

Alternative Spring Break 2009

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For the past two years, I have participated in Alternative Spring Break, which provides high school students with the opportunity to do community service/relief work throughout the United States. The trip is sponsored by the United Way of Seneca County and the Surge After School Program, and is coordinated through National Relief Network, an organization that specializes in relief operations to different regions of the United States.

The first time I went, I thought it would be a great experience to meet new people and help those in need. I was not expecting the trip to be as rewarding as it was. But now I feel a deep sense of accomplishment. In March, we found out our group of 36 high school students would be traveling to Eustis, Florida. This region was heavily damaged by tropical storm Fay.

After our 24-hour drive on the National Relief Network bus, we reached Florida only to have our work delayed by two tornado warnings. After a day, we were finally sent out to work.

Our first worksite was at an elderly woman's house that had been badly damaged. We picked up debris in her yard, sanded her ceiling and repainted her kitchen. When we left, we knew the house was in much better shape. The next morning we set out for a new work site. We were split up into two groups and each traveled to a different house to do numerous tasks.

The house I went to had a lot of work to be done. As soon as we arrived, however, we were greeted with some scary warnings. We had to watch out for things such as fire ants, scorpions, ticks, snakes, bears, and big bees that bite. Despite all of that, we still managed to get many things done, such as taking off the old siding on the house, and replacing it with new, painting the back porch, painting the shed and garage, and rebuilding the owners greenhouse. The owner grew plants as a way of living, so this project was very important.

The next day we came back and painted the new siding. We also cut down trees and cleared away the woods surrounding the house.

At the end of each day we were exhausted, yet our spirits were high. Unlike tests and homework assignments, we could directly see the results of our efforts. The owners valued all our efforts and even asked us to sign our names on their shed that we had just painted.

From this experience I have learned that even the smallest of things, done in a caring manner, can have a large impact in a struggling community.