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When I think about how I've impacted the lives of others in a positive manner, many instances come to mind. I often think those examples are just part of how my family and I chose to live our lives following God's teachings. I've been fortunate to have many opportunities to serve others. I serve my church on a regular basis by being an altar server for our Sunday masses and have done so for the last five years. I serve my community through consistently volunteering at Matthew 25 Ministries. I serve my school by being in the student council as class representative during 5th & 6th grade, secretary in 7th grade and now the president. Through this group, I'm able to lead John Paul II in many of our school and community outreach activities such as serving at the Ronald McDonald House. However, I would consider my relationship with my cousin John, a.k.a Johnny, the most impactful.

Johnny is 31 years old but he has a learning disability that puts him in the same intellectual level as someone in middle school. He's able to carry on simple conversations and perform simple tasks. What he lacks in some aspect of his life, he makes up in providing laughter and happiness to those around him. My relationship with him is quite humbling as he teaches me patience, understanding and flexibility. Often, he likes to join in on the activities that my other cousins and I do. Due to his learning challenges, it requires that I adjust the activity to allow him to understand and physically perform it. Sometimes I'll even do a totally different activity so that he can join in. He loves to play cards so I always make sure we have a card game he can do that is not too challenging for him. I must say, sometimes I let him win because it fills my heart

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when I see his joy as he wins. He's always appreciative when he can be part of our group.

Johnny also loves the Cincinnati Reds and I remember the time I gave him an autographed batting helmet. The helmet was something I won from a raffle. My dad would have loved the helmet as he collects sports memorabilia but I knew that Johnny would be ecstatic to have it so I chose to give it to Johnny. His smile was from ear to ear and he couldn't contain his excitement. He hugged me so tight and gave his thanks as if I gave him the best gift of his life. Through the night, he talked about where he would display it in his room or that he may even sleep with it that night. It's amazing to see that a simple gesture brought so much happiness for him.

I often think that God sent Johnny to be part of my life to teach me how God shows his love for all of us. My love for Johnny expands past the normal love you feel for your extended family. I want to protect him, be there for him, and do anything he needs to live a full life. I want to use my experience with him to teach others that God created us all in his image and therefore we must love each other regardless of looks or abilities. This is how we live God's teachings. As I get older, I want to do more for individuals like Johnny and use all my blessings to make a difference in their lives as well.

Did I impact Johnny's life positively? I hope so. Although, as much as I think I've impacted his life, he has impacted my life even more. I believe I'm the lucky one in having Johnny in my life. He inspires me to face any adversity with fighting spirit and

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positive attitude. He has shown me that disabilities should not hinder someone from living a good life. Every time I see him, he teaches me that we have so much to be thankful for and that we have many opportunities to improve someone's life.

I've been lucky to have spent the last nine years at John Paul II Catholic school where helping others is part of our daily lives. As I think about continuing my education at Ursuline Academy and even into college, I will look for those ways to spread the love of God by serving others and make someone's life better every day. I want to continue to be a servant leader.