

Jack

WR 13300

Professor Clauss

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The Arc Community Center

Situation: At my former high school, Gonzaga Prep, seniors are required to complete a community service course either over the summer or during one of the semesters. There are many options in terms of placements for this class. Once a community service student who chose the Arc Community Center of Spokane as a placement, I am writing to Evelyn, a current Gonzaga Prep junior and former member of my carpool, who is starting at this time to think about the course and where she could possibly go. I hope, that by reading this letter, Evelyn would choose or strongly consider the Arc Community Center as her placement.

Hello Evelyn!

How are things going back in Spokane? I know that the transition from sophomore to junior year can be a bit of a leap, so I hope all your classes aren't too overwhelming. In fact, I wouldn't blame you at all if you set aside this letter until May after reading the first paragraph. Anyway, I am extremely curious to see how using iPads instead of textbooks would change the whole classroom experience. Well, if you're not too swamped with work: I know it may be a little ways away, but you've probably heard Abby and me talk about Community Service in carpool last year. As you know, seniors have to take the class either over the summer or during the school year. When the decision comes, I know it can be somewhat daunting with all the fantastic options for possible placements; as I remember, it took me almost a week to choose. I could tell you that you can't really a mistake in what you choose, but saying that would be both unfair to you and, not to mention, very untrue. Several of my friends have, in fact, disliked their placements. I would like to help you avoid this, so that you can make the most out of the course. However, I will tell you that I remain positively affected in choosing the Arc Community Center

as my placement. I hope you too will take into consideration the Arc as I explain how rich of an experience it can be to work there.

A unique quality of the Arc Community Center is that it allows only adults with intellectual disabilities to become members. As you will notice when you take a look at the sheet with the list of placements and their descriptions, a large majority of the options involve working with children. Your teacher, Mr. Kempen, will most definitely advise something like, “Although these opportunities to work with children are great, I would strongly recommend that you consider a placement that involves working with adults.” After volunteering at a place that requires its members to be eighteen years or older, I understood what Mr. Kempen was talking about (How). Children can make for an equally wonderful experience—well I don’t know about Patrick and Isabelle—when volunteering with them, but there is something more dynamic and enriching about interacting with adults that makes the entire situation, simply put, much more intricate (Kempen).

As you may remember from back in the days of Cataldo School, we had to do some type of community service. I specifically remember a time when, even though I had signed up to work at the food bank, I went to St. Anne’s Children and Family Center because the food bank was closed for some reason. When I went in, it was extremely overwhelming with kids running everywhere and chaos brewing around every corner; it seemed like a complete loss of control, which made me very uncomfortable. Yet, the employees seemed very calm and knew how to handle any situation. Working for children is without a doubt meant for some people. I know you can probably speak from experience with your siblings. The volunteering experience at Arc Community Center, however, is very much a polar-opposite to that of a place such as St. Anne’s. As I noticed from my very first day working at the Arc, there was such a calming sense of informality. I thought, why didn’t more than two people from my class choose this placement?

Unlike working with children, members always tried to make a real conversation and often times they could be quite intriguing. Although much of the time the conversations would involve nothing more than a short discussion about how the Gonzaga basketball team will do, there were those few times where one would carry on for longer than 10 or 20 minutes. I remember once I talked about the history of rock n' roll with one of the members. He knew all of the names of not only the classic bands, but also the band members. Times like these were the greatest of all at the Arc. The experience was made so much better simply because of the conversation on the adult level of complexity.

If you don't necessarily enjoy conversations at the "adult" level, that is perfectly fine too; the Arc is sure to surprise you with its overwhelming sense of welcoming. When you first walk in, you will most likely see a few people playing Wii Bowling or someone playing pool. If you want, you can go right up to them and join in on the activity. I remember how almost all of the members were thrilled to have my company. On one of the days before you actually start volunteering at your placement, you will go and do some type of orientation. Trust me, you will understand this sense of welcoming the minute you enter the room during orientation. I vividly remember one of the women, Brigit, took me around the whole room and introduced me to every single person there. It is because of instances like this one that I have come to greatly appreciate the intellectually disabled. They will never judge you. I was nervous at first that I might not fit in at the Arc, but after a few days, I realized that fitting in is something that doesn't really exist at the Arc. They care nothing about who you are or where you come from, but only that you are willing to sit down with them and talk or play a board game with them. This ability to not only reserve judgment, but to throw it away altogether, is something that I became aware of and now make effort to practice every day.

Another thing that you might notice when volunteering at the Arc Community Center is

the unique way the employees act toward the members. As you might have already learned from your mom and dad who have had extensive experience with the disabled, many would think to treat the developmentally disabled as inferior and therefore “talk down” to them. After volunteering at the Arc over the summer, I could clearly see that the employees have been specifically trained to avoid this. One volunteer in particular stood out during my time at the Arc. I don’t think Paul still works there, but I really wish you could have met him. At first he seemed a bit awkward and hard to talk to—but you know me and who am I to talk about awkward—but his way of interacting with the members was exceptional. I had never really considered the correct way of talking to the intellectually disabled until I observed Paul. I realized that it is actually no different than when you are talking with your friends. I think every one of the members labeled Paul as a favorite. As I began to utilize some of Paul’s techniques, I began to more fully understand why it is so important to approach the intellectually disabled with no regard to their disability. It is such a small part to their overall personalities that I could more deeply and much more successfully connect with the members of the Arc by approaching them like one of my friends at school.

If you are looking at the massive list of placement options for Community Service, obviously the first thing you should consider is what suits your personality the best. I know you have dealt with children extensively though, so if you are looking for a completely fresh experience, you should definitely place one of the adult options among your top choices. I have been able to apply many of the things I have learned from my experiences at the Arc to the disabled community, and to mention those college application essays. I realize that you have a long while to decide until summer or senior year rolls around (depending on when you want to take the course), and I would commend any choice you end up making. After all, they are all outstanding institutions. However, I will say that what you make of your time at the placement is

far more important than simply what you choose, and the Arc Community Center, an enriching place to work on its own, will most definitely motivate you to make the experience a really, really good one. I can't wait to talk to you soon and hear how your classes are going and see if you have any college visiting plans.

Your friend,

Jack

Works Cited

"How You Can Help." Community Center. The Arc of Spokane, n.d. Web. 07 Nov. 2013.

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