SERVICE LEARNING

PORTFOLIO

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Reflection Essay

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others” – Mahatma Gandhi

When I chose to take Service Learning this year, the only thing I had in my mind was, “it will look good for college applications”. It never occurred to me that I would do things that I will never forget. Needless to say, my mindset towards service has completely changed since the beginning of the year. I now see the value and true meaning of service to others and I believe everyone should try it at least once in their lives. Service to others is truly a beautiful thing. The feeling that comes when you serve those in need is indescribable. When you are able to go home and think to yourself, “I did something really good today”, that is a sign that you are making a difference. Throughout this school year, I believe I have made a difference in my community. Even though that difference may seem small, the fact that there is a difference for the better is all that matters. I have gotten the opportunity to be apart of many different experiences and projects that have helped me see the bigger picture of service.

Throughout my tenth grade year, I told myself that I could serve my community without taking the service learning class. Clearly, I was wrong. I completely underestimated the resourcefulness and benefits of taking Service Learning. While taking Service Learning, I have learned about many different aspects of my community and the areas that are in need. For example, I learned about the poor families of Egypt and their needs, including access to health care, low to no salaries, lack of proper homes, and lack of education. These are just a view of the issues we looked at throughout the year. The Service Learning class also exposed me to many different settings outside of Maadi with people in need. These places included the Cancer Hospital, orphanages, clinics, and schools throughout Maadi. I was never aware of the everyday problems of the average Egyptian family until this year. Sure, everyone is aware of poverty and the general conditions of poverty but it is not often you get to see it with your own eyes. It goes without saying, taking Service Learning this year has truly allowed me to discover the meaning of service to others and I will forever remember all that I have had the chance to do this year.

Not only has Service Learning taught me about the importance and meaning of service, it has also effected me as a person. Including Service Learning in my college applications should never be the sole reason for serving others. Fortunately for me, this mind set did not last long. It only took my first trip to the Cancer Hospital to suddenly realize the value and importance of serving. I have come to firmly believe in the idea of giving back to your community. When you look at what makes a CAC student special, I am most impressed by the great sense of community and I have come to value that aspect of this school the most. Especially at an international school with dozens of different cultures and beliefs and backgrounds, it is really special when all of us get together to help others in need. It is great because you get in situations with other students you never knew before, and you are all doing something important for people in need. Serving the needy is actually a great way of meeting new people and erasing pre-assumptions you had about them. Also throughout this year, I have slowly come to terms with my fear of the language barrier. At the beginning of this year, I was always slightly reluctant to get fully involved with a certain task because of the language barrier between English only speakers and Arabic only speakers. Nevertheless, that fear is gone and I now feel like there is nothing in my way.

Over the course of this year, I have had the chance to partake in many different service projects. I had the opportunity to work at the German Clinic here in Maadi that provides good health care with access to doctors that is pretty much free for patients. Another project I was exposed to that I might take up for next year was teaching the math section of the SAT at the African Hope School with Mrs. Lantz. But the project that I fell in love with and plan on continuing with for next year is teaching math to the seventh graders at the Found school (FACLC). The project has been far from perfect, but I have witnessed incredibly satisfying results. I remember my first day teaching at Found and how scared I was to communicate with the students. I did not know what to do or what to say. Not only am I teaching (something that is harder than it looks), but also I am teaching students who barely speak English. Talk about difficult! This is why this project is something that requires face time, and lots of it. You cannot build strong relationships in a day. Relationships take time. To me, the most important aspect of this project thus far has definitely been establishing relationships. Recently, the Found school decided to close early due to the upcoming presidential elections, which proved to be a challenge for me. However, the FACLC volunteers averted the crisis by figuring out a new and different way for us to interact with the seventh graders. The original idea was to take the seventh grade boys to the CAC soccer pitch to play sports and hang out, while the seventh grade girls bake and cook at Mrs. Lantz’s house but unfortunately we were only allowed to bring the boys on once. Although teaching the kids math is over now, I cannot stress enough how much of a difference the volunteers are making just by cooking food with the kids. It is different seeing the kids in a non-academic environment because it is more personal and it is easier to make relationships. One day, Alyosha and I were talking to Faid John about his reading and what books we could give him to read. I learned a lot from him. We gave Faid the first Harry Potter book one Sunday and he came back the next Sunday asking for the second book. He is a faster reader than me! I was very impressed by his determination and passion for reading. He even has better habits than me. Faid reads with a dictionary open so that he can always look up the words he does not know. When I look back on this project, I will definitely remember some of the things I did with the seventh graders. But what will stay with me the most are the things I have learned from the kids, the things they have taught me about life and about myself.

This project has a ways to go. These seventh graders desperately need us to help in anyway we can, and the only way we can help is by showing up and spending one on one time with them every week. Even if I spend 2 hours explaining one problem, they are learning. They are learning even when it seems like they are not. The pay off has not come yet, but it will come. These students are very bright and beautiful people and they need us to not give up on them. Just the fact that we show up gives them something to look forward to at school. We provide fun, laughter, life skills, and we are making friends along the way. I am not about to quit now. FACLC will see me next year!

Smart Goal Sheet

**S**pecific:

My goal is to educate the seventh graders in math at FACLC.

**M**easurable:

Sometimes with projects, you may only be able to move one or two chess pieces in the time you have. It may take years to reach the ultimate goal of getting these kids to college, but at least after this year I know that I have made a huge difference and the kids have learned many new things and have showed a significant amount of improvement in math.

**A**chievable:

This is definitely something I want to do, this year and next year. I believe it will be very challenging because I will have to try to re-establish some basic math concepts in order for the kids to build their knowledge and grow, and of course there will be a language barrier. However, despite these potential setbacks, I believe I can accomplish this goal because I will not be alone and even the smallest things help towards my goal. Even if my students only retain 10% of the information I teach, the point is that they are retaining something, and over time, that percentage will grow.

**R**ealistic:

The goal is within my capability because the project sponsor, Mrs. Lantz, makes it easy for all volunteers to access the school. Mrs. Lantz will provide the supplies and she opens her home to us to meet and carpool together to FACLC. All volunteers have the principal Peter Ramadan’s phone number in case we need it, but he and the school are aware of the times we will be there.

**T**imely:

I know exactly when I will be able to go to the school and teach: every Saturday from 12pm to 3pm, and every Tuesday from 3:30pm to 5pm. This goal does not have a deadline, because I can never stop helping these kids. They will need my help until I am no longer living in Egypt. But, this does not mean nothing will ever be achieved or accomplished, because so much has been achieved already. These kids are very bright and I have witnessed a lot of improvement.

Action Plan

The FACLC

Seventh Graders

EDUCATING

(spreading knowledge to those in need)

GOALS

FACLC

Make Relationships

Stay Committed

Teach Math

OBSTACLES

1. How to teach math?

2. Language Barrier

3. Frustration with learning speed

TASKS

1. Get face time as frequently as possible

2. Stay calm and collected, don’t get frustrated

3. The more face time, the better!

1. Assist the 7th graders with math

2. Prepare worksheets for them to work on

3. BE HANDS ON

4. Be dedicated

1. Be friendly

2. Ask the kids to tell you a bit about themselves

3. Remember names

4. Try to teach the same kid as often as possible

Journal Entries

1. The opportunity of serving at FACLC, otherwise known as the Found Africa Children Learning Center, has been an incredible learning experience.  Through volunteering at Found, I have learned not only about serving others, but also I have learned how to be the teacher.  At Found, I help by teaching the 7th graders math.  I remember my first time going with Mrs. Lantz to the school with zero initial expectations.  I had no idea what it was going to be like.  I was actually nervous a little bit, and I knew that I had no reason to be, but I was.  I was nervous that the kids would not understand me. I was nervous that I would not say or teach the right things.  I was nervous that I was going to just confuse them.  I was afraid of judgment.  But as soon as I arrived at Found, these fears and concerns immediately went away.  These 7th graders are my age and older.  They are Sudanese refugees, and they are getting an education.  Definitely not a CAC education, but they are learning.  I never actually realized my impact and influence on them until I found out about how their other teachers teach them.  Their other teachers in their other classes simply write information on the blackboard, and walk out of the room.  “Where is the learning in copying down information?”,  Mrs. Lantz said to me one day , “You have to show them why and how things work”.  That is where CAC volunteers come in.  The teachers for their other classes are often times refugees themselves.  CAC volunteers are kids, and we provide one on one attention and guidance for the 7th graders.  The first time I went to Found, I had no idea what the educational level was for all the kids.  I did not know what to expect academically.  Unfortunately, their level is a lot lower than I initially imagined.  It was not until I taught one session that I really understood how much help they really need, and how much I am really serving the community.  Teaching at Found also helped me realize how incredibly fortunate I am.  The opportunities I am given in life are not given to everyone in the world.  Not every kid my age gets a world-class education.  I definitely want to continue to work at this school, because I know I am serving my community in a really positive way.

2. During the week, I can only go to Found twice. I can go once on Saturday and once on Tuesday. This led me to other side projects like picking up trash.  One problem I think everyone around the world, especially in Cairo, can see needs fixing is the trash.  Trash is such an issue here locally, and I have been trying to do the little impact I can to keep the streets around school clean. It has been incredible to see the community’s response to a white teenager picking up the streets.  I have had many cars honk their horns at me, people give me thumbs up, and some people have even offered to help.  Every time they do, I am motivated to continue.  One day, while I was finishing an area behind school, a CAC faculty member stopped me and asked if I had a community clean-up group.  This idea really got to me, and made me think of the impact a few more hands could have on our streets.  A group of people cleaning opposed to just one person would make a huge difference.  By having a community clean-up Maadi project, I could spread awareness to a much larger group of people.  Locals would not only see one teenager cleaning the streets, but many people cleaning.  We could post signs in Arabic and English telling people to refrain from littering.  We could raise money to purchase large trash containers to keep all the trash in one place for the people that take the trash.  That way, its in a centralized area and its easy for them to take it all in one go.  Of course this is not an easy task, it will take a lot of work.  But I am seriously considering this idea.  An issue like garbage and trash is not one to be tackled alone.  I will be thinking about this potential project a lot over the next couple of months, and hopefully next year we can make it a reality.  I have learned a lot from picking up trash.  I have come to the realization that we are just hurting ourselves by polluting our homes and communities with trash.  And of course I can get very scientific and talk about entropy and talk about how we as humans will always consume and deposit, but then I won’t get anywhere.  The important thing to remember is that no one wants to live in their own waste and filth.  Let’s clean our streets.

3. Service is something in life that can be so beneficial towards your character.  I have learned so much since I started doing Service Learning. I never thought that I would want to do service learning next year but after all the things I have done this year, I know I will for sure continue with an important project. I have three big options for next year that really need my help. One option for a project could be starting a “clean-up Maadi” group to promote a cleaner environment around school and across Maadi. Another option could be working as a math teacher for an SAT course at the African Hope School. There is a small group of African students there that are taking a year and a half long SAT course. I would teach math, while Mrs. Lantz teaches English. A third option for me next year would be to continue with the Found school as a math teacher. All of these options need me! Hopefully next year, I will be able to help where I can as often as possible. Through working with the seventh graders at Found, I have learned a lot about how fortunate I am and how valuable education is. Teaching seventh grade math to other kids my age is an eye-opening experience. Everyday I teach I realize I how much more people like me are needed and now I fully understand why I am doing what I am doing. It feels really good when you know you are making a difference.

4. So, my project ran into a huge speed bump recently and I am not too happy about it. The Found school decided to close down early because of the upcoming elections and now I have no way of teaching math. But, Mrs. Lantz and all the volunteers have figured out a way to continue serving this group of seventh graders in a really positive way. Rather than going to the school to teach math, we now meet on a regular basis to cook and bake at Mrs. Lantz’s house. At first this was only for the girls in the seventh grade because Alyosha and I were able to take the boys to school to play sports together. Unfortunately, Mr. Shuetze said that we could only bring them one time. At first, I questioned myself about whether or not baking was service but soon realized its value. I realized the importance and value in what we were doing after Alyosha told me about a seventh grader named Butros. Since school had finished for him, Butros John was considering returning back to Sudan. The sheer idea of him returning to Sudan scares me, because as soon as he goes back, he will most likely be forced into the military. This is why we do what we do. We are not just baking food and playing sports. We are teaching good skills in the kitchen, we are picking out books for some of the kids to read and write book reports on, we are stopping people like Butros from returning to Sudan where they may be killed. I am really happy that we have found a way to continue serving this select group of people, and it is great getting to know them outside of the school environment.

Disability Research

Autism

Autism Society

<http://www.autism-society.org/>

* Autism = developmental disorder
  + affects brain’s normal development
    - social/communication skills
  + appears – first 3 years of life
  + exact causes = unknown
  + spectrum disorder
    - some mild some strong cases
  + GENETIC
  + 1 out of every 88 births in the US
  + Autism affects boys 3 - 4 times more often than girls
* Signs/Symptoms
  + delay in spoken language
  + repetitive mannerisms
  + unusual distress when routines are changed
  + little/no eye contact
  + lack of interest in making friends
  + staring off into space
* Vaccines?
  + some believe that the small amount of mercury (called thimerosal) that is a common preservative in multidose vaccines causes autism or ADHD
    - studies have NOT shown this risk to be true
* Treatment
  + an experienced specialist should design for individual child
    - Applied behavior analysis (ABA)
    - Medications
    - Occupational therapy
    - Physical therapy
    - Speech-language therapy

PubMed Health

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002494/

Hours Sheet

Pictures

Cooking various foods in Mrs. Lantz’s kitchen! A great time for bonding.

 



 



