

Since my first year of high school, I had many opportunities that allowed me to further my personal growth. After engaging in these opportunities, I have learned valuable skills that have been very useful throughout my educational career so far.

The time I spent as an aide and volunteer at the Down Syndrome Association of Orange County made a huge impact on my life. I was involved in the "Mano a Mano" reading program, which is an early literacy program for children with Down syndrome. As an assistant to the program coordinator, my tasks included preparing the curriculum, setting up the reading work stations, and assisting individual students with completing their reading assignments. I learned that patience and care is required when working with children with disabilities, which at first was very challenging for me. However, over the years, I have grown in patience and understanding as I have learned how to effectively engage with students with learning and social disabilities. After the first year in the program, my efforts were quickly recognized as I received an award for being an outstanding DSAOC volunteer. As I continued my volunteer work, I earned the City of Brea Mayor's Youth Community Service Award. In addition, I was also recognized for completing a total of 160 volunteer hours, which qualified me for the City of Brea Mayor's award medal. It was awarded to me by the Mayor's office at my high school graduation awards night.

Another volunteer opportunity of great personal influence to me was when I was involved with MERCY Worldwide. They are a global nonprofit humanitarian organization that assist underprivileged people and communities. This organization provides personal care, educational programs, living resources and funding to the homeless, orphans and youths. Other community projects were the American Cross emergency preparedness training program and the City of Whittier cleaning day event. I helped in a street cleaning project by picking up trash and debris throughout the city streets, parks, and business avenues. One of the two projects that inspired me the most was helping clean up and beautify a youth shelter in Fullerton for troubled teens. I was involved in helping clean the inside of the home,

perform kitchen repairs, and outdoor yard-work. At the end, the teens were greatly encouraged to see their home beautifully clean. The other project included installing fire alarms in homes of low-income neighborhoods in Los Angeles County. I was part of a team that went door-to-door in the Pico Rivera City neighborhoods to install new fire alarms because some were old or non-existent. This was a rewarding experience since our home safety efforts were valuable to the residents. We found that more than half the homes had no fire alarms installed. Our volunteer efforts most certainly saved lives. I am looking forward to dedicating time to more projects with MERCY Worldwide in the future.

Lastly, I volunteered for the Fullerton Sister City Association. This association works with local schools to encourage international unity and positive language learning experiences. Brea Olinda High school, hosted a program where Chinese exchange students were given the opportunity to enroll in 3 courses on campus. As a volunteer, I was assigned to partner with an exchange student, whom I assisted during classes. Several fun activities were set up to encourage bonding with the exchange students. Since their learning and communication can be different, I learned to be open-minded and flexible. Although, their English language was limited, we were still able to communicate and interact in many fun ways. It really was a wonderful experience.

Since starting at the University of California, Irvine in the summer of 2021, I have maintained a GPA of 3.920. I have done well in my Social Ecology major and will continue to perform at my best at UCI. My educational journey, along with these volunteer opportunities, have provided me with so many valuable experiences. I am grateful for the opportunity to have engaged with children with Down syndrome at DSAOC. At MERCY Worldwide, I was exposed to the many challenges that the underprivileged population deals with in our communities. Serving the Chinese exchange students at my high school was a different and rewarding experience I will never forget. All these opportunities were remarkable, as I believe they have helped me grow and become a better person.