

## I CAN SEE THE SUN PEEPING THROUGH THE CLOUDS

By Mary Warren

I am fifty-four years old, and I raised two children as a single mom. As a single mom, I had many struggles, but I gave my children the structure and support they needed. I thank God I did not have to bail them out of jail, but some children are not that fortunate to have a parent or parents that care. This is my life's work. I am not these children's mother, but I offer unconditional love and believe in them, even when they don't believe in themselves. I know they can have a life full of possibility. When I was thirty two years old, I started a purity class for teens. I taught them morals and who they could become. They were very responsive to the point that when I did not meet with them, they would come to my house and ask to have the meeting.

I became concerned about teens when I visited my son's middle school. I saw teens that were in trouble and no one came to their rescue. The teens were being very disrespectful and the teachers latched back at them, which made the situation worse. They needed someone that could take them by the hand and say it will be alright. I tried to tell parents and the community our teens were in trouble and no one cared. The passion to help teens and have a voice increased in 2005. I took the opportunity to attend Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College. I learned about all the resources available for beginners like me. One resource was the required Success and Study Skills class. Part of this class was a Service-Learning project. My life was transformed. Service-Learning changed my life, and the lives of the four young people I mentored. I learned that someone else hungers for a kind word, hug or just a few minutes of my time. The community improves when an enthusiastic person becomes a role model in the lives of others because these teens become positive members of the community. Volunteering also helps the community when limited budgets are not stressed to operate the different programs that need

assistance. I will not give up now because I can be heard through class projects and papers I have to present. Volunteering can be a great reward.

I was reluctant about volunteering. Why should I volunteer? What is in it for me? I have a husband, children, and grandchildren to care for. I belong to a church, I had six courses with homework. My time was already filled to capacity, or so I thought. I was required to volunteer in the community only four hours; however, once I started participating as a volunteer, it gave me a new sense of value for people who are less fortunate.

I chose to volunteer at Eliada Home because I love to work with teens. Eliada Home offers various programs.

“Founded in 1903, Eliada Homes, Inc. is a non-profit agency serving the children and families of Western North Carolina. Originally a refuge for women and children and later maintained as an orphanage, Eliada’s services now include Residential and Day Treatment for high risk children and adolescents; Child Development Center services, including Day Care, Summer Camp and School Age care; Foster Care and Therapeutic Foster Care; STEP Adolescent Afterschool; Therapeutic Recreation, featuring TASC (Therapeutic Animal Stewardship Cooperative) and NYPUM (National Youth Project Using Minibikes); and Community Support services. Eliada Homes strives to meet community need in innovative ways, remaining committed to the fulfillment of its mission statement: Helping children succeed. Eliada's vision is to provide an optimal learning environment that empowers children and their families to succeed.”

I wanted to experience the change in their lives when I spent time with them. I begin helping them to stay on task, teaching them to respect others, and helping them learn to read. The little time I would spend with them brought joy and smiles in their lives. They started looking forward to me coming and my visits also gave me great joy. I showed them the dark clouds would leave and the sun will shine if they hold on.

On one of my visits Sarah was taking her finals, she shut down in the middle of the test, and refused to do anything more. She was out of control. They asked if I could help her. We proceeded to another room where there were no distractions. I talked with her and she calmed down. I explained to her how to go about finishing her test. She agreed and finished her test in

thirty minutes. It was just the attention that she received with the one on one help. If I was not volunteering, this could not have taken place. This is only one success story of how lives can be changed through my Service-Learning project. I finished my four hours for my project and learned that the need was so great to give back to the community.

My volunteering gave the teens hope that they can make it. The possibility of them being turned around is truly a treasure that keeps me giving my time. Through my volunteering, their future has possibilities, a future they can look forward to instead of being stuck in the current cycle of bad behavior lifestyle.

The response was so significant in their lives that I continued to volunteer months after my project was over. It motivated them because I let them know they can make it and that someone cared. The students I was assigned to were frustrated and discouraged about being there. Once I started spending time with them, they had the initiative to reach for their goals. It has been two and one half years since I started and I am continuing to volunteer with young people.

I was affected to the point that when I finish school I will continue to volunteer because the need is so great. In school, I started to research more in-depth about how teens are affected by a society that seems to forget about them. I began to see all my school work related to their lives. I learned how the court system worked in their favor because teens need structure. A lot of people give up on children after they turn eleven. They believe they are lost. These teens are stereotyped as criminals, punks, losers, etc. I have sat beside these young men and women. I have talked to them. I have listened to them. They are ready to be loved. They need guidance and just a volunteer. I know I could take a least one teen and help them to turn in the right direction. Troubled teens feel abandoned so when someone cares they latch on. I worked with this young

man who told me his story how he had been left so many times. He asked me if I would be back and I responded with yes. He told me the first day that he knew I cared. The point of volunteering isn't my story. It is these young people that need help with a volunteer.

Volunteering is a life force in a young teen's life. Just one hour causes the winds in their lives to stop blowing so hard. The smiles on their faces show someone cares about them. Giving back to the community is imparting what a person can give to someone else unselfishly.

Service-Learning is a magnificent program, which allows an opportunity for anyone to participate. It covers so many different areas in which volunteers can make a difference in the community. I chose teens because when I finish school, I will search for a job helping them and eventually I want to own group homes for teens. I will continue to volunteer because it is needed. If I never volunteered, I don't think I would have really known the value of imparting to the teens what is in me.