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Riki Jacobs Livingston Pride Award Essay

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Bringing change to the Rutgers community, nation, and the world is one of the things that has always resonated in my heart since I first began my college journey at Rutgers University. As a first-generation Hispanic/Latino student about to graduate among the class of 2022, I believe it is important to give back to others as it is a way to share the knowledge and skills you have obtained so others may flourish as well. I have been fortunate to be part of several service organizations on campus such as the service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega, became an active member in Habitat for Humanity, as well as volunteering at my hometown's soup kitchen, and occasionally returning to my old high school as a mentor for the next generation of college students. I am a student who does not take anything for granted but rather tries my best to open the door of possibilities for others as my predecessors have done for me. It is important to appreciate all the things you have learned in life, all the friendships formed, and all experiences one goes through because they transform us into the person we are. The act of helping out others is not a chore, it's a privilege. One simple action, one hour of your time, or simply a heart-to-heart conversation can give someone or a group of people the support they need to thrive, and to me that means everything.

For the past three years, I have served as an active E-board member of the service fraternity Alpha Phi Omega. As a former Leadership Vice President and Membership Vice President, I have been able to coordinate service events for the members and myself to attend. For example, we have been fortunate to attend events on campus such as Rutgers Special Friends Day, Scarlett Day of Service, as well as volunteer at nearby food pantries such as Five Loaves Food Pantry and the Christ Church Food Pantry. At the Special Friends Day event, I was able to host fun activities for special needs youth ages 6 to 21 and allow them to have a day of fun with me and other students. I remember feeling mesmerized by the amount of people who came to the event to help others with special needs, it truly warmed my heart. I made strong connections with the special needs youths as we all played board games, laughed at the

movie that was playing on the projector, and was given the opportunity of being able to make their days just a little better by eating popcorn together. The family members of the special needs youths were extremely appreciative as they told us how much it meant to them that regular students such as us were dedicating a whole day to make others smile. On the Scarlet Day of Service, my fraternity and I went around campus finding places that need assistance. We arrived at the First Christ Hospital where we began cleaning the entire building, planting new flowers, as well as organizing the materials inside the building. The first Christ hospital was thankful for the help we have given them, they have been in need of volunteers for a while and when they saw how many of us arrived, they were moved to tears. I remember telling the person in charge that whenever they require assistance to let us know and we'll be more than happy to come. It's the little things such as seeing others smile or shed a tear of gratitude, that makes it all worthwhile. At the five Loaves Food Pantry and the Christ Church Food Pantry, I helped prepare and serve meals to those less fortunate. I member feeling a sense of warmth and accomplishment. I was not here for recognition or for any materialistic gain, I was here to help others and make a difference. That has been the way I have been raised and that is the way I have been taught by all my friends, teachers, and mentors whom I have had the pleasure of meeting. When you help someone, you help everyone.

Volunteering for Habitat for Humanity has taught me a lot of things, one of the most important things is the satisfaction of seeing how one's hard work can make a difference in someone's life. Habitat for Humanity is a prestigious organization that goes to different build sites to help construct houses for people who are in need of a home. At these builds, we work with professional workers who teach us how to be safe with the equipment and how to build certain aspects of the home. At the end of the build, we either get a visit from the family who we are building a house for or we get a message via postcard of them thanking us for their hard work. On one particular occasion, we were in the middle of building the walls of the house, the family surprised us by buying us water and pizza. It was a great showing of camaraderie as we we're all a diverse group of people joining together for a good cause. On the days when we do not attend builds, we would continue our acts of service by creating personalized cards for the

patients at Saint Peter's hospital. Each member would be assigned a patient and get a quick summary of the patient's diagnosis and what their interests are. After taking a few hours to create the card we would send them to the hospital to get distributed. In return, the patients would convey their gratitude to us for thinking of them. This is an example that allows me to put reality into perspective, every life is precious, and exchanging words of positivity with one another can make everyone feel cheerful.

Ever since I left my hometown and started living on the campus of Rutgers University, I have been fortunate of finding mentors in my professors and my supervisor at my research job. Bringing about a change to the world does not necessarily mean doing something universal, even helping out one person can change someone's well-being for the better. I managed to keep in contact with my local high school's administration in order to act as a mentor if they ever need alumni to come back and talk to the students about college life. In addition, I would come back to help answer any questions, give my own personal experiences, as well as help serve as a judge at the local Science Fair. I want to be a role model for the children in my hometown and wish nothing but success for them.

In all of these examples, the results of my actions made people smile and have a better life experience. You get a positive feeling inside of you when you see others succeed, and that is reason enough to help others. Being part of Alpha Phi Omega has allowed me to interact with people who are in need and be there for them as a friend. Working for Habitat for Humanity has given me the opportunity to use my own two hands to give people a place to call home. Furthermore, I realized that bringing a change to the world does not just limit myself to the community at Rutgers but everywhere I can find people to assist. Going back to my hometown to volunteer at the local soup kitchen and being a mentor for the next generation has allowed me to be a mentor/role model for others. At the time, I felt a feeling of joy seeing others being positively impacted by my actions. It allowed me to meet people from all aspects of life, and different backgrounds and eventually become good friends. To this day I am passionate about serving the Rutgers community and the world. I would not be the person I am today without the help of others who came before me, and I wish to impart the same mentality to those I help so that the cycle of helping continues.