

## “How My Acts of Service Help Me Understand What My Community Means to Me”

Your community shapes who you are. The people you are surrounded by influence every aspect of your life, from your aspirations and goals to your personality and self-esteem. I have grown up in the world of sports, and I was blessed with a wonderful community that has supported and uplifted me from the beginning. As I matured, I began to realize how much of a gift that is. Doing my part for that community allows me to help the next generation of little girls with big dreams thrive and find joy doing the things they love.

Growing up, I quickly found a passion for the hard work and the tremendous rewards inherent in sports. From kicking soccer balls to running 5Ks, I dedicated my childhood to furthering my athletic capabilities. One of my favorite things about sports was getting the opportunity to participate in camps. I idolized the older girls who ran those camps, but I never pictured myself in their position. The level that they were at seemed unattainable and out of reach for me, and I could've never guessed that in a few short years, I would be in their shoes.

Volunteering to work with young athletes, although gratifying, can be full of challenges. For instance, I tend to be a soft-spoken, reserved person, and leading large groups of people can be out of my comfort zone. Learning to speak up and take control was an important step I had to take if I wanted to continue working with children. My first experiences helping in a youth soccer program gave me a newfound confidence, as well as a greater appreciation for all of the coaches and volunteers who supported my soccer journey throughout the years. As I continued volunteering, this gratitude only grew.

Like all things in life, my time in sports has had its ups and downs. I faced low self-confidence, and at times, I lacked the motivation and drive to keep moving forward.

Throughout all of this, I had my teammates to lean on, my coaches to push me, and families (including my own) on the sidelines rooting for me. I wouldn't have made it as far as I have without their constant support. My goal as I grew up was to give that same energy back to them in any and every way possible. Serving the sports community has helped me realize how much dedication, passion, and enthusiasm these people have brought into my life, and how much of that zeal was passed onto me.

High school has given me countless opportunities to volunteer in the sports community. I've been a running bunny, demonstrated soccer exercises, run basketball drills, and worked 5Ks in freezing temperatures. Each camp, race, and practice has brought me closer to my community in ways that I never expected. I became one of the girls that I had idolized since kindergarten, and knowing that young players are looking up to me has inspired me to become a strong role model for them. I owe it to the people who supported me to help the next generation of athletes in our community find strength and confidence through sports.

All of these experiences have strengthened my connection with my community, and I have begun to understand how important it is to me. As I have reflected on my journey in sports, I realized that there was one thing that never changed throughout my career: the people. No matter what sport I'm playing, what team I'm on, or what level I'm at, there have always been people within the community who are eager to help me in any way they can. Becoming that person for others was the best way for me to comprehend the immense impact all of these people have had on my life. Being able to see this in the sports world allowed me to recognize it in other aspects of my life. I started to notice the ways my teachers, classmates, mentors, and the other members of my community influenced the way I carried and viewed myself. Making an important realization through sports changed the way I saw my community outside of sports.

Ultimately, volunteering in the sports world has helped me understand that my community has shaped every aspect of who I have become. It is my constant source of support and motivation, and it has pushed me to embrace challenges to be the best version of myself. My community gives me purpose, and I will continue serving it in an effort to encourage others the way I was encouraged my entire life.