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Mgt42
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Anabel's Volunteering Reflection

On May 1, 2018, HADM 4125/6125, the Foundations of Social Entrepreneurship class taught by Professor Mona Anita Olsen collectively volunteered at Anabel's Grocery inside Anabel Taylor Hall. The primary activity the class engaged in was to place wooden planks on all of the metal shelves around the store to prevent items on the shelves from falling through the rows on the shelves. The class split up into groups based on the pairings from the Make a Difference Case Creation.

The biggest takeaway from this volunteering experience was undoubtedly, for me, the power of collaboration. Both of the members of the Anabel's Grocery team mentioned that had they done the work the class did, by themselves, it would have taken them at least a couple of hours, compared to the (sub) one-hour time period it took the class. However, there is also an upper limit on how many people working on a single task is productive.

One of the phenomena that I observed while we were volunteering was that there was a point where most of the work around the store was finished, but there were only a few shelves left that needed to be worked on. However, because the real estate of the store is relatively small, the area around the shelves only left space for a few people to work. As a result, there were a handful of people crowded around the remaining shelves, but they were not able to contribute, which could be seen as not being productive.

In retrospect, I was surprised how much of a contribution our class had made by doing something that seemed fairly trivial. My initial impression of what we'd be doing to help out with Anabel's was that the class may have helped unload shipments for instance, or rather, a task or activity that definitely requires more people to complete. I have volunteered before, with different organizations (Rotaract, Seneca 4-H, etc.), but I felt that during those experiences, the volunteering activities had a very clear impact with respect to the people who were affected directly by the activities.

Following up on this, I think what I have learned about myself from volunteering is how small changes can make a big effect. I realized that *I* can make an impact by doing small things and how having the right mindset about what I do can show me what the far-reaching implications of my actions could be. For instance, it never truly occurred to me that I can make a difference in someone else's day just by spending a bit of time to help them out, whether that be answering a question for them, donating clothes, giving them a smile as you cross their path, or any other seemingly tiny action. This was probably the value that stood out to me the most after volunteering because it was quite a polarizing idea, especially given the stigma that as a Cornell student, I am almost expected to create something significant, or a big impact in my own community.

Through this experience, I learned that my peers were equally engaged, but in different ways. Everyone chose to fulfill different roles during the volunteer activities that aligned with their own strengths, whether it'd be helping out with the shelves or contributing and critiquing the ideas that were posed by Anabel's team afterward. The last thing I learned from my peers is that one's background influences his or her thoughts. During the discussion session after the volunteering work, I could attribute certain suggestions with the influence from people's backgrounds or environments. For instance, many of Peter's suggestions focused heavily on his prior business experience, while several of Jari's suggestions were related to building up the community, which stemmed from some of his previous work in residential districts in his own community.

However, the greatest value I received from others was not actually from the other volunteers, but from some of the members of Anabel's team. I was impressed by how Devon handled the critiques of her own ideas as well as the team's ideas. She was extremely receptive towards the feedback the class gave her, and didn't simply dismiss any feedback, but also tried to expand and iterate through everyone's ideas and how they could be integrated into Anabel's existing framework.

Ultimately, this showed me that one of the core components to being part of such a great team that is involved with social causes (or just in general), is to be receptive and open to feedback, and to have members that have a similar mindset as well. By doing so, it allows for a constructive environment where all ideas can be valued and true progress can be achieved.