

Lizzie Jira-Immaculate Heart of Mary-Saint Ursula Academy

Most people think that when we contribute to those in needs, the recipients are the ones who benefit from the services. Although this is partly true, I have found that the ones receiving the aid have taught me invaluable lessons about life and true happiness.

Ever since I was eight, I have been volunteering regularly at Crayons to Computers. Crayons is a non-profit organization that provides both basic school supplies and other learning tools for children at schools with over 60% of their students on a free lunch program. Stocking shelves, sorting donations and assembling kits are among my basic duties that I perform. The pictures of the smiling children that hang from the Crayons to Computer's walls remind me and countless other volunteers of why service is so detrimental. Crayons to Computers has ignited my interest in service and has led me to more opportunities in my community for stewardship.

For the past three years, I have led a group of kindergarteners in Immaculate Heart of Mary's Vacation Bible School program during the summer. The children perform activities from dances to service projects that are all centered on that year's topical theme. I find so much enjoyment in seeing their smiles as they learn about their faith in many engaging way such as crafts and songs. It is so amusing to see the children progress through the week, looking up to their older role models just as I once did when I was in the program.

On a personal level, I have developed a working and social relationship with my eighty-three year old next door neighbor. Our friendship began with me mowing his lawn and cleaning his basement that hadn't been cleaned in fifteen years. As a break from his Lean Cuisine meals, I occasionally cook and bake for him as well. Although I am not a technology mogul, I attempt fix his numerous technology problems that occur on his iPad. Though our relationship began on a business level, he has come to be like an adopted grandfather to me.

My most recent endeavor has been with the Tender Mercies organization. This association allows homeless and mentally handicapped people to live in safe environments with a surplus of food. As a volunteer, my job is to prepare and serve the tenants homemade meals. Tender Mercies has made me realize even more how fortunate I am to have basic necessities such as food and a safe place to sleep. The gratitude that the occupants express is so immense and heartfelt that it keeps me coming back to volunteer. I feel that God allows people to suffer so that others can work to change their situation, making themselves better people. Therefore, it is important to me to make even just the slightest difference in their lives.

Next year as I enter Saint Ursula Academy, I look forward to engaging in more service opportunities to further benefit those in the community. Just as Saint Ursula's founder Saint Angelia Merici once stated, "For I understand now, even more, [that] I want and am able to help you and do your good in every way". (Counsels, Prologue 23-25)