True Kindness

(Original)

Sang-Ha Chon
(Age 15, South Korea)
Seoul International School

Smiling faces, dancing bodies, laughter ringing through the air as the crowd sang along to our music. The excitement in the room was tangible. At the end of the concert, we were greeted with applause louder -- and more meaningful -- than any I had experienced before. The venue was Gongju Center for Disabled People. The performing group was Ixtus, a service organization that seeks to utilize music as a way to improve the lives of individuals with physical or mental disabilities. I admit, my original purpose in joining Ixtus was to improve as a musician and to have a unique extracurricular activity to list on my resume. But at that moment, I found myself being rewarded in a much more significant way.

After spending my early childhood years abroad, I returned to my home in Seoul, South Korea, in sixth grade and entered middle school anxious to fit in. I did not realize at the time, however, that embracing Korea's competitive culture would result in developing a distrustful, self-centered attitude. In Seoul, it can feel like people seldom act for the benefit of others, and when they do, they expect their favors to be repaid in some way. This has led to a very machine-like society, where acts of kindness are generally done in the hope of a bigger reward in the future. I began to believe that all acts of kindness must have an ulterior motive, and was soon acting with indifference towards others. That is, until I joined Ixtus.

Just as many of my fellow students were doing as we entered high school, I was seeking volunteer services opportunities to add to my extracurricular activity list, leading me to participate in Ixtus. However, my motivation for being a part of the group has completely shifted. Witnessing the excitement and gratitude of the patients at Gongju Center whenever we performed for them has been an experience far more valuable than any other type of compensation. Since I realized the value of true kindness, I have been constantly searching for other ways to help others in my society without expecting any reward. The more I went out of my way to help others, the more I felt appreciated. And as I did more to show care

towards others, I became more observant about the people around me and how I could help them.

The best way to create a kinder society is to continually show kindness to others. Kindness is contagious; as people feel the joy spread through acts of pure kindness, they will be prompted to pass it forward. In the end, it is always the individual's choice whether they act for self-benefit or for the community's benefit. However, there is no doubt that acting for the community's benefit will someday return to benefit each individual as well.

I have visited the Gongju Center several times now, but the heartwarming feeling has never worn off. Indeed, each meeting has become more meaningful through our interactions with the patients there. Being able to interact with and help those who are less fortunate was crucial in changing my once indifferent mindset towards the society. My experiences in this service made me search for more rewarding experiences, and I was able to join another service group, where I would get to physically help the less fortunate in foreign countries through providing free healthcare services. Like many others contributing to society, I hope that my story will go noticed and provide an example for those who are looking to follow in the same path. It is never too late to start caring about your society, and anyone can contribute to making the world a more kind, caring place.