

**Sara Black- St. Susanna- Ursuline Academy**

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When I was in the sixth grade we were required to perform service hours for the first time. A group from my church decided to do a service project at a trailer park. We would be entertaining and reading to the children who lived in the complex. We would also help them pick out donated books to take home with them. We were told that the children who lived there had close to nothing and that they would be very grateful for our visit. This was hard for me to wrap my mind around. I thought to myself, "All of these kids are waiting for you. This is your time to change someone's life."

When we went into the club house for the first time, all of the kids were waiting for us. You could see the hopefulness in their eyes. These children's ages were varied from three to ten, and there was even one girl older than me. First, we decided to help them pick out picture books and then read it to them. I remember helping a little girl and a little boy, who were siblings. They both had bright blond hair, dazzling green eyes, and wonderful smiles. I thought to myself, "These children have very little, and yet they are still smiling and making the best out of what they had. Maybe I could learn something from them."

The siblings I was helping wanted to read *Somebody Loves You, Mr. Hatch*. This is a book about Mr. Hatch, a grumpy old man that lives alone, has no friends, and only leaves his house when it's an absolute necessity. This is his regular routine until t day Mr. Hatch finds a package on his doorstep. It is a cardboard heart with chocolates inside, and a note that says, "Somebody loves you." Mr. Hatch is astonished. He has no friends, no family, and yet someone loves him. After that, Mr. Hatch is never in a bad mood again until one day when the post man comes back to Mr. Hatch's house. The post man, looking very disappointed, says that he accidentally delivered the package to the wrong house. Mr. Hatch is devastated. The next day, when Mr. Hatch goes back to work, he does not smile, he does not laugh, and he does not stop to talk to anyone. No one knew why Mr. Hatch was acting like this until the postman told everyone in the small town what had happened. They all exclaimed, "But we do love Mr. Hatch!" They threw Mr. Hatch a huge party and hung a banner on his porch that said, "We love you, Mr. Hatch!" And Mr. Hatch loved them.

After reading this book to those kids, I realized that it could relate to them. I wanted those little kids to know that someone loves them. They may go through some ups and downs but all they need is a little love to get through it, just like Mr. Hatch. I might not have even been close to changing their lives, but at least I was off to a good start by changing the outcome of their day.

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Next, it was time to do a craft. The kids were going to make picture frames for their parents. This activity was chaotic. Some of the children took the craft seriously and concentrated on making their frame while others just ran around crazily until someone told them to sit back down. All of the kids had glue stuck to their hands, there were rhinestones and stickers stuck to the table, and Elmer's liquid glue had been spilt on the floor. I knew it would take a long time to clean up this mess, but I was glad that the kids were having fun. After another fifteen minutes, most of the kids finished and were getting antsy, so we decided this would be a great time for a snack break. The kids were delighted to finally get something to eat. All of the people doing the project sat down with groups of kids and talked to them while they ate. I was paired with a group of four boys. They were very hyper, and I could tell that they didn't get to play with their friends very much, so I tried to make my time with them enjoyable. They devoured their snack in less than a minute, so that left us plenty of time to play games. They even seemed happy when they were just chasing each other in circles for a while. They all looked like they were having fun, and I was glad that I could help contribute to their happiness.

Sadly, soon after that, it was time to clean up. While I was moving some boxes, the little girl, with blond hair and green eyes, which I read to earlier, came up to me and gave me a huge hug. She exclaimed, "Thank you so much for coming and helping us. This has been one of the best Saturdays ever!" And as she let go and walked away, I noticed something in her hand. It was the book *Somebody Loves You, Mr. Hatch*.

I am so glad that I went to that service project. It was not only fun for me but for the kids that I helped, too. To me, it was so enjoyable that it didn't even feel like service hours that I was required to do. It felt like something that you do just for fun and for the joy of helping people. I feel like I really affected the lives of the children at the trailer park and my life, too. I realized how fortunate I am, and that I should appreciate what I have. Furthermore, I have become more interested in helping kids because of how I felt after volunteering at the trailer park. Now, I volunteer to help disadvantaged kids as much as I can, and I have recently gone back to the same trailer park and helped out again. I have also helped at Vacation Bible School and at my church's children's faith formation classes for two years in a row. All of this, especially volunteering at the trailer park, has made me more interested in helping little kids. It has made me realize that, one day, I think I will have a career helping children. I also believe that I have affected the kids at the trailer park. About a week after we helped out there, the kids sent us a card that they all signed. It said how much they enjoyed our company and wished that we could come back. This kind gesture truly made me believe that I positively affected at least one of those kids. And since I volunteer at many other places helping children, I believe that I am changing the lives of wonderful children every day.