**Angela**

There was one special moment when we were about to leave the Grade 1 class in 49ers Academy. Unexpectedly, the teacher asked the students to say Goodbye to us; one boy ran to me and hugged me. I could feel his arms were holding me so tight, just as he said, “Angela, I would never let you go”. He was smiling; I could tell from his expression that this was true happiness coming from the heart. Then, he said to me, with a tiny voice, “Thank you for spending time with me”, instead of “Thank you for teaching me Math.” These little details touched me. I did not know he would show his gratitude in such an affecting way. For me it was volunteer work I had to do, but for the boy, it was such a precious time when he could actually talk freely to an older friend, and share thoughts and deal with trouble together. I brought him not only the knowledge to solve one Math question, but also the pleasure when we were working as partners.

Let us take a moment and think about some times in our daily life, when we were disappointed and our friends were here with us, when we finally got the answer after our teacher’s patient explaining, when we were supported by our parents in almost every aspect. Their patient presence brought us hope and happiness. There are a lot of people to whom we need to say “Thank you.” Expressing our appreciation is not a complex task. It may be a hug or a note in return, but the key is to always have a grateful heart. As long as we are present in this life, we shall always try to discover and focus on the little things that we need to be thankful for. In this way, we could better understand the beauty and love of our human civilization.

**Naka**

For anyone who doesn’t know, EHP stands for Ecumenical Hunger Program, a food bank essentially for the homeless in East Palo Alto. Going into it, I had very high expectations. My expectations were matched and blown clean out of the metaphorical water. We packed box after box. We carried and pushed them this way and that way. But I loved every second. I didn’t mind the fact that the work was hard.  It was challenging, but my reward was from the people, mainly one of the workers. His name was Mario.

He was a quiet person. He spoke fluent Spanish and okay English. He loved what he did. He loved what he did, embracing it even at the toughest of times. As we slid with our carts though the rectangular building, He was patient with us, even when most teachers would have just let me mess up, he didn’t. He was the one who would encourage us to keep going. These attributes are important because it empowers others to continue. Our group did more work. He provided, not just he was an extra pair of hands, but an upbeat approach that made our group feel a lot better. We all seemed more joyful, more effective, and ultimately happy.  I want to embody all these things, so I can make a difference in someone’s life like he did mine.

He shows the drive, I have seen in the Priory community. I've only been here a semester but here at school, I see people like Mario. People here don’t mind hard work, for the grace of others. This is the Priory we all know and love.

**Amelia**

This past week I had the opportunity to work with Abilities United in Palo Alto, an organization that specializes in collaborating with people who have a variety of disabilities. Something I learned through this experience was that if you are able or disabled, everyone needs human connection.

When I first arrived, I was intimidated and didn’t know what to do. One participant named Maritza must have seen my discomfort and broke the ice by simply saying, “Hello.” Relieved, I walked to her side and we got to know each other. We learned that we both liked talking a lot, jewelry, makeup, and reading. What I discovered was that I could look past her disabilities and see that she was simply a woman, just like me. On Friday, her parting words were “Add me on Facebook,”

I was surprised at how much I got out of this experience. Not only was I able see Maritza past her disabilities, but I was able to see how much we had in common and I gained a friend because of that.

**Luke**

 Last week I had the pleasure of working at San Carlos Adult Day Center. It is a day center for seniors with Alzheimer’s and Dementia, a place for them to exercise and enjoy themselves. As volunteers we played games and engaged with them. I was pleasantly surprised by their sharpness and energy.

 Personally my favorite experience was with a Chinese woman named Violet, I had heard Violet’s story, and her family was a well to do family in China and lost everything in World War 2. Violet was very kind and loved to help out however she could. While I was there I helped craft some Chinese New Year decorations because I was the only volunteer who spoke and wrote Chinese, when one of the staff members saw my writing he asked if I would show it to Violet. When she saw the writing her eyes lit up, and she smiled. To her it brought back fond family memories. It was wonderful that I was able to use my knowledge of Chinese and Chinese New Year to bring back joyful memories to someone who works hard to give joy to the community around her. This reminded me how easy it is to use your own talents to give back to others and the community around us.

 I wish that I had more time to talk with the people there, they all had stories to tell, and of the ones I heard I was moved by their experiences and hardships that brought them to where they are today. One woman told me how she left France as a 19-year-old girl and about her struggles to stay and work in America. I can’t imagine what some of the other seniors must have been through and what they have seen. Given the chance, I would like to go back and volunteer more. I appreciate the chance to work with our priory community and the San Carlos Adult Day Center. It gave me a new perspective.

**Tatiana**

Before going on the Junior Retreat, my impression of the Tenderloin was that the area was dangerous, unsafe, and sketchy.  This was based off of YouTube videos, and research about the neighborhood. My perception of the Tenderloin changed instantly.  When walking around, my group encountered many people on the street. They were in groups listening to music, and lingering, looking to engage in conversation. There were moments where some homeless people and even some businessmen, would stop and thank us for helping.

The first day of my retreat I volunteered at the Boys and Girls Club with a group of my classmates. Most of the kids in the program came from struggling backgrounds. Despite the challenges some of the kids faced, they entered the program excited to meet us, and they loved to play tag, and insult us.

On the second day of retreat, I woke up really early, and worked at Glide providing breakfast with 20 classmates. At Glide, I handed people their meals, and greeted them “Good morning”, some of them replied, others just snatched the food and just wanted to eat the grits and eggs. These moments, working with and preparing and providing food for others, forced me to think about how fortunate I am today.

On the Junior Retreat, it was an honor to give back to others that were not as fortunate as I am today.  I’ve had moments in my life, where I had to go to places to get food because my family was not able to provide.  I had to go to the Boys and Girls Club because my mom didn't receive her full high school education.  Last week, I was excited to give back to others who are in situations similar to those I’ve been through.

The Junior Retreat was fun and thoughtful.  My classmates and I were able to make a difference in one's day simply by saying hi, and sometimes giving peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to people in the neighborhood. The retreat helped remind me how fortunate I am today, and made me realize that nothing should be taking for granted.  Last thing I would like to say is, someone once said, “you have two hands, one to help yourself and one to help others.”

**Lena**

This past week, my classmates and I went to the Tenderloin as a part of both service week and our class retreat. Our first day, I volunteered with an organization called City Impact that serves the community through various departments, some of which include a thrift shop, place of worship, and school. Our group split up to cover a few different jobs; my assigned task was to walk over to the building where the community sermon was held and integrate myself into the group there. My initial reaction to this placement was that I wasn’t going to be helping anyone or learning anything by sitting through a sermon. However, I left the sermon humbled and having learned an important lesson.

 When I first entered the building, I nervously walked over to the chairs that were set out in rows and sat in between two men, who were smiling warmly. One man greeted me silently, while the other man asked me what my name was. I responded and then he told me that his name was Dellis and he was named after his father. In between readings from the pastor and singing songs with the group, Dellis and I talked about some of the challenges of having siblings - he has three - and he told me about his never failing support for the Raiders. Even after the sermon was over, we continued talking about football and basketball. I was surprised by how much Dellis and I had in common and how easy it was to talk to him. We both lived in Oakland for a little while, love watching football, and struggle to live up to the expectations set for us.

 Going into this experience, I felt sympathetic for the people that I was going to meet due to their situations, but I hadn’t really thought about the fact that they didn’t all have to be sad and hopeless, but rather could be very similar to me, be full of hope, and have important messages to share. The most meaningful lesson that I took away from my time talking to Dellis was that you cannot judge a book by its cover. While on the outside we appeared to be very different people, ultimately the situation that Dellis was facing is one that so many people, from all different backgrounds, struggle to overcome. Going into this experience, I was somewhat emotionally guarded because I was looking at this trip as an opportunity to make a material difference in someone’s life, when in fact having a discussion could be equally as impactful to the people you meet. It is sometimes easier to be emotionally disconnected from situations, but it's more valuable to be in touch with your surroundings and get to know those around you for who they truly are. I challenge everyone in this room to be more cognizant of how they perceive those around them, and strive to look past individual's outward appearance and situations, to uncover who they really are. Thank you.

**Wako**

I saw Nicole struggling to take even the smallest of steps into the gym. But then, I felt my heart lift when such a big smile appeared on her face. Wearing a pink jacket, pink pants and a pink helmet, she slowly walked with her walking aids. The boy behind her wore a hearing aid and held onto a lady’s arm to walk with his twisted legs. The rest of the three were in wheelchairs, and all of them except for Nicole were unable to talk or make any facial expressions.

For the next two hours, we practiced shooting a basketball over, and over, and over. “Good job, Ibraham!” “You did it, Naomi!” As I pulled out all stops to make this a good experience and smiled at the faces that didn’t seem to change at all, I became unsure if they were really enjoying basketball or even listening to anything I said. After the Special Olympics, I waved at the teachers and saw them off to their school vans with the kids. It was a huge relief for me.

The idea of doing service as a high school senior strangely encouraged me to be more mature, reliable, and friendly. But it was only for a couple of hours. Looking at the teachers’ backs pushing the wheelchairs, I felt that I wouldn’t have enough patience to stay as cheerful as they were if I spent time with the severely disabled children for a week, or even a day. For me, the time spent with people with disabilities is so short, and I know that there is my “normal life” after the service week is over.

But for those with disabilities, this is their life. At this very moment, as I give a talk, or even after this chapel, they live with their disabilities, and they will, probably for the rest of their life. People with disabilities are definitely a minority, but they still have the same twenty-four hours a day, just like we do. And so do the homeless people in San Francisco, low-income families, and many others who have bigger obstacles than we do. From this experience, I’ve come to realize that learning about others can teach us the perspectives that we don’t get to explore otherwise.

**Sophia**

Basic basketball dribbling seems easy.  You bounce the ball and keep it going and, if you’re not trying to do any fancy moves, that’s about it. It’s a background activity, like walking or breathing that usually doesn’t even register as an activity.

Or so I thought.

Last week as I volunteered with the Special Olympics, I was positioned at a station where athletes practiced dribbling. When I saw my next group was comprised of six kids in larger wheelchairs, I became nervous. I feared that if they tried to dribble, the balls would bounce off of their chairs, but I didn’t want to assume they couldn’t or didn’t want to do it. I quickly tried to come up with an alternative activity as they approached the station.

When I began talking to a student in the group, all he wanted to was dribble. Here’s what we did:  I would hold the ball at about his waist, let go, and he would dribble three, four, and even five times. Then the ball would stay on the floor until I picked it up and we repeated it. I hoped he would not be too disappointed.

But the athlete was loving it and we were all cheering him on. He was having fun, but I felt almost guilty. I had been playing basketball with my friends that morning and I complained every time my shot didn’t make it in the basket.

So there I was, helping one of the students dribble with the simple goal of having the ball bounce more than four times. It was a different kind of goal, but a goal nonetheless.

Seeing how other people define satisfaction can help us define it differently for ourselves. The athlete found joy in a place I never even thought to look. And that makes me think I should be looking a little harder.

Thank you