

Samantha Finley

Grade: 12

Teacher: Dr. Penne Wilson

School: Great Lakes Cyber Academy

ESP: Connection Education

Authorizer: Central Michigan University

Impacting my Community

People have often told me that I have an infectious energy. They've said that my random jokes or comments have lightened their day and they finished it with a big smile on their face, almost for no reason. I took this and ran with it and decided to volunteer at the homeless veteran housing. Most of the veteran's in there don't have family anymore. Their wives have died, their kids abandoned them, or they just forgot. When I go in there, I see some smiles on faces that nurses have said never smile. Some of them say that I remind them of long lost friends or family and some actually confuse me for those people. It makes them happy and sometimes gives them closure on why they haven't seen this person in so long.

For the veteran's that are more functioning, I ask if I can take them out for a while. We wander, we eat, and we talk. They sometimes end up crying because no one else will listen to their war stories over and over again. I've heard ones so many times I feel like I was there.

When I'm not volunteering there, I try to befriend stray animals and give them food and then take them into the shelter. I have reunited ten cats and one dog to their owners and it is worth every scratch, especially when it is a kid who lost their animal. I have one case in particular that I love. She was a stray black cat. She was super skinny, super loud, but she wouldn't let me near her. After the first time I put food out, she started hanging around our backyard. Every time I saw her, I would make sure to go and out a thing of canned food out for her. I would stay crouched near the food and she would creep up, very unsure of me, but her

recognize I wasn't threatening and then get to know my smell. After a while, she became my friend and would come running up to me and flop at my feet begging to be pet. It was getting colder, so we made a little home from an old cabinet and sheets. She stayed in their a while, but then we couldn't find her for a few days. She came back by climbing a tree. It took about an hour to get her down and then we took her into our home because it was freezing out and we weren't sure if she was hurt. She wasn't hurt, but she was pregnant. We kept her since she was pregnant, and then I brought her to the shelter but they found no matches.

Since she was so sweet, I had the idea of asking the veteran place if anyone was allergic to cats and when the answer was no I asked if I could bring her and her babies. She was a hit. All of the veterans, even the ones that didn't find anything amusing, smiled at her. They awed at the babies, cuddled her, and gave her nicknames. She and I are now called angels by them. That is my biggest accomplishment in affecting my community to date.