

## Community Service Reflection

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Last summer, I spent four days on Pine Ridge Reservation investing in 82 incredible kids. The opportunity arose through my home church, First Church of God in Marion, SD. We have a sister church in Allen, SD, and every summer, members of my church go out there to staff a Vacation Bible School for the kids in the Allen community. That summer, I was asked to be the director of crafts for the VBS. I was quite nervous; I had been an assistant in a VBS craft room before, but this was my first time leading one. Nevertheless, I took on the responsibility, which included finding appropriate craft ideas, compiling the necessary supplies, organizing the space, and delegating tasks and duties to the two craft room assistants. Staring out, it was a bit chaotic, but each day got easier as I picked up on the dynamics of the groups of kids and tailored the craft room experience to meet their needs. Indeed, in those short four days, I gained knowledge and experience that will help me on my journey to become an effective teacher.

The first set of skills I strengthened were my organization and time management skills. I had to create the activities schedule, arrange the craft supplies, and prepare the reading material so it was ready to go before each VBS day. I only had 25 minutes with each group, so I had to make every activity count. To do so, I had to cut passages from the reading plan, simplify crafts so they could be finished in time, and design an effective method for transitioning groups quickly and smoothly. All of this detail work was great practice for my future profession; I will have to create unit and lesson plans that will require assembling materials and allocating time for each activity. Likewise, I will need to have it all ready ahead of time.

As a teacher, even if I have everything ready and planned ahead of time, things will not always go the way I plan. I experienced that in Allen, too; sometimes my design for the day fell

short and I had to adapt and adjust. For example, on the first day, I was not checking to ensure every child was putting their name on their craft. Consequently, when the day ended, kids were unsure of which craft was theirs. To prevent that confusion the next day, my assistants and I encouraged each child to not only write their name on their crafts, but also to place their craft on the drying table in the square with their name on it. After we utilized the new system, far fewer crafts were unclaimed or fought over. Even the most perfect plans are subject to interruptions, and as a teacher, I will have to know how to reorganize and accommodate for changes. I was not able to perfect the VBS craft system in those four days – I do not think I ever will – but my confidence in my ability to adapt to the needs of students grew substantially. I learned that having a plan is great, but flexibility complements even the best thought-out plans.

Lastly, I learned that, while there is a lot of hurt out there and it feels like I cannot make a difference, no kindness given is kindness wasted. I encountered a lot of kids that were hurting in very real ways. Some of them had lived through things no child should ever have to experience, yet they smiled so widely and loved so hard. I was taken aback by their honesty and authenticity. They absorbed my affection like a sponge and returned it tenfold. When I got home, I was struck with the feeling that the short time I had spent in their world was not nearly enough to make a difference. However, I came to the realization that I am no hero and that is okay; the important thing is that I love generously and give the best of myself. I know how much of an impact their sweet smiles had on me, and I can hope that the same is true of the minute role I played in their lives. In the future position I will have as a teacher, I will have more time with my students, so my impact has potential go even further. Even still, though my role may be but small, I realized that I should not let myself get discouraged that what I do leaves no impression on my world. Furthermore, I should assure my students that they, too, make a difference in the bigger picture.