I knew from my early years in high school that nothing gave me greater satisfaction than being able to make a difference in someone else’s life. Knowing you were able to help someone in need is something I can’t describe.

Being a writer for the Thunderword led to me to writing an advance story about students signing up to volunteer for Habitat for Humanity last quarter.

The Non-Traditional Students Club was hosting this event and told me about how they wanted to make this event a yearly tradition. Seeing their passion for this cause and desire to make a difference convinced me to sign up.

Before we could volunteer, we had to attend a safety orientation hosted by Habitat. In this orientation not only was safety covered, but I was amazed at how advanced the homes were.

They told us about how many homes use solar power and are made out of recycled materials. The families that receive the homes are also required to put in many hours of labor, called “sweat equity”.

The families also pay a mortgage, but it is only the cost of what it took to build the home. Habitat makes no profit on any home they build. The families also only pay a monthly payment they can afford, which is a percentage based on their income.

After this orientation, I was extremely excited to be able to volunteer. I love everything Habitat stands for and how they include the families in the process.

Our job site was a neighborhood called Golden Given in Tacoma. This is a whole neighborhood of homes that Habitat is currently building. Many of the homes are already built and have families living in them.

Upon arriving, I was amazed. The homes were beautiful and extremely well kept. This neighborhood also has a play area with a jungle gym. There is also a community garden that the families work in and grow vegetables. If I didn’t know this was a Habitat neighborhood, I wouldn’t have been able to tell the difference.

Our day started with removing nails and large pieces of wood from a concrete foundation that had been poured. Everyone tackled removing the hundreds of nails with amazing effort. It was a hard and tedious job, but time flies when you’re having fun with your friends.

After that, our jobsite manager told us that he had a job for some “strong men”. We were assigned to clear some trees and blackberry bushes, and dig up fence posts.

Unfortunately, due to us being volunteers, we were only allowed to use certain tools while on site. All we had were shovels, hand saws and large metal digging poles.

While a chain saw would have made this job a breeze, it was amazing to see the whole group work together and get this job done. Our job site manager was amazed at what we got done in the time we had.

Our final task was shoveling gravel into wheelbarrows to be poured around piping at the base of the foundation. This again was some heavy lifting. However, our team came together and was able to completely fill the entire foundation. Everyone took turns doing the heavy lifting; it was an amazing display of teamwork.

Our group consisted of 14 people of different age groups and ethnicities. Everyone did an amazing job and I’m so proud of every one of them.

While on our jobsite, children were riding their bikes and playing. You could see how happy they were. Obviously at some point they were faced with hardships, but now they can lead normal lives and enjoy their childhoods.

Knowing I was able to be of service and help another family eventually receive this same joy is an amazing experience. If you haven’t volunteered somewhere before, I can’t recommend it enough. So many of us have so much to offer and don’t realize how lucky we are.

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