Community Service

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| --- | --- |
| Reflective Essay | 3-5 |
| Smart Goals | 6 |
| 4 Journals | 7-10 |
| Disability Research | 11-12 |
| Pictures | 13 |
| Hour Sheet | 14 |

Table of Contents

**Reflective Essay**

After previously completing one year of community service I knew for sure I would sign up to continue for a second year. Community service is not the kind of thing you only do for one year and then stop, it’s something inspiring that you want to continue. Last year we started visiting an orphanage called Yanboo3 el Noor orphanage located on the outskirts of Maadi. Throughout the year last year we got to know the kids there and created a bond with the kids and the owner. Our main goal was to teach them English. Each kid had his own English book. At the beginning of this year we returned to the orphanage and spoke to the manager about returning to work with the kids, of course he was delighted. This year has taught me many new skills that I’m sure will help me with my future both in community service and in life. Dealing with orphans is quite different than dealing with anyone else. It’s something special because in their lives they never had anyone and when you are introduced into their lives they really do stick with you. I learned that when dealing with orphans you have to be extremely nice and not say anything or do anything that would make them sad or angry. This year actually I learned a lot about service itself and what exactly service is and why people do service. This year really showed me that there’s more to doing service than just the hours. After spending a couple of hours with orphans and talking to them and getting to know them you feel good about yourself and you feel thankful. I can see that community service has made me a better and more appreciative person and I believe everyone should be thankful for what they have. One of the hard things that is a problem all over Egypt in schools is when we’re trying to teach the kids something for example a word in English, and they only memorize it. This isn’t bad of course but it makes it hard for them to use it in context and it makes it hard for them to actually understand the word. We tried our best to overcome this challenge by changing the order of the words in the book or drawing them pictures instead of writing the actual words. I think our changes helped them understand the actual meanings of the words. It was a challenge to continue at Yanboo3 el Noor this year because last year when we started all we needed to do was teach them the base of English. We taught them a few words and a few baby sentences but as they learned more and more we needed to teach them more and more. It was more difficult this year because of the higher level of English we had to teach them. They were learning full sentences and even though it was extremely hard for them, they understood and learned after a while. One of the things that we are regularly impressed with is the level of preparedness the kids have. Each kid has his own backpack and pencil and book and journal to write in, after all this is an orphanage so this is all very impressive. It’s hard to see progress with your own eyes. We have been working now for 2 years with the same orphanage and with the same kids and we’ve watched them grow and really there is a strong improvement in all aspects from when we met them until now, especially from the beginning of this year. At the beginning of this year the kids were just writing words and barely spelling or knowing them but as the year went on and our work went on they begin to actually understand all the words and write full sentences. One of the things we started doing last year and continued was that every time we went we would call the manager in advance and take a list of food to buy from him and buy food for the orphanage. Every time we went, we went with food, all kinds of food and sometimes even just necessities for the orphanage. Overall this year was very successful in the aspect of community service.

**Smart Goals:**

Specific:

We are a group of four CAC students who will work with 10 year old, Egyptian orphans to assist them to improve their English skills with the aim of helping them perform better of their English test exams,

Measurable:

We can measure their progress by engaging the students in a conversation in English with one of the group members at the end of the year. This will assess the degree to which the kids improved their English conversation skills.

Achievable:

As a group of four CAC students we can achieve improvement in the kids’ English skills as we can each work with the group as a whole and we can divide the kids in the class into smaller groups to help them learn. English language skill is extremely important to their future and we can make it work.

Realistic:

It is difficult to achieve improvement in language skills and it takes continuous repetition and time with the students. As a group of four CAC students we believe we can achieve results over the year. We are fluent in English and this will help as the students will hear native or near-native English language speakers.

Timely:

We meet with the students on Fridays or Saturdays from the beginning of the second quarter through the beginning of our CAC exams.

**Journal 1:**

My friends, Sheikh, Seif, Rizk, and I, began went to Yanboo3 el Noor the first time this year around September. We continued our tradition of last year and stopped by Metro market to buy goods for the orphanage. We bought what the manager requested and brought them to the orphanage. Since today was the first day in a very long time, he was extremely happy to see us. We sat and talked for a while then visited the kids in the room next door, they were beyond happy to see us. Since it was our first visit back we decided to stay for a while and just talk and play with the kids. In the beginning we started our lesson and starting reviewing their second edition of the English book and we saw instantly that many of the kids had dramatically improved in their English speaking and writing skills. After we learned a few new words, we put the books down and played with the kids for a while. The kids make you feel happy, they really do put a smile on your face. We talked about all different sorts of things and what they did over the summer and we could tell they really did enjoy our company. It was a good way to start the year of service.

**Journal 2:**

We decided to go again later on in September to continue our service and time at the Yanboo3 el Noor orphanage. As we always do, we asked the manager for a list of goods to buy for the orphanage before we went and went to Metro market and bought them. As usual we arrived and spoke with the manager for a bit then went to start teaching the kids. The kids were actually very attentive and listened and did everything we asked them to. We started by reviewing new vocabulary and seeing their progress. We realized that the kids were improving and that we would have to teach them additional vocabulary to be of any value to them. We found this a bit challenging. The kids are attentive and enjoy the sessions. I think they like the time with male teenagers as they look up to us. I also enjoy the sessions as it makes me fill good to be doing something for the kids. We sometimes experience some focus issues with the kids but we are able to deal with this. Generally the kids are so happy to spend time with us that we can work through any challenges.

**Journal 3**

As the year continued it has been difficult to find times to go and work with the kids. We are in touch with the manager but often our schedules conflict. We usually try to go on Fridays and sometimes on Saturdays when we have the time. This winter has been Varsity Swim season for me and I have not had the extra time to devote to the service. This is a bit frustrating and I realize that dedication to community service really requires continued ongoing work with the kids. When there are large breaks in our sessions, the kids are harder to work with the next time and they don’t make the same progress when we try to help them improve English. I’m realizing that I need to give the community service a higher level of priority and commitment and I really want to give more time and energy to support the orphanage and the kids, but I do find my time limited with my swimming commitment and all of the academic and homework requirements. I would say that this winter was the most difficult period balancing community service with other commitments but I also feel I learned from this.

**Journal 4**

This spring I was able to go to the orphanage about six times mostly on Fridays and Saturdays. As swim season is finished and I work out mostly in the mornings I have been able to dedicate more time to helping the kids. We’ve been working with small groups of kids in each session. We use the blackboard as a tool and write the words in English and then the kids translate. We also have discussions with the kids to encourage them to speak up. The kids are really active when they see us. This is sometimes hard to manage but it makes it fun. We also continued to speak with the Manager to see what the Orphanage needs and then we bring supplies and food based on what they need. The Manager seems very grateful for this help and we are happy to do this, as we know that we are privileged and that we can help in this way. It makes us realize how just a few hours and a few pounds, which for us is not significant, can make such a difference to the kids and to the orphanage’s ability to feed and take care of the kids. This is always a very satisfying feeling. I think the most important part of doing quality community service is to find a place where they really need the help and we walk away feeling good about the commitment.

Disability Research **on Dyslexia**

Dyslexia is a developmental reading disorder. I felt it would be interesting to research the disorder as we are working with the orphans to help them acquire language skills and this could be related.

Dyslexia Definition: A developmental reading disorder (DRD) that occurs when the brain does not properly recognize and process certain symbols.

Causes, Risk Factors and incidence: Dyslexia occurs when there is a problem in areas of the brain that help interpret language. It is not caused by vision problems as is often assumed.

The disorder is characterized as an information processing problem. It interferes with a person’s ability to think and to understand complex ideas. People with DRD for the most part have normal intelligence; some have above-average intelligence the same as the general population

In some cases, DRD or Dyslexia can be evident in combination with a developmental writing disorder and developmental arithmetic disorder. These disorders involve the use of symbols to convey information. These conditions may appear alone or in any combination. DRD can often run in families.

Symptoms: A person challenged with DRD can have trouble separating sounds that make up spoken words and may also have trouble rhyming. These abilities are essential to a person’s ability to learn to read. When a child first learns to read, his or her initial reading skills use word recognition. This requires the ability to separate out the sounds in words and then to match the sounds with letters of with groups of letters.

People with DRD may have a difficult time understanding sentences as they will be challenged to connect the sounds of language to the letters of words. True dyslexia is a much deeper challenge than simply confusing or transposing letters, for example mistaking ”b” and “d."

Symptoms of DRD can include:

* Difficulty determining the meaning (idea content) of a simple sentence
* Difficulty learning to recognize written words
* Difficulty rhyming

DRD often occurs at the same time and in combination with writing or math learning problems.

 