

Shannon Dennemann – Summit Country Day Middle School – Summit Country Day High School

In life we encounter many different people and how we act can make these encounters positive or negative. When I was in 6th grade, I had an encounter with a classmate who was extremely unkind to me. People told me to brush it off because, “middle school is the worst,” “girls will be girls,” and “that’s middle school for you.” After some reflection I decided that, if this is the middle school mold, then I don’t want to fit into it. I took it upon myself to try to make my school, and ultimately the world around me a better, kinder place through my daily interactions with others.

The same year as my negative encounter, we were assigned of a year-long perseverance project, and I decided that the project would be the perfect first step along my quest. For this project, I performed and documented an act of kindness every day. Most of these acts were small, unplanned gestures that responded to a need as I observed it, such as scraping teachers' cars in the parking lot after it snowed or dropping off food to a homeless camp I encountered while hiking in the woods. At least once a week I challenged myself to perform a larger, planned act such as making meals for a person recovering from surgery and handing out warm coffee to people sleeping on the streets in downtown. My culminating project, which I assumed would have the greatest impact on myself and the community, was an annual event called Kindflash which took place during February. I sorted and bagged hats, scarves, and mittens that were previously collected at community sites, to go out to people in need of warm clothes. I hung over 40 Ziploc bags to trees and poles around Norwood and O’Byronville for people to come and take them if needed. While Kindflash did have an impact on others, it was not what left the greatest impression on my teachers and classmates. I later found out that my greatest impact was simply always being positive and leading by example and the phrase “What Would Shannon Do” was used among my teachers and classmates in a positive way.

After my wonderful experience with the project, I decided to continue to have a positive impact on my school community through participating in our Service Club and the Diversity and Inclusion program. The Service Club oversees all the service projects in the middle school. I love working on the existing projects but continue to look for new opportunities. At the end of each school year, I saw most people throwing away their unused folders, binders, notebooks, etc. This bothered me, so I found a way to help prevent such waste. I collected all the supplies that anyone did not want to keep at the end of the year. After all the other students went to start their summer break, I stayed at school and organized the school supplies I had collected. This way they would be available for any student or teacher to use as they needed for the next school year. Thus, I founded Project Reuse that has saved hundreds of supplies from going to waste. Diversity and Inclusion’s mission is to make the school’s environment more

**Shannon Dennemann – Summit Country Day Middle School – Summit Country
Day High School, Page 2 of 2**

understanding of the people around them in order to help the world be less hateful and more accepting of others. I attempt to do this by educating the middle school students and teachers about stereotypes, prejudices, etc. Each quarter we plan an assembly that addresses a different topic. I have planned and lead assemblies on heritage, stereotypes, unconscious bias and disabilities.

I have tried to also have a positive impact outside of my school. Since I am fortunate enough to learn Chinese at school, I take that knowledge and help tutor a young girl who lives in China, to help her grow her English-speaking skills and her English vocabulary. Every Saturday morning, I wake up early to Skype with her before she goes to bed. We talk about her week and work on her conversation skills. It is not always easy to wake up early, but I do so because I love to hear her proudly show off her English and I know that she looks forward to these weekly conversations. Another way that I try to help others with what I have been given is volunteering my time. Every fall, I volunteer at a festival that benefits Children's Home of Northern Kentucky. I know that I am fortunate to have two parents and a home to live in and I am happy to help support a festival that works to help kids who do not have what I do. One week during the summer, I go to a camp where every day we go to a different organization and volunteer. This past summer, we went to organizations such as, Rose Garden Missions, Matthew 25, SAAP, Tender Mercies, the Play Library, and more. During this week I was able to discover even more ways to serve others and bring joy to people.

When we meet someone, we make a lasting impression on them, and it is our choice to make that impression positive or negative. Even though I was harmed by a classmate's mean words and actions, I decided to take that hurt and try to eliminate it out of the world, so more people could feel happier in life. I have done this by leading by example, volunteering, and becoming more involved in my school community. That is how I have made a positive impact on many people's life.