

- 1) Describe your service or project (i.e. logistics, how long you've been doing it, the goal, purpose, and if you reached this goal or purpose)?

I have created a service initiative called Sandwich Squad. And although this has just been realized in the last year, the journey is over three years in the making. In the summer of 2016 as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader, I was reflecting and struggling to find a talent or passion that was meaningful to share. Then, Catholic Charities and their Bake for the Needy program was mentioned. I love to cook and am fearless when trying new dishes! I felt that this was my calling. Every month, I purchased groceries, then baked and delivered homemade goods to be served at the Catholic Charity dinners for the poor in Des Plaines, IL. I also had the opportunity to help serve the dinners and interact with the families in need. Inspired by this experience, I volunteered twice a week during the summer of 2018 in the Catholic Charities office, which helped me better understand how the organization supports those in need. To further support the working poor, I initiated the "Sandwich Squad" in June of 2019 to provide this community with a healthy lunch as well as to attract and lead other teens into service.

Each Sunday of summer break, I shopped for all the lunch ingredients with money raised from donations or by working odds-and-end jobs including dog walking and house sitting. I also created a sign-in sheet in Excel, to record the volunteers' hours. Hiccups did occur in the actual lunch making processes. Small problems such as not defrosting the bread in advance or even taking the butter out of the refrigerator too early led to an extensive cleaning endeavor. I had to increase planning and adjust the preparations to improve the process each week. After the sandwiches are packed, the volunteers hang out which builds a sense of community. Finally, every Tuesday evening, I deliver the bagged lunches to Catholic Charities so they can be handed out to their working poor community.

Working, earning funds, and then shopping has really impressed on me how needed these lunches are. I have successfully met my goal of providing meat sandwiches each week in lieu of peanut butter and jelly. However, with limited funds, I started to understand how challenging affording healthy food can be. Shopping at our traditional local grocery store versus a discount store is significantly more expensive. I took the time to evaluate and graph the two store's prices of each item I include in the lunch bag: the lunch meat, cheese, bread, drinks, granola bars, chips, and sandwich bags. Each of these items that I purchased was approximately 65% less expensive at the discount store. Discovering a way to shop more effectively has allowed me to reach the goal I set out this past summer. I have raised and donated \$785.50 for the healthy lunch supplies for each week of this summer. The results exceeded expectations by providing over 640 healthy lunches to those whose monthly budgets need relief, as well as engaging sixteen youth volunteers.

2) What community(ies) does your project serve and what is the long-lasting impact on that community(ies)?

My goal is to feed the working poor community by providing them with healthy lunches and help make their budgets be more manageable. Three years ago, when I first started serving baked desserts at the dinners, I learned about the working poor. As a junior high student, I envisioned “the poor” only as the homeless person on city street corners. My eyes were opened to see entire families with small children at these dinners, a place where they could eat healthy, home-cooked meals at no cost. Most of the guests have jobs or work, but they do not earn enough to cover all of life’s expenses. I began to really appreciate what I have, and most recently appreciate how long it takes to earn grocery money. I delivered sixty sandwiches to Catholic Charities in Des Plaines, IL, every week of this past summer. On a few occasions, there were other sandwiches that had also been donated. I noticed that they were typically peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I became even more committed to provide sandwiches with better nutrients such as meat for protein, cheese for dairy, and whole wheat bread for grains, so it can add some variety to their diet.

Another goal is to lead and serve a community of teen volunteers into meaningful service. Three features of my initiative were attractive to teen volunteers. First, the Sandwich Squad was consistently scheduled for two hours every Sunday evening. This made it easy for the teens to remember, and it was at a time that did not conflict with summer school. Second, there was no commitment required; teens could join on any Sunday that they were available, without having to commit to every Sunday. Third, I always provided all the food supplies. This initiative offered flexibility, and an attractive way for them to meet their volunteer commitments. Most importantly, we were all able to build upon the uniting purpose of helping others and deepen our relationships with each other.

My project’s goal for a long-lasting effect is focused on the working poor community, where I hope that those in need are fed physically – both with a nutritious lunch and some relief on their budgets. But I also hope that they are fed spiritually, so that those working to make ends meet also feel spiritual support just by knowing that someone is thinking of them and working to make life a little easier for them.

The long-term effect for the teen community is already being planned. I will lead the project monthly thru the school year, with a young 7<sup>th</sup> grade man. We have already had a planning meeting where I wrote out the sandwich supplies and procedures and we committed to monthly dates thru May of this school year. Next summer I will again run the Squad weekly, with the help of appointed and delegated teen leader positions. I am grateful that others are inspired to continue Sandwich Squad while I am away at school!

3) Describe in what ways you were a leader? (How did you inspire others to participate or lead a new initiative or create an improvement)

Being a leader includes inviting others to share in a goal, it includes sharing passion, it includes leading by action and example, it includes being organized, it includes challenging oneself to reach outside of comfort zones, and it includes developing skills and leadership in others. I had the opportunity to implement and experience all these aspects of leadership along with the intrinsic rewards that come with knowing we worked together to help make life easier for others.

The Sandwich Squad is an initiative I started from scratch. I learned quickly that I was more comfortable working and donating my funds for the project than I was asking other teens to help me make and pack sixty sandwiches every Sunday night. In May, I really wondered if anyone would show up to join me. Although apprehensive at first, reaching out to a church teen group was helpful and successful in recruiting volunteers. Looking back, I am proud that I took a risk to interact with the church group, even though I attend a different school out of state. Through a no-commitment but consistent weekly time, I was able to attract volunteers. Once they arrived, we played music, discussed sports, and enjoyed making sandwiches and bagging lunches in a social environment. The social aspect is very enjoyable and attractive because it creates a sense of community and it also feels rewarding to help others. This encourages the teens to return for another positive experience.

Towards the end of the summer, I formalized the club and selected a vice president: a participant who never missed a Sunday and is dedicated to participating again in next summer's Sunday sandwich making. He has also agreed to take on the Tuesday deliveries with me next summer. I also trained a committed seventh grader as director of junior high recruitment. This young teen will be recruiting junior high students for monthly Sandwich Squads during the school year, and again for the weekly Sunday events next summer. It is such a needed service; I am glad to know it will continue even while I move away for the school year.