

Saint Vincent Students: A Kindness Revolution

Students doing outstanding community service and their stories.

By Lucy Perry

Each of us have been touched by service, whether we have been served to or have performed service; each person knows the power of kindness and giving. Studies have shown that volunteering has a positive effect on social psychological factors, such as a sense of purpose and accomplishment, and enhances a person's social ability to buffer stress and reduce disease risk. (Herzog et al., 1998; Greenfield and Marks, 2004; Harlow and Cantor, 1996) These benefits appear undoubtedly appealing to everyone. Especially during the holidays there are many volunteer opportunities available for basically everyone. Some organization that are in need of volunteers are Habitats For Humanity of Sonoma County, the West County Health Center, and NAMI Sonoma County. There are lists of multiple opportunities on the Volunteer Center of Sonoma County's website.

Because of these amazing benefits of volunteering, students at Saint Vincents are held to a high standard of volunteer work. I chose to interview a few students who exemplify how community service can change lives. Whether it is through Boy Scouts of America, BOOST Camps, or Kaiser Permanente, these students have taken away amazing stories and life lessons from their service.

Katie Gross volunteers at Kaiser Permanente San Rafael. Her main works include tending to patients when they need help, following her attendings (doctors), and assisting them when she can. Katie shared a memorable story of a working with a four year old who had metastatic melanoma in her brain. It was known that she would die within the next four to six months. The child beckoned Katie to come to her and sit by her bed. She then asked Katie, "Are you going to

save me?” Katie explains her reaction saying, “Tears came down my face. I just told her ‘We are going to try our hardest’”. The child and Katie continued to talk and were joking together, smiling and laughing. “My attending and their mother were looking up, because apparently that was the first time she had laughed in months. It was just an amazing experience.” This simple act of Katie talking to the child and making her laugh, had benefitted them so much. “I take away that it is never too late to help anyone. Even if you do the smallest thing like just helping someone get out of bed or smile at them in any way; it’ll make their lives so much better. Just sitting with them and understanding them, it just helps them so much.”

Another prime example of a student who works outstandingly in community service is Cameron Ray. He volunteers at BOOST Camp over the summer. This camp helps people with Cerebral Palsy and other brain based motor delays to improve their independence and quality of life. “I gain a lot more from it then they seem to gain. It’s awesome.” Through his many summers working with this program he has had a lot of amazing and memorable experiences. He shares one saying, “I was working with a kid named Joe and he could not walk when I first started working with him, and by the end of the camp I got to watch him walk for the first time without any help. That was really nice to see.” An experience like that can change your whole outlook on life. Something we so often take for granted like walking, can mean so much more to someone else. Cameron shares what he takes away from the experience. “[I take away] respect for others, and compassion and understanding for those who have different struggles than I do.”

Tom Hearty is another student who exemplifies the positive effect community service has on people. He has been a Boy Scout for ten years and says, “The boy scout uniform represents that I am willing to help everyone. The uniform carries a responsibility.” He takes away from his multiple community service experiences that, “Being apart of your community is very important

thing to do for everyone. It's just about giving back to others. Here in America we get to witness and be apart of so many things, and the only reason they are being done is because of community service. It's giving back to what you are contributing to."

Service is a very important part of not only the Saint Vincent community but the global community. Through community service young people can gain hands on experiences that can potentially change the course of their life, lessons can only be learned through human connection. Whether that lesson is the importance of helping others like in Katie's case, respecting everyone like in Cameron's case, or the importance of giving back like Tom's case, it is clear that community service is doing amazing things for our community and the world.