



A BUCKETFUL OF *Kindness* Volunteering with Horizons



I signed up for Horizons after hearing my friends talk about how much fun they had and how many community service hours they were able to log. Lancaster Country Day, where I go to school, strongly encourages students to engage in community service. If I were to be completely honest, I also signed up because I thought Horizons would look good on a college application in the future. However, after working for two summers, I can now say that my thinking has changed. Horizons turned out to be a meaningful experience that I will never forget. It has helped me grow as a person in ways I will explain.

What exactly is Horizons? Horizons is a 100% donor-funded program with the mission to advance educational opportunities for children from under-resourced communities. It does so by building long-term partnerships with students, families, communities, and schools and by creating experiences for kids outside of school that inspire in them the joy of learning. Students in the program gain confidence, grow academically, acquire skills, get exercise, make friends, and understand that learning can be enjoyable.

"Fill your bucket" was the theme for this summer. It essentially means that one should act kindly toward others. Throughout the six weeks, everyone makes an attempt to be a "bucket filler," which means they should go out of their way to say and do nice things for others. The theme inspires you to ask yourself, "What can I do to make someone's day better?"

For volunteers, each day starts off around 8:30 a.m. by greeting the students as they get off their buses. We then head

inside to the cafeteria for breakfast. After breakfast, we proceed to the classroom for a morning meeting as well as a math, literacy, music, art, or science class. Fridays are different, as that's when everyone reports to the theater for community meetings when two or three kids from each grade are recognized for their outstanding "bucket filling" for that week.

Following the first class, kids hurry outside for recess and snacks. Horizons spreads classes throughout the day, so students never have more than an hour of pure learning at a time. At least once a day, kids enjoy recess, an important time for them to run around and burn off energy.

Some students can't swim well due to their lack of access to a pool. For this reason, Horizons features swimming instruction on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at the Lancaster YMCA. Volunteers enjoy teaching swimming just as much as the kids enjoy splashing around in the pool. "It's really nice to get into the pool with the kids to help them swim," remarked Cara C., volunteer and School Lane Hills resident. "Swimming is always important to learn no matter the age."

In addition to swimming, weekly field trips add a unique feature to Horizons. Whether the field trip is educational or purely recreational, everyone enjoys a getaway from their regular schedule. This summer, destinations included Longwood Gardens, Climber's

Run Conservancy, and James Buchanan's Wheatland, among others.

Not only do the students benefit from Horizons, but the student volunteers do as well. By working with kids, volunteers learn responsibility and organizational skills, traits that are helpful in any career path. "My experience with Horizons has given me practice working with kids of different ages," commented Emma T., a volunteer and School Lane Hills resident.

This is my second summer volunteering with Horizons. I love the job, though it keeps me busy! I help out the teachers in the classroom, offer swimming lessons, supervise field trips, and provide students with friendship and a role model. I never expected to form such strong bonds with the kids, and I am always amazed by how close I have grown with many of them. Horizons has been a rewarding experience for me.

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