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2023 High School Scholarship Essay Contest
Second Place Winner (\$2,500 Award)

Making A Difference

by Matthew Ferrara

attending Jesuit High School in Carmichael

Esteemed scientist and environmentalist, Jane Goodall wrote, “You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”

Even during my mere eighteen years, I have experienced some days during which I understood my own influence and my capability to impact my community. Last March, as a Fellow for Jesuits West Collaborative Organizing for Racial Equity (CORE), I joined with a group of energized students to lobby at the State Capitol for our assigned social justice issues. Despite my preparation, having to advocate in a public way was intimidating for someone who usually takes a more reserved, introspective approach. Taking a deep breath, I stepped into my role with confidence because of our intensive planning. It was time to push out of my comfort zone, to be a louder voice in the room.

Once our group briefly rehearsed, we piled into vans for the short trek downtown. Even while stumbling out of the crowded car, I felt energized by our joint commitment. Today, we would boldly share the stories of men, women, and children incarcerated at the United States - Mexico border. These powerful stories would be a spark to create much needed change. In that reflective moment, I was even more sure of one thing: those with a voice must speak for those without one. This is our most important call as

men and women for and with others -- to bear witness to the life experiences of those on the margins. As Jane Goodall so wisely suggested “you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make”.

Becoming a CORE fellow and speaking out for immigrants has transformed me into a more assertive leader. Since this initial experience, I attended a weeklong immersion with the Kino Border Initiative in Nogales, Arizona and Sonora, Mexico. Our group spent time at the shelter, speaking with the residents in English and Spanish, learning about causes of migration and entering into their experiences. Our team leaders led nightly reflections of journaling and in-depth sharing. Mr. McGrew emphasized that true leaders are people who consistently use introspection to inspire next steps. This school year, our immersion cohort has been sharing our experiences with other Jesuit students and forming an advocacy group. Kino Teens is actively recruiting new members, assessing how we can keep using our voices.

Jane Goodall would argue for a never-ending quest to make a difference, a life rich with opportunities for service to others. I believe that my recent experiences will set me on a path to make a lifelong impact on my community.