

Wellesley
Dawoun Jyung '07

“Only thing I got out from this is that I feel bad for people but the truth is I can not do anything about it. I am just a kid. I have no power to help them so I rather not know about this because I would feel bad for them and also feel bad for not doing anything to help them but the truth is I can not do anything. I just hope that this [thing] ends so everyone can sleep without worrying. But the truth is that everyone in America will read articles about these poor country and people and they will feel horrible, but they won't do [anything].”

-- written by a high school junior

A few months ago, I asked my younger brother, a high school junior, to read a New York Times article about the AIDS epidemic in one of the developing countries in Africa and then write a one-page reflection paper about his feelings about this topic. I was shocked when he handed me what he wrote.

My brother is the author of the quote I have provided at the beginning of this essay. I was surprised by the way he believed he had “no power” to help those he read about in the article. He said that he would rather be oblivious because “the truth is [he] cannot do anything.”

My brother's perceived powerlessness reflects that of many other students from socio-economically disadvantaged families like ours. I have worked with students from low-income neighborhoods in Cambridge for a semester. From this experience, I have learned that most of these students saw themselves as “powerless” and “unable” to make a difference in the world.

Coming from an immigrant working-family, I remember how similarly I used to feel when I was in high school. Until I came to Wellesley College and had received generous financial support and opportunities provided by my school, my interest in serving others was limited by lack of resources. Often, students from economically-challenged families have to work over the summer, or throughout the school year, to help support their family. Despite these necessary distractions, I have always had the heart for empowering students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and serving less-fortunate communities of developing countries.

My project addresses two issues that I am passionate about and that I believe deserve more attention: empowering students from socio-economically disadvantaged background and serving internationally disadvantaged communities through service. I designed the project for a group of high school students whom I have known for the past seven years. These students, all of whom come from immigrant and low-income families, are in a youth group managed by my home church in New York. Recently, I had a chance to talk to them about my plans for a community service trip to Africa this winter. The students expressed their enthusiasm for community service of similar kind, but they also shared that they felt powerless to take on such service, and that they believed that their ability to help would be impossible. My project gives these students the opportunity to serve a community in a developing country during two-to-three weeks in the summer (most likely the last two weeks of August). The students will be accompanied by four to five college student leaders and one adult leader. The college student leaders are also from an economically-disadvantaged backgrounds or have grown up in similar neighborhoods that the high school students have. These college students, along with one adult leader, will lead training sessions, and provide mentorship to the high school students, encouraging them and helping them realize that they have the power to make a difference if they have the heart to do so.

The organization that the group will be working with is Orphanage Outreach. I have already established a relationship with the representative of Orphanage Outreach at a fair/conference I attended last December. The representative approved of my proposal and was excited about the possibility of this project. Orphanage Outreach provides volunteers opportunities to make a difference in the lives of orphaned, abandoned, and disadvantaged children at the Hope of a Child Orphanage in Monte Cristi, the Dominican Republic. Students will be helping to design, manage and lead camps – art camp, English camp, sports camp, vacation Bible school, and baseball camp – for over 1,000 children from the orphanage and the local community. The students will work alongside their national staff and local community members in order to make a lasting impact in the local community and the lives of the children at the orphanage.

Besides Orphanage Outreach, there are a few more organizations with which the group can possibly work. I have also developed relationships with the representatives of these organizations. Once this proposal is accepted, the students will have a chance to decide what kind of service they want to participate in, and they can then choose which organization they would like help.

All international projects pose many challenges, including the need for volunteers to sensitively understand the culture, needs, and history of the local communities that they are serving. I believe that working with one of the organizations I have mentioned is a strong solution to this problem. Since these organizations have been working with the local community for decades, working with such an organization would provide a cultural bridge for a foreign group like us. Our group will work together with the organization and the local community to serve the community in the ways that are most relevant and efficient.

Once this project is implemented, planning for the training process will take a place throughout the spring. I will contact the college student leaders and plan training for the students. The training will begin in June, after which the students and the leaders will meet twice a week before the service trip. The training will ensure that the students are aware of the safety procedures and are properly equipped to serve, learn, and grow.

The goal of this project is two-fold. First, this experience will help the students make peace with themselves. Serving others will be an invaluable experience as it will empower them to become peace-makers. The students will also become encouraged as they see themselves beyond the economic and social situations they are placed in back home. Secondly, this project will help the students make peace in the international community as they serve the people in communities that are in even less-fortunate situations than they are in themselves.

With the support from the *100 Projects for Peace*, the high school students from low-income community will have the financial support and an opportunity to serve others. By being able to serve those in more dire situations than they are in, I believe that they will become enlightened to the fact that they have the potential to contribute significantly in order make a difference and peace in the world.

** From January 8th to 27th, 2007, I will be joining a team of eight students from Wellesley, MIT, and UMass Boston on an economic development and service trip to South Africa. I will be working in a center that has an orphans' home, AIDS hospice, and squatter camp feeding program. I believe that this trip will give me even deeper sense of the need of the international community in need.