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### Meaningful Volunteering and What It Means To Me

What instills the greatest meaning in volunteering is the unique opportunity to change lives - especially your own. When you change the lives of others by providing hope, solace, and comfort, you are changing your own life. You are becoming a better person, and you are discovering who you truly are.

My volunteer experiences primarily revolve around my involvement with Key Club. From elementary school bazaars to school beautification projects, from helping out at the local animal shelter to interacting with special education students, being a part of an organized volunteer organization with fellow peers has allowed me to experience many moments of joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, and selflessness. These experiences have ultimately shaped me into the person I am today. They have changed my life and have placed meaning in volunteering. There is an indescribable surge of emotion inside me when I place smiles on the faces of the elderly at monthly bingo nights, when I light up the faces of the elementary school children at weekly reading nights, and when I am able to craft memories and friendships with the people you interact with while volunteering. I believe this is the beauty in volunteering. After discovering the inexpressible worth and value in a fellow human being's life, being a caring individual is no longer strictly confined to "when you are a volunteer." It becomes almost instinctual. You begin to pay more attention to the welfare of others, and you lend a helping hand.

Volunteering is also meaningful to me, because it is, in essence, a journey of self-discovery. Mahatma Gandhi once said, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others”. If you are searching for the meaning of your life, you will find it by helping other people. When you become so involved in helping others that you lose sight of your own petty problems, the things that you think define you, and your true self will be revealed.

The importance of volunteering is that it instills core values such as selflessness, gratitude, patience, compassion, and leadership. These values do not hold much significance within our society today. The majority of society does not know about these meaningful values nor do they sincerely care. They are lost in indifference, self-deceit, and ignorance. Participation in community service can change this. It allows members of the community to be engaged and make a difference. A little volunteering goes a long way. Knowing that you made a positive impact is an emotionally uplifting experience that can never be matched by money or fame. It also reminds us that difficulties are an inevitable part of life, but how they are overcome shapes our future.

I now perceive the world beyond my comfort zone. I now know that I am capable of making a difference in the world. I am not afraid to challenge myself to do so.