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When I first heard about this scholarship, I immediately recognized the name “Aubrey Rose.” I had heard her name many times before, but I never really knew who she actually was. To find out, I went on the Aubrey Rose website and read the story of her life. She went through so much at such a young age, and it was really difficult to think that someone so young had to cope with so much. It made the problems in my life seem small and unimportant. Even though her life was far too brief, Aubrey clearly had a huge impact on many peoples’ lives. I read that no matter what Aubrey was going through, she always had a big smile on her face. In this simple act of smiling, Aubrey had made a difference in the lives of those around her. That really struck me because I used to think that the things that I had done could make a significant impact on those around me. However, I have since realized that simple acts of kindness can really impact the lives of others, and our lives as well.

This new understanding about what it means to make an impact on others came to me through the various opportunities that I have had to volunteer my time in serving others. For instance, I have been volunteering at Tender Mercies, which is an organization that gathers food and prepares meals for those who are less fortunate. My girl scout troop and I have prepared meals, such as spaghetti and meatballs, and brought them to the Tender Mercies kitchen to serve to those people who depend on this organization for their meals. Most of us take for granted that we will have food to eat when we are hungry, but not everyone is so fortunate. The thing that I will always remember about the time that I have spent there is the look of appreciation and thankfulness that I saw on the faces of the people we served. This helped me to see that these people were truly grateful, and that our small efforts appeared to make a big difference.

I also help with the Manna Outreach program. Like Tender Mercies, Manna Outreach is an organization that provides basic needs to the poor and homeless people in our community. A memorable example of this is when our school held a sock drive so that those without enough clothing might be able to safely get through the brutal cold of the winter. Again, while gathering socks does not seem to be an important activity, I began to understand that small efforts do make a significant and positive difference in others’ lives.

The most recent opportunity that I had to make a difference was when my class went to “Visionary and Voices” to spend time with disabled artists. These artists were people who had many different challenges in their lives because of their physical and mental disabilities. While this experience was a reminder of how small acts of kindness can make a real impact on others, it helped me to realize something else—that helping others not only has a positive impact on others, but also has a positive impact on me. These people may have had serious disabilities, but they were pursuing their dreams and achieving great things in spite of them. If these people who are challenged with disabilities could be brave

enough to pursue their dreams, then certainly I could do the same. It was inspirational, and I know that I am better for having taken the time to visit with these amazing people.

There is one other important lesson that I have learned from my efforts at helping others. While volunteers and organizations can help to provide the less fortunate of our community with very basic needs such as clothing, food and shelter, there is something that these people receive that is just as important—a sense of being worthwhile. Many of us take for granted that others care for us, but there are people among us who feel ignored and forgotten by most of society. I feel that organizations such as Tender Mercies and Manna Outreach, and individual volunteers help to show the underprivileged of our community that they are not forgotten and that they are worthwhile. While it is extremely important for us to provide the needy with their basic needs, I believe that the act of showing them that they are important enough to be cared for can have the most meaningful impact of all.

My school and parish have given many wonderful opportunities to volunteer my time to help the poor and needy people of our community. While I did not always appreciate the impact that I have had, I have come to realize that my efforts are truly appreciated in many ways. Not only can I help others to receive their most important and basic needs, but I also help them to see that they are important and worth being cared for. In addition, I also benefit from helping others. I have been inspired by seeing that those people who have many more challenges than can live their lives fully and achieve so many wonderful things. I have been fortunate that my Catholic education has encouraged me to serve others. Attending a Catholic school has really helped me to realize what is truly important in this life. I know that I will continue to do what I can to volunteer and serve others, and I know my life will be much more rewarding because of this.