

Caroline

WR 13100

Professor Clauss

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The Rise School

**Situation:** As a graduate of Ursuline Academy of Dallas and someone who had the opportunity to do my Senior Service at The Rise School of Dallas, a preschool for children with special needs, I am writing to my good friend Lisa. Lisa, currently a senior at Ursuline, must choose her service site, and she having trouble deciding what to do. As a result of my argument, I hope Lisa will seriously considering volunteering at The Rise School.

Hey, Lisa!

How've you been? I'm so glad I got to see you at Ursuline when I was home for Fall Break! It was so nice to be back there and see everyone I've been missing. I hope your senior year is going well and you are enjoying the beginning of your last softball season. I'll have to come watch my favorite team play in the spring when your games start. I still can't believe I won't be out on the field with you this year. Being back at Ursuline reminded me of how much I miss softball and all the people I played with, especially you. I'm happy we got to talk about everything happening during your senior year, and I remembered that you said you were having trouble choosing where to go for your senior community service. When I got home, I began to think about my community service at The Rise School, and how it was such an amazing experience for me. Serving at The Rise School was such a rewarding experience and had such a big impact on my life, and I hope you'll consider volunteering there as well.

At The Rise School, kids with disabilities are mixed with kids without, and it creates a fascinating classroom dynamic seen almost nowhere else. The preschool classes, ranging from one year-olds to six year-olds, are designed for children with special needs, but thirty percent of

the kids in each class do not have disabilities. The Rise School website explains that this concept was developed when the school was founded by a family who had twins, one with Down Syndrome and one without (“About”). When I first heard about the integration of special needs and “typical” kids (what they call the kids with no disabilities at Rise), I didn’t understand how that would work, but once I saw it in action, all my doubts were gone. Obviously, the kids with disabilities learn from the typical kids, but amazingly, the typical kids also seemed to learn more by being with kids with disabilities. Not only are they ahead of kids their age from other preschools, but also it’s so easy to see the compassion the typical kids learn from their classmates, even at such a young age. In my classroom, which had three to five year-olds, there was a five year-old brother with Down Syndrome named Ben, and his sister who was three named Grace. Grace would read books to him or tell the teachers things for him when he couldn’t communicate. Seeing how a three year-old girl knew she had a responsibility towards her brother amazed me. While volunteering at Rise, I saw the benefits of this unique program, and I know you will, too.

One of my favorite parts about volunteering at the Rise School was the hands-on work I got to do. I know when we talked you mentioned you wanted to get a hands-on project where you could work with kids, so you were considering choosing a grade school. The reality of it is that not all the grade school service sites give their volunteers the opportunity to work with the kids. My friend Katie Howe and I were talking about our community service, and she told me how she was excited to work at a school, but was really disappointed when every week, they handed her a stack of papers and asked her to make copies. Instead of spending the two hours working with kids, she spent it doing what she felt was “busy work” because they didn’t know what else she should do. Unlike some of the other schools where Ursuline girls volunteer, at The

Rise School, volunteers are guaranteed to work with the kids everyday. When I was there, I got to help with circle time, snack time, reading time, bathroom breaks, arts and crafts, music therapy, and free play. There was so much hands-on work, at times I felt worn out after a day of service. I felt so lucky to have a service site where my only problem was having *too much* to do, unlike many of my classmates who constantly complained of feeling useless.

Even on days at The Rise School where there wasn't as much to do, it was impossible to feel useless, because no matter what, the children were so excited to see me, and their enthusiasm never failed to make me laugh. I know, like me, you love working with children, and I can't think of any other children who have more love and excitement than the kids at The Rise School. I remember two kids in my classroom who made me smile every time I saw them. There was one little girl, Alex, who was four years old and had Down Syndrome. Every day I walked in the classroom, she remembered my name, gave me an ear-to-ear grin, and jumped into my arms. The other teachers and I always laughed that she was like a little monkey, because until I left at 10:30, she did not let go. If we were sitting in circle, Alex would give the "I'm so cute I know you can't refuse me anything" face she was so good at and climb right into my lap, even if she was supposed to sit on the floor. She would follow her rule breaking with a small giggle, and if I would say "Alex, not funny," she would respond with "not fun-neeeeeee" and an even louder giggle. Even though I knew I shouldn't laugh, I couldn't help it because she was so funny, and she knew it. Another story I remember involves the 5 year-old boy named Ben I talked about earlier. Ben had bright blue eyes that were always wide with curiosity, and he was always excited about anything we did. Almost every day, he would arrive at school, look right at me, scream "AHHHHHHH!" in pure excitement, and run across the room at me with his backpack barely hanging off one of his arms. Then, he would wrap his arms around me, backpack and all,

and jump straight into my lap, attempting what seemed like a mix between a hug and a tackle. Kids like Alex and Ben made me feel like I was really doing something great, and always brightened my day with a laugh. I remember how much you love to laugh, and because of that, I really think you would enjoy working with kids who make people laugh as much as the ones at The Rise School.

Not only were the kids excited to see me when I came into the classroom, but the teachers were also genuinely happy when I walked in. The teachers at Rise honestly love what they do and care about the children, so whenever someone is willing to volunteer and help them with the cause they work so hard for, they are really grateful. Because they are so happy to have volunteers, the teachers took the time to get to know us personally. Every Monday when I came in, they asked me about my weekend, my college choices, my boyfriend, and school. They offer to write recommendations for their volunteers, and look for any opportunity to show their appreciation for their help. Seeing how much effort the teachers at Rise gave to get to know me really made me feel special every time I went to service. I could not help but to constantly feel like a valued member of the team at Rise, and it made me feel like they appreciated what I contributed to the classroom.

Volunteering at The Rise School is an extremely rewarding experience, especially when volunteers can see the difference they can make in the kids' lives even by being there once a week. I saw the difference that could be made through not only my friend's experience at Rise, but also my own. My friend Mary Anderson, the other Ursuline girl who went to Rise with me, remembers a student in her class named Roman who could not sit crisscross applesauce. She told me the story about one Monday when Roman was getting frustrated that he couldn't do it, and she worked with him and taught him how to sit correctly in circle. Mary knows this seems like a

very minor feat in the big picture, but she saw how big it made Roman smile and knew she had done something huge for him in that moment. A similar story happened in my classroom, when I was reading a book with Ben. He always had trouble with his colors: Ben tended to call every color, no matter what it was, purple. Our book happened to be all about colors, and after reading the book together and pointing with his fingers to different colors on the page and saying them out loud, Ben was naming the colors correctly. When I celebrated with “Good job Ben! You did it!!” he knew he had done something great, and celebrated with me. At The Rise School, even the smallest things make the children feel so accomplished, and seeing the smiles on their faces makes every second worth it.

Everyday when I left The Rise School after service, I felt better than I did when I got there. As I drove out of the parking lot, I would immediately call my mom and share all my stories from my day of service. While other girls in my grade would come back to school and complain about how they had to go to service that morning even though they were tired and had so much homework, or even talked about how they skipped service to catch up on sleep, I came back to school with funny stories about what happened that day. No matter how tired I felt or how much I wanted that extra two hours of sleep I could’ve gotten by simply skipping, I never wanted to miss an opportunity to go to The Rise School. I feel like it is so rare that someone looks at a community service opportunity as a complete privilege, and not as an obligation, but that is exactly how I felt about Rise. If you want the kind of satisfaction from your senior service that I got from mine, then you should definitely consider volunteering at Rise.

In most of this letter, I have talked about why Rise is so much fun, and the impact the volunteers can have on the people there; however, the truth is that volunteering at The Rise School affects the *volunteers’* lives more than anything else. Since I started volunteering at Rise

over a year ago, I have really seen how it has impacted me. Even after our last day of service ended in March, I kept going back almost every week until I left for college. And even when I came home for Fall Break, I went back to volunteer again. Volunteering at The Rise School made me see that there is more to volunteering than a requirement, and that it benefits me more than anything. I know this inspiration is not unique to me because of the story of a teacher in the classroom where I worked. Andrea Richardson, a teacher's assistant in my classroom, told me about how she volunteered at Rise when she was in high school and realized how much she loved it. She not only got a job as a teacher substitute at Rise during the summers in college, but now she actually works there full time. I know anyone, especially someone as driven as you, would love to find inspiration like Andrea and I did, and I know that volunteering at The Rise School will give you exactly that.

I realize there are so many choices when you are looking at community service sites, but I really hope you will look seriously at The Rise School now. I had so much fun volunteering at Rise and I still wish I could go back every week. There is not a day that goes by that I don't think about the kids in my classroom there and all of the Rise Community. I really think you would appreciate the opportunity as much as I did. No matter what community service site you choose, I hope you love it as much as I loved The Rise School, and that the rest of your senior year goes well. Don't forget, I'm just a phone call away! I'll see you when I'm home for Christmas!

Love,

Caroline

## Works Cited

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