

**Ken-Caryl Ranch Foundation Scholarship | Community Service**  
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A toilet paper fashion show is the best example of what community service means to me. Let me start at the beginning...

In the middle of COVID, I transferred to a new junior and senior high school because I wanted to be more academically challenged. I was nervous about being a middle school student in the same school as high schoolers. I also worried about making new friends amidst masking and social distancing rules at the time. So, I joined the school's Mentoring Club as a mentee and became the lucky recipient of someone else's efforts to pay it forward.

The Mentoring Club pairs high school mentors with middle school students to help them adjust to a new environment and enable an overall smooth transition. As an 8th grader, my mentor was a smiling, welcoming face. She gave me tips on how to successfully navigate the inner workings of the school, from scantron tests to teachers' office hours. Her advice helped me get the hang of my new surroundings.

What warmed me the most was her steadfast dedication in ensuring that I always felt like I was right where I was meant to be. She helped cement a strong sense of belonging at my new school. Through her efforts, I came to define myself as a member of my school community. It wasn't one specific, individual event; it was the slow progression of camaraderie, and her willingness to give so much of her time and care that made a lasting impression.

Someone choosing to show up for you is powerful. I decided that I wanted to continue to pay forward the benefits I received as a mentee by showing up for others. An active member of Mentoring Club over the next four years, I was a mentor as a freshman and sophomore, group leader as a junior, and program leader as a senior.

Senior year, I was responsible for overseeing the entire club. I wanted to reach as many students as possible while maintaining the club's fun and welcoming atmosphere, so I worked hard to recruit new members and introduce new group activities. At the beginning of the school year, I created flyers advertising Mentoring Club, helped staff our booth at student orientation, and single-handedly spoke to every 6th grade classroom about the benefits of joining the club. As a result, our membership grew by more than 20 percent, to around 300 members, the most in school history.

Now I had more middle school mentees than ever before, and I needed more mentors. I recruited a number of responsible upperclassmen to join Mentoring Club, many for their first time, and after orchestrating a complicated Excel spreadsheet matching process, we were off to the fun part... building those connections. Our Mentoring Club is built on consistency. Bi-weekly meetings, regular check ins, and shared activities inside and outside of school forge relationships that last longer than just nine months. With my own experience as a mentee as proof that small actions can make a big difference, I wanted to replicate the same positive outcomes within the program.

With that in mind, I introduced new activities in hopes of building bridges and helping middle schoolers really feel like part of the school community. My favorite brainstorm was a toilet paper fashion show. Teams of mentors and mentees designed outfits using only toilet paper and then walked down a "runway" together. We literally made a red-carpet runway in the cafeteria out of pink butcher roll paper. We also awarded candy prizes for winners in categories like Disney princess, most creative, minimalist, and more.

The event was a huge success. It broke down barriers and built trust in an effective yet fun way. What made the fashion show so special wasn't just the laughter, although there was plenty of happy shouting and squealing. It was watching shy middle schoolers step out of their comfort zones, supported by older mentors who cheered the loudest, and join the school community completely lit up with huge smiles and the confidence to tackle the rest of their academic journey.

Community is built through these small moments, because small acts rarely stay small. When passed forward, they ripple outward in ways we don't always see. Over the course of my high school career, I proudly volunteered more than 130 hours paying it forward in my school's Mentoring Club; organizing blood drives through the National Honor Society; running Trick or Treat Street through the National Spanish Honor Society; volunteering at the Food Bank of the Rockies, and more.

To me, community service is about paying it forward. From grand gestures to remembering a mentee's favorite class, a friend's birthday, or showing up on a hard day; being of service is an encouraging word, a small smile, the reassurance that someone is welcome... and then watching them light up. It's being a good sister, daughter, friend, classmate, neighbor, and citizen of the world. It's a toilet paper fashion show.