

Luke Stiles - St. Columban School - St. Xavier High School

I try to make a difference and make people smile when I'm given an opportunity to serve. I have done service projects through my grade school and also with my family for almost as long as I can remember. Sometimes the things I do are small, but I hope that they will provide happiness to others.

One of the services that I have been doing with my family for many years is to collect gifts for a poor family in need, through St. Vincent de Paul. My family organizes our neighborhood to donate gifts. My Mom and I sort, wrap and tag all the gifts and pack them for delivery to the needy family. I've always spent some of my own money to help buy a gift or two for one of the children in the family. This year, my mom invited me to help her deliver the gifts to the Christmas family. I was quite nervous because it was a dangerous neighborhood that had lots of crime but I decided to go. I remember when we were bringing the gifts in there were lots of little kids around us excited to see all the presents. Their smiles really made me feel good because I knew that we helped make their Christmas special. Then on the way out we prayed with them and then left. This experience really opened my eyes to the poverty in our city and it made me feel grateful for what I have. I look forward to continuing to help the poor in this small way each year.

Another service that I do is to provide help and care for an elderly man named Clyde. Even though Clyde is not related to us, I feel like he is a part of our family. Every time we would go visit him his face would light up with a smile and we would sit and talk with him for a while. Also I would help fill his bird feeders and keep him company while my parents cleaned up his house. I would rake leaves, take out the trash and do odd jobs for him. I enjoy my visits with Clyde knowing that we bring him joy because he has no family and is quite lonely. In the past we would visit Clyde about once a month, but as his dementia has gotten worse I see him around twice a week because he needs a lot more help. Recently my parents and I helped him move to a nursing home and we visit him a lot there. The last time I went to see him I helped refill his bird feeder outside the window to his room, just as I used to do at his house. While I was out there, I decided to fill up some of his neighbor's bird feeders. I will never forget when I was

filling one of his neighbor's feeders an elderly lady looked out the window at me and gave me one of the biggest smiles I've ever seen. It made me feel good to take the extra step and fill up his neighbor's feeders and not just fill up Clyde's. I've added bird-feeder filling to my weekly jobs because I know the elderly residents of the home get so much joy from such a small thing.

Last year in the 7th grade our class went out to different locations to do service. I chose to go to Free Store Food bank, which is like a grocery store where all the food is free. While we were there we helped unload boxes and crush the empty boxes. Also we helped restock the shelves in the actual store, where the people in need of food were shopping. It felt good to know that I was making a difference in these people's lives and they were going to have food on their plate. Also around 3 months ago our 8th grade class had another day when we went out and did service. This year I went to a place called InReturn. InReturn is a company where they employ people with traumatic brain injuries and give them simple jobs so they can make money. Also, they help them with social skills and give them a happy work atmosphere. While I was there I helped the employees assemble nail polish caps, put stickers on boxes, and other jobs that the employees do there. It was fun to talk with the employees and have conversations with them about sports and other things. Also it was great to make them smile and see them laugh.

As I move on to high school at St. Xavier I will continue to do more service and will try to create as many smiles as possible. It feels good to make people happy and to know that I can make a difference in the world.