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The Trip Next Door

Danielle-Andree Atangana



Jean-Irès Michel

▲ Danielle-Andree Atangana

I RECENTLY WENT ON A MUSIC MISSION

TRIP with my school choir to the country of Chile. I could see the children listen with joy as melodious notes hit their ears. They also seemed to have an unusual obsession with my hair and were eager to touch it. To think that my interaction with them inspired a child to accept Jesus, excel at school or even start singing is humbling. Yet, “missions” is so much more than going on foreign mission trips. Opportunities for missions exist right in our backyards, in nearby communities — wealthy and not-so-wealthy, that are just as fulfilling and worthwhile.

I really had not planned to help with the flood clean-up at a Berrien Springs trailer park, a community which was a six-minute drive from my house. In fact, I heard about it that morning and so was somewhat hesitant. My Sundays are busy enough with Pathfinders, work and finishing up homework. But, I did the online registration anyway. I noticed I was one of the two teen volunteers when I got there. We organized into groups of about six, walked around the neighborhood, knocked on ten doors of the 300-plus homes devastated by the flood, and asked if they needed help cleaning up their house.

Around lunchtime, the Salvation Army truck pulled up. A woman needed some assistance getting a sack lunch and that is when she started sharing her story. The night before the evacuation, she had suffered from a heart attack. While at the hospital, a friend called to inform her the insurance company wouldn't be replacing the damaged items at her house. It seemed like the added stress of coming home to find things in her house destroyed brought her even more distress. When she returned from the hospital to find volunteers helping others, it astonished her.

When I was coming home, I was thinking about several things. I recalled how happy the lady was when I handed her the sack lunch. Why was this simple

act of kindness so surprising? It seems like because we live in a fast-paced sinful world, little things don't matter anymore, which is quite disturbing. As Christians, we are called to serve with a good attitude and a good heart.

Because of my experience helping out, doors of opportunities opened. I met a psychologist at the clean-up who connected me with her organization where I can conduct research. The experience, coupled with my aspirations to become a pediatrician, caused me to want to investigate how children respond to sporadic unpredictable events like flood, fire, car accidents and how the impact/trauma compares to trauma from continuous domestic abuse. Also, I was invited to train as a Disaster Response volunteer, which I am currently doing, with the Adventist Community Services Disaster Relief organization. The experience helped me get a summer internship to study Environmental Engineering at Michigan Technological University.

When one volunteers locally, you are able to accomplish more since these trips are relatively cheap and affordable because one doesn't have to worry about airfare, visa and hotel costs. It also is easier to maintain relationships with people you may meet through follow-up visits. In my case, the opportunity came to me by word-of-mouth, but local mission project opportunities also might be found on websites of churches, schools, local humanitarian agencies and municipalities. Think about serving! It just may open the windows of heaven for you, too. ■

Danielle-Andree Atangana, 17, is a senior at Andrews Academy in Michigan. She aspires to become a pediatrician and is in the Pathfinder Teen Leadership Training Program.

Danielle received a \$100 scholarship for her story. If you're a youth or young adult interested in submitting a story for consideration, please email: herald@lakeunion.org