

Service Learning at the Waterford Riverside SDA Food Pantry

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A service learning project is no ordinary grade. It is not about the final grade at all. It is about learning to reach out and serve wherever a need may be. This project, in particular, involved serving at the Waterford Riverside SDA food pantry. It entailed organizing in-coming donations, making up food bags, and delivering them to the persons in need. In addition to how a food pantry such as this is operated, knowledge was gained on a deeper, personal level.

### **Learning**

More than learning something about myself that I did not previously know, I became more aware of myself and how I view service. I love serving, which is good because this world is in great need of caring service. I learned that many people in my community face similar struggles of making ends meet and providing for their families. It is not just a few people going through these rough times, but rather entire cities. My heart goes out to those facing these trials, but while I was serving at the pantry I was forced to acknowledge many of my motives for serving. It is easy to serve when you know you will benefit by it, whether by praise or a tangible benefit. It is not so easy to do so when you see no reward. The most important lesson I learned is that service should never be for me, but for those I come in contact with. This was also my greatest challenge in that I sometimes saw myself vainly thinking about what I may gain from serving. While I may gain a grade for the work I have done, I remind myself that I should want to do it anyways, just because it will help someone else.

### **Impact**

I may never know the full extent of my impact on the community through this service project. I can only know a portion of the impact of those I came in contact with. I may not have been able to make a large-scale difference in the community, but I know I made a difference in

the lives of those I met with. Like the story of the boy throwing washed up starfish back into the ocean, he could not save them all, but made a difference to one.

Making a small difference in the lives of the people I met with is part of the reason I believe my project was effective. Another reason I believe it was effective is that besides making food bags, a large portion of the time I spent there went to organizing the shelves and sorting through the food people have donated. The pantry cannot pass out food that is out of date or that contains unclean meat, so I got to be the one to sort through it all. At the end of the week, we took all the food we could not use and donated it to a homeless shelter in the city. So we not only got to make a difference to the people in our immediate community, but also the surrounding city.

I believe my project might have been able to be improved if I could have somehow reached out better to those in need. Not a lot of people know about the service happening at the Waterford Riverside SDA food Pantry, and I think many more people could be helped if they did know. The pantry is not big enough to become a larger organization at this point, but with the amount of food they get, many more families could be helped if there is more outreach in the community.

### **Insight**

This project proved to be very beneficial to me in the area of insight. I became more aware of my attitudes towards service, the true meaning of service, and service from a biblical perspective. My attitudes and opinions did not necessarily change drastically as a result of the project, but I gained a greater appreciation of the value that service holds. In such a sinful world as this, I do not think society could function as it does without service. Without service, the poor, needy, abused, and oppressed would not receive any extra help to give them hope of a better life.

My relationship with Christ benefited from my time there as well. When I began to see the true meaning of service more clearly, I thought about the service that Jesus Christ carried out during His time on earth. Serving others is not always fun and easy. It takes patience, inner strength, endurance, and a genuine love for people. In 2 Corinthians 9:7, the Bible says, “Each man should give as he has decided in his heart. He should not give, wishing he could keep it. Or he should not give if he feels he has to give. God loves a man who gives because he wants to give.” Jesus served because He wanted to; because He so loved us. I want to become more like Jesus every day, therefore I should follow His example of service.

I can see myself going back and continuing to serve at the food pantry. It was a wonderful experience for me, and I enjoyed serving others in that capacity.

### **Preparation and Future Growth**

As a freshman in the Social Work program, I have not taken many classes geared specifically towards service. The closest class is my Intro to Social Work class, and it has helped me by outlining what it is exactly that social workers do. It is teaching me how to serve professionally as well. We learned about the NASW Code of Ethics and how they apply to social work, service, and even everyday life. This experience contributed to my academic knowledge by putting me in an environment that required me to practice some of what I had learned in class. Instead of just reading about it, this project helped me to live out and be a part of what we have been learning all this time. Along with that, I believe it has helped me to be more prepared to serve in the future. As a kid in an SDA grade school, we had regular Bible labs to serve our community, but this project helped me become more acquainted with service in a professional way. I am excited to continue growing in my major, in service, and in Christ; and I cannot wait to see where it takes me.

