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My parents taught my brother and me at a very early age the importance of giving back. I can remember going through my toys and clothes to find items to donate to the Red Cross during floods when I was very little. It was nice to know that my toys were going to a little girl that had lost all of hers. I have tried to continue to remember that the best gift I can get is helping someone else.

One of my favorite places to volunteer is Ronald McDonald house. When you go there to serve a meal, the little kids love when you play with them. Some of them just like to sit at the table and color pictures while you talk to them. No matter what they are going through, they still love to smile and have fun. You can also tell how important it is to the parents to see the kids smile. It is such a fun, warm house where everyone feels loved and welcomed.

I also love making blankets for Project Linus. My mom has been doing this for years and started a big project with the sixth grade class where everyone in the class makes a blanket. Ever since then, I make 2-3 blankets every year. They explain how important these blankets are to the kids that receive them. They are passed out at Children's Hospital, homeless shelters, and with the fire and police. They are given to kids that are scared and alone. I know how much my blanket means to me so I know that this small gift from me will be able to bring peace and joy to another child. I made one for my grandma and grandpa. Both have died and I can still wrap up in their blankets and feel like they are giving me a hug. Hopefully, that is how these kids feel – like I am giving them a big hug.

I am in Girl Scouts and we do many volunteer activities. One of my favorite activities for my Marian medal was going to a nursing home to talk with the people. You could tell from their smiles how important it was to them that we wanted to listen to them. People are so lonely, and I have found that just showing you care can lead to many smiles.

Every summer I spend one afternoon a week volunteering at the library. Usually, I work the prize table for the summer reading program. This is so much fun because the kids are so excited to get their prizes. Reading can help you forget your problems and take you to a new place. It is very important for kids to have fun reading and the summer program lets them do that. I am glad I can help get them excited about reading.

I also like tutoring younger students at St. Ignatius. The students really look up to you. If I can make math or some other subjects easier for them, I feel good.

When I was in third grade my brother was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. I see how hard this has been on him and my parents. I don't think many people understand the difficulty of this disease because it seems like no big deal. When he was taking shots, I even learned to give them to him. I feel really bad that he has to keep poking his fingers and putting his pump in his stomach. I don't want him to have to do that for the rest of his life. My family has become very involved in JDRF (Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation). We have a walk team every year and raise money to find a cure. We love walk day. My friends and I put up a tattoo booth during the prewalk. We do stick on tattoos for all of the little kids waiting to start the walk. Everyone is having fun, laughing and working together to raise money. I love to see the smiles as I put a tattoo on a little girl or boy. The walk is so much fun. It goes through King's Island. There are tons of little kids running, skipping and just having a great time. Nobody worries about being embarrassed about taking out their tester or dosing their insulin because they are in a group where everyone understands. To know one day that I helped find a cure will bring a huge smile to my face!!!

I know that I will always find ways to volunteer with service hours. Knowing that you can help someone is the best feeling of all. I never look at it as a chore or something I have to do because I always find that I end up having as much fun as the people I am trying to help.