



and out of the classroom. Had Steve applied to a school with a strong international development or political science program, he might have also referenced these specific university assets to tailor his essay for that specific university.

“A Young Voice for Seniors”

Ariela Koehler

MIT

NOVEMBER 23, TWO YEARS AGO: THANKSGIVING. My mom and I celebrated the holiday as we had done for the last three years—by delivering turkey dinners to homebound senior citizens. After carrying the food to their kitchens, our brief visits with them were filled with laughter, hugs, and the sharing of family photo albums. In the midst of all the warmth and vitality, though, I couldn't help noticing the signs of loneliness and isolation: the windows with dust suggesting they hadn't been open in ages, the faded Christmas cards from 1995, and the tables with a single place setting. It was during these visits that I committed to find a way to better connect with the seniors in my community.

I discussed my desire with the mayor of Fremont in December two years ago. He agreed that a younger voice could prove to be beneficial and mentioned the Senior Citizen Commission for the City of Fremont (an advisory board to City Council that worked to directly address the needs of local seniors). I formally applied to the Commission and was unanimously appointed by City Council in February last year, becoming the youngest Commissioner in Fremont's history.

Although I was initially met with skepticism from my fellow Senior Citizen Commissioners, I was committed to sharing my vision of the benefits of intergenerational interactions. For the next two months, my after-school hours were devoted to calling nursing homes, negotiating with movie theater managers, and recruiting teen volunteers. The resulting event was the Senior Movie Outing, which paired teenagers with wheelchair-bound seniors for a fun afternoon at the movies.

As a result of my hard work on the successful outing and the rave reviews from all who participated, my fellow Commissioners became more respectful of my contributions and open to my input. During the annual grant-reviewing period (when the Commission decides which



non-profit organizations will receive City funding), I advocated to fund Lavender Seniors, an organization which supports gay and lesbian seniors. While it had not previously been funded by the City, I strongly believed it fell within the Commission's charter of "serving the needs of all seniors." After sharing my rationale for proposing to fund Lavender Seniors, I was proud that the Commissioners kept an open mind and the majority voted to grant the organization funding.

In the two years since my appointment, I have cherished the unique opportunities I have had to learn from people with different perspectives and backgrounds. My time on the Commission has taught me to be more confident when expressing my ideas, and to be more open to hearing others' thoughts. I am proud to be a trusted voice for seniors in my community.

ANALYSIS

Ariela takes advantage of this optional essay to illustrate a unique perspective on her life. While her other two essays focused on her passion for science, this essay helps create a "thorough impression" of other aspects of Ariela's life, namely her commitment to public service and experiences in local government leadership. This essay is reminiscent of Anastasia's "Cuddle Buddies" (Chapter 8) in presenting an example of going above and beyond an assigned service task. In Ariela's case, she is delivering turkey dinners to homebound senior citizens. Her compassion shines through when she notes, "... our brief visits with them were filled with laughter, hugs, and the sharing of family photo albums." However, it is Ariela's keen sense of observation that helps her to notice "signs of loneliness and isolation": dusty windows, faded Christmas cards, single place settings. These evocative details show that she recognizes a community need—"a way to better connect with the seniors." The contrast to the joy and laughter and the indications of loneliness make this first paragraph emotionally compelling and clearly demonstrate the issue that Ariela hopes to address.

What makes Ariela's story unique is that she is not content to rest with this observation. Instead, she takes her concern to someone who can help facilitate the change she envisions. By providing the dates in her essay, Ariela shows us the compressed time frame in which all of the actions and changes she created took place. This highlights her ability to act quickly and suggests that she will be a mover and a shaker in her college setting.

Ariela's essay also stands out because she describes the challenges she encounters in the process of creating change. First, she