa. Frita had been volunteering every Sunday afternoon for the last 25 years to serve lunch to the people of Chicago. She knew every family by name and welcomed them all with a hug. Even if she didn't know someone, she treated them just the same, and treated everyone like they were her own family. It is the people like Frita who make me realize that there are still good people in the world today.

One can wake up on any given morning and see bombings on the news, or terrorist attacks in one of our ally countries. We have grown so used to the hatred and violence in our world, that we don't really acknowledge anything else. We need to stop searching in the dark towards the future and instead look down and smell the flowers. Lake Health utilizes over 1000 volunteers; Perry Service Learning is about to gain 106 potential volunteers next year. The class of 2013 has donated over 7,442 hours of our own time to serving others, and I'm sure that each and every one of us has touched one other person through our experiences. Community Service has allowed me to open my eyes to the present. I've seen how my peers have served my community and how I have contributed

myself. I have learned life lessons that cannot be taught through any curriculum or video. I have learned to break the barriers of stereotypes and instead appreciate the differences that everyone has and use them to serve others. One quote that we have been taught since the beginning of class, I have finally begun to understand. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." If I have learned any lesson my senior year is the one said simply by Gandhi himself, so many years ago.