
My Experiences Volunteering On The Reservations

My six mission trips throughout high school allowed me to develop meaningful relationships with many disadvantaged children. The Fort Barthold Indian Reservation is home to many kids who come from abusive environments, most of whom live below the poverty line. Working with them pushed me out of my comfort zone and challenged me to become more compassionate and patient. I had the opportunity of running both day and overnight camps where the kids were able to stay in a welcoming, safe environment without having to worry about the troubles at home. Although I was not able to solve their problems, I am grateful that I provided them with temporary comfort and support. These intangible experiences hold immense personal value, despite being small and limited in nature. Physical therapy, similarly, encompasses much more than just the science and data behind treatments and exercises. To be an excellent physical therapist requires commitment, compassion, patience, and a desire to solve problems. My experiences volunteering on the reservation allowed me to develop these skills and fueled my passion for service and physical therapy.

Physical therapy embodies so much more than just scientific facts. It involves recognizing the patient as an individual who possesses their own feelings, struggles and fears. Volunteering on the reservation required more than just an outgoing, energetic personality when working with the kids. I found that I was only able to address their problems when I sought out their underlying concerns. There were many nights spent sitting out under the stars comforting children who were afraid to go to bed. One young girl was afraid of the dark and sleeping without her siblings. I sought to validate her fears by explaining stories from when I was young and was afraid of the dark just like her. As the week progressed, she was able to go to bed on her own and was so proud of herself. Although this was a small victory, it is strikingly similar to the practice of physical therapy. Patients often struggle with the slow process of recovery. Yet, with encouragement and support, they will be able to flourish.

My experience volunteering has helped me to to develop both professionally and personally, while allowing me to gain more cultural understanding than I ever thought were possible. Each year during our trip, we had the opportunity of going door-to-door to advertise for our camp and interact with the members of the community. This experience challenged my communication skills by allowing me to interact with individuals who have drastically different backgrounds than I do. Many of them had significantly different, religious, cultural, socioeconomic, and educational experiences. Talking with them challenged me to change my ways of thinking and communicating in order to incorporate others' unique perspectives into my own. These interactions that have stemmed from my volunteer work will allow me to become a more knowledgeable and understanding physical therapist. Not all of my patients will come from the same backgrounds, but my interpersonal and communication skills will equip me to provide individually tailored care unique to them.

Physical therapy encompasses an intricate combination of scientific facts and a deep care for the individual; it is impossible to separate the two. My six years of volunteering on the Fort Barthold Indian Reservation fueled my passion for service and transformed my way of thinking. Patients deserve physical therapists who recognize the unique differences of each individual and who are able to patiently and compassionately provide care. I want to be a physical

therapist who incorporates my strengths and qualities into finding individualized solutions for my patients. Physical therapy, just like my trips to Fort Barthold, has a profound impact on the lives of many, and I look forward to dedicating myself to rehabilitation in every way possible.

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