

Maddi O'Connell - Mercy Montessori - Saint Ursula Academy

There are many positive ways that I have affected the people in my community.

One of the first places I ever made an impact on the people around me was when I was in the Aubrey Rose Foundation American Girl Fashion Show (AGFS). I started being in the show the spring of my first grade year. I will never forget the first time that I auditioned. I watched the video that explained Aubrey's amazing story and how I could help raise money that would allow other sick children to get the medical attention that they needed. I was very moved by Aubrey's will to live, and I knew right that second I wanted to be a part of increasing awareness and raising money for extremely ill kids. I was a model in the AGFS for four more consecutive years, and I'm hoping that when I'm in High School I will be given the opportunity to MC the show as well. I loved wearing different American Girl outfits each year and matching my favorite dolls, but the best part of the AGFS is that I was able to help make a difference in the lives of hundreds of kids.

I also have impacted the community through my love of the performing arts. For many years, and at a variety of places, I have utilized my passion for the arts to bring joy to many people in Cincinnati. An example of how I have used my talent is playing the piano. On Grandparent's Day at my school (Mercy Montessori), I have played piano for the enjoyment of the visitors who attend Grandparent's Day. It always warms my heart to see our guests smiling and clapping after each student plays their piece. I have also played piano at a couple of senior centers, and it was very clear that our music made their day. Another way that I bring joy to people is by singing. My voice studio and I perform a vocal concert twice a year for senior citizens. I've performed in our recitals for the past four years, and I love how the elderly sing and clap along to the familiar tunes. They seem very pleased that we share our talents and music with them. In addition, I have used my talents to entertain the community through my passion of musical theater. I have been performing with The Children's Theatre of Cincinnati (TCTC) for the past five seasons. One thing that I love about TCTC is that we put on special performances in the daytime for school children. This allows many students who are extremely underserved in the arts to experience, enjoy, and sometimes even develop a passion of their own for live theater. We bring so many smiles to children's faces, and that's one of the main reasons I love performing with TCTC. Finally, I performed in a special presentation of Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella for Pregnancy Center West at The Covedale Center for the Performing Arts. Every seat was filled and I felt very fortunate to be able to share so much Christmas spirit in December of 2012 to that very special group of people in our community.

As I mentioned above, I have made a difference in the lives of others by helping those in need. When I was in Preschool, my Mom took me to Ronald McDonald House to help bake cookies for the families staying there while their children were ill. I knew that they were going through very tough

times, and my hope was that lots of homemade cookies would make their day just a little bit brighter. In fourth grade, my homeroom teacher took our class to Matthew 25: Ministries. At Matthew 25, my classmates and I put together bags of toiletries to be shipped off to different areas that had been victimized by a devastating disaster. I learned so much that day about the good work of Matthew 25 while working with my team, and it felt really good knowing that I was truly helping people get a hold of the basic essentials of everyday life. One spring, my Girl Scout Troop participated in the Great American Clean-Up. It was a cold and rainy day, but my heart was warm knowing that I was helping the environment and the people in the neighborhood near my school. I also regularly sort through my closet and drawers in order to donate many items to the Vietnam Veterans. I am very thankful for those who served and protected our country, and it feels really good to assist both the veterans and their families.

My school, Mercy Montessori, has provided me with most of my opportunities for doing community service. In the seventh and eighth grades at Mercy, we get to go out into the community on a regular basis and perform works of service. Many Wednesdays the entire Junior High goes to different locations: Stepping Stones, Mercy Neighborhood Ministries (MNM), or we work on the premises of Mercy Montessori to do what is called Erdkinder (which is a term coined by Maria Montessori that means “children of the land”). Last year we also worked at Gorman Heritage Farm. We helped the staff with their difficult farm chores that they have to do each and every day. This year my class is focused on improving the grounds at Mercy, in particular, our Ecolab (which is a peaceful area where the lower grades can experience and learn about nature). When we work at Stepping Stones, we eat lunch with the teenagers who have disabilities. We all laugh a lot during our lunches, and I feel like we really brighten these special kids’ day. Plus, I truly love learning about these interesting kids who are actually a lot like me. We also help maintain the premises by raking leaves so that people don’t slip and fall. It’s amazing how many people thank us for doing something as simple as raking leaves. I have learned from my experiences at Stepping Stones that even the smallest things to me can have a big impact in someone else’s life. Another place we go on our service days is Mercy Neighborhood Ministries. MNM does so many incredible things, but the specific role of my class is to help with the food pantry. For example, we go through the shelves and throw away expired food. Sometimes when I go to MNM, I get to hand out or deliver food to the many people in need. I love seeing the people’s faces light up when they get a good meal, and they are always very thankful. Another thing I have done for MNM is hand out Christmas gifts at an apartment complex in the neighborhood. It felt really good to be a part of the joy of giving presents to people who aren’t able to buy them for their families at Christmastime. Finally, I have been fortunate enough to help plan our school Mass at least once a year since first grade. I also have been playing the musical accompaniment for our monthly school Mass for the past two years. It feels good when I see

my teachers, Sister Aloyse and Mr. K, truly enjoying the music that their students are creating during Mass.

Last but not least, I really like helping my Grandparents by doing work on their farm in Illinois. I feel best when I help my older family members who I love so much and can truly benefit from my assistance. On the farm, I have helped plant, maintain, and harvest my Grandpa's 1-acre/very large garden. As he has gotten older, it really helps him when I lend a helping hand. As a farm-wife, my Grandma regularly feeds ten or more people, with at least four side dishes at every meal. Since my Grandma's meal preparation is very labor intensive, I always help her cook the meals, bake the desserts, and set the table when I'm at her house. When I was a little girl, my Mom drove me from Cincinnati to Illinois so that I could be with my Grandpa the day that he retired from his many years of farming. There are lots of pictures of me riding in the combine through the cornfield with my Grandpa as he made his very last round in the field. I am so proud to be a part of a family whose farming has helped feed millions of people all over the world for more than 100 years. After multiple generations of farming in our family, my Grandparents were so happy that I was able to be on their Illinois farm on such an important day.

I am very happy that I have been able to make a difference in the lives of people around me in just my few 13 years of life and I'm even more excited to discover many other ways that I can make a positive impact on the people around me in the future.