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ST Vincent's Youth Awards Essay
2/21/2025

This past October, I went on Mission Brownsville with my school to travel to Texas and work with the Guadalupe Middle School and the wider city as a whole. I quickly realized that Brownsville was suffering greatly under the pressures of poverty, immigration, and lack of quality education. I began my service at the Settlement House, which serves anybody suffering from any kind of homelessness or poverty. While there, I helped package food at their food bank and cleaned their facilities. Afterward, I was able to share a meal with those in need. At lunch, I met Fred. He used to be an over-the-road truck driver making a six-figure salary, until he lost vision in his left eye. That injury cost him his livelihood, and left him in need. Fred did not fit into any kind of stereotype or preconceived notions I had about the poor, and challenged my internal narrative. I later served at the McAllen respite center. They offer meals, temporary housing, and legal advice. I served in their kitchens and also played with many of the children who were there. The respite center, just like the settlement house, defied many of my expectations. Many of the migrants at the respite center already had links to America. I also met a family who were from China and who spoke English. At the Guadalupe Middle School, I met many students there who came from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, as I walked through the school, I noticed that their college acceptances were extremely impressive. I felt proud that, even though I was just repainting their basketball court, I might have had a small part to play in helping their school. Originally, I chose to attend Mission Brownsville out of a desire to help out a Christian Brothers school. After I came home, however, the biggest impact was how much the disadvantaged were humanized to me. Stereotypes I had about the poor, or migrants, were totally destroyed, and made me a much more empathetic person. I realize now that, in a way, they served me more than I served them. A major part of the mission of St. Vincent's hospital and of the Sisters of Charity is a focus on human dignity. The service that I did in Brownsville was laser focused on treating the disadvantaged with as much dignity and respect as possible. I am now working on an advocacy project in my school aimed at improving awareness and interest in Mission Brownsville, so that more students might participate and have the same experience that I did.