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I am Ian Meier, and I have been going to Visitation for 8 years now. Over these 8 years, I have tried to make a difference in the lives of people around me by helping other people and my community in various ways. Some of the people I have assisted are my two special needs sisters Rachel and Jillian, elderly people, the poor, and children with disabilities at Stepping Stones.

My oldest sister, Rachel (15) has Trisomy 18, a catastrophic chromosomal defect which has taken away her ability to walk, talk, eat on her own, etc. Jillian (14) has multiple disabilities including microcephaly and moderate mental retardation. I try to help them in any way I can. With Rachel, I play with her, help feed her, keep an eye on her when my parents need me to, and any other thing my parents need like getting a pack of diapers out of the garage for them, assisting with getting her in and out of the car and setting up her transport chair, or getting her off the school bus. I am an extra pair of hands! But in spite of all she can't do, she always has a smile on her face. Even though she can't talk, you can tell she is always happy. Every time I do some everyday things to support her, I walk away inspired and motivated to do what she can't as a way to spread her happiness into the world.

Jillian is pretty independent for the most part, but she still requires full supervision because her judgment is very poor. She needs to be walked down our long driveway after she gets off the bus after school so she doesn't get distracted by a neighbor's dog or something and dart into the street. I also help her with the tasks of daily living like cutting her meat at dinner, how to put the cap back on the toothpaste, helping with reading books, and teaching her how to use the microwave without setting fire to the kitchen.

Along with helping out at home with my two special needs sisters, I also get involved with community service by volunteering at Stepping Stones. In the Fall, I became a volunteer for the Saturday Kids Club so that I could help out whenever they need me. When I go, I am put into a group of about 10 to 15 boys who are about 8 years old. Throughout the day I help with things like cooking, lunchtime, facilitating tasks for those that need help, pushing wheelchairs and running errands for the chaperone. The boys love that I know all about Star Wars!

At the canned food drive for St. Leo's, Visitation's partner parish, I volunteered to help collect, box up, and ship canned foods to their food pantry. It was a lot of fun and really nice to do something so simple, but effective, for the community. I have also set up tables and chairs for church functions, and I co-chair my family's Mystery Money booth with my dad every year for the church festival.

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For the last couple of years, I have assisted the elderly in various ways like shoveling our neighbor's driveway when her husband was out of town. Being involved with People Working Cooperatively has been one of my favorite volunteer efforts. In sixth grade my dad asked me if I wanted to join People Working Cooperatively and I said yes because it sounded like fun. In the fall and spring my dad and I have gone to assist elderly homeowners with whatever they need. The jobs may include raking leaves, cleaning gutters, building a new deck, tree trimming, and one year we even replaced a woman's concrete steps!

When I was around 10 or so, my Grandma was diagnosed with kidney failure. Throughout the next six months, my entire family would always be visiting the hospital or nursing home non-stop to see how my Grandma was doing and to watch baseball with her to keep her company. She loved the Reds. Sadly, after a long battle, she passed away. This loss wasn't just hard for me but for everyone in my family. For my Grandma's funeral, I signed up to be a pallbearer and to help in any way possible. But it is not just about burying the dead and forgetting about it; you have to carry on their legacy, their courage, and even their hardship. By doing that, you can be a light that carries on their life even though they are no longer with us. Since then, I have become a server and helped not only at family funerals but at other people's funerals too.

My Uncle Tim is with a big construction company and, last year, he was tasked with removing furniture and equipment from the old Mercy Franciscan Hospital before the demolition of it began. Rather than throw everything away, he decided to send it to needy people in Appalachia. So, my dad and I went to assist on Saturdays. We helped clear eight floors and we sent every chair, table, and knickknack we could down one elevator - one load at a time - into semi's to be driven to Appalachia by seminarians who also volunteered.

In addition, my mom and I have participated in Operation Shoebox for several years. This program is sponsored by the Samaritan's Purse organization and helps bring the Word of God to children all over the world. Following the guidelines provided, we fill shoe boxes with educational and hygiene supplies, small books and toys, and anything else useful or fun that we can come up with throughout the year.

What would all this be without having some effect on me? Well, let me tell you. By doing things like working at the food drive and the hospital, I have been able to meet new people and get to know better those that I already knew. Also, by doing these things, I have helped others live a happier and more comfortable life, which is the thing that hits me the most. By helping make a difference in the lives of people around me, I have not just helped them. I have also helped myself by having the satisfaction of knowing that by doing what are simple acts of Christian charity, I have helped make this world a better place.