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Bringing a Difference

Volunteering, by definition, is the expression of undertaking a task; by hearing this, the appeal of doing volunteer work is to express one's drive to help others. In addition, many people take great pleasure in committing thousands of hours to make a difference to others around them. With all of this being said, as someone who has done hundreds of hours of community service, volunteering can be such a rewarding experience.

Since January of 2021, I've volunteered with Zakat Foundation of America to provide new opportunities and have participated in many events under the notion of helping out others. I became a Zakat Foundation intern to lead distributions and other events. The word "Zakat" means to give back to a good cause, and our organization takes donations and funding to run distributions and other community events. I've lost count of how much time I've committed to volunteering to bring smiles to the faces of those we help. Working with others has provided a great environment where many volunteers can have a better experience when putting time and effort into what we do. I've had nothing but positive experiences when helping Zakat Foundation with its community outreach efforts. It has inspired me to continue helping those who need it the most.

Volunteering is more than just showing up, doing a job, and calling it a day after recording your hours. It is a focal point at which a community comes together to meet new

people and gain connections they would not have been able to beforehand. One of the biggest appeals of volunteering is gaining a better understanding of your community and the types of people around you; as someone who always looks to meet new people, volunteering with any organization specializing in humanitarian aid and community outreach has given me a new outlook on life. It's essential to gain new interactions and experiences with other people and try to understand the backgrounds from which these people come. In conclusion, volunteering can help shape a person and their outlook on their community because of the diverse types of people that live within it.

Over the summer, even when having other commitments, I've done over 40+ hours of my vacation helping out others and running events with Zakat Foundation of America. Can I say that I've had an incredibly positive experience when I volunteer for at least 4-6 hours a week? The answer is always yes because I enjoy the work I put into bringing change to the community and making those not as fortunate happy. Volunteering helps build my character and learn to appreciate others around me; It's helped me meet new people with whom I've gotten closer over time. Committing time to volunteer can help build upon pre-existing skills and make you a better person through hard work and communication. Everyone gains some benefit, whether personal or goal-oriented, and that's what I think is the most crucial part of volunteering anywhere.

I would like to discuss a momentous event that happened to me when I was volunteering with the Zakat Foundation of America at one of their many food distributions. On a Monday, we had two tables set up at the McDougal Apartment complex in Durham with hot food ready to serve the local community. During the one hour that we served food, we met many types of

people of many different backgrounds. I was one of the volunteers that led the food packing and handing out to the residents. What made this distribution impactful to me was seeing people appreciate our efforts and thank us for giving them food; it's a genuinely warm feeling that positively impacts your mind and your being. After everything wrapped up, we packed our things and left the complex; I had a more upbeat attitude during the car ride. Overall, I'll always enjoy taking time out of my day to help others and having a positive experience from seeing people feel gratitude for community effort.

Another volunteering experience I would like to share was the first computer distribution I did while with the Raleigh Digital Connectors Program: a program I've worked with for three years and am still a part of as an Ambassador. They call these distributions "Wired Wednesdays" because, on occasional Wednesdays, we arrive at a low-income neighborhood or apartment complex to bring computers to those who requested one. During the pandemic, the need for technology was strongly evident, and we worked to distribute over 100+ computers in 2021. Unfortunately, many families are in an unstable financial situation and cannot afford to buy a laptop, which is something that the Digital Inclusion program strives to fix. Many other ambassadors and I enjoyed all the time we've put into working towards digital inclusion and helping bridge the digital divide across the City of Raleigh. We'll continue to do these distributions so that everyone, regardless of their place in life, has the necessary access to technology when it's needed.

To conclude, working with organizations to make a big difference has been an enlightening experience for me and many others over the summer. Working to bring community

relief to others in need, getting to know people from different backgrounds, and benefitting from a positive environment are some of the biggest appeals to volunteer work. In my eyes, it's worth it to put in the time to help others while also building upon your character.