

Sarah Kung
Scarsdale High School

This year, I dedicated over 100+ hours to community service across healthcare and nonprofit settings. Through this experience, I started to see service not as something abstract, but as something practiced quietly and consistently through presence, listening, and action.

At the hospital where I volunteered weekly, my role often seemed simple: visiting patients, asking what they needed and helping however I could. Yet those small moments carried weight. I recall one patient crying when telling me how much he missed his family in Italy while another told me to write in a journal every day, insisting that life passes too quickly to forget how it felt. In hearing these things, I had to realize that my service is often less about what I give and more about what I am entrusted to carry, showing me that service is not always about fixing problems, but also about creating space for honesty, grief, and moments of human connection. Whether I was delivering water or simply listening, I learned how attentiveness can restore dignity and comfort in moments of vulnerability.

In addition, I volunteered at a nonprofit focused on substance abuse prevention. There, I witnessed the power of compassion in rebuilding trust and hope. Through administrative support, outreach, and community engagement, I helped create an environment where individuals felt respected rather than judged. One moment that stayed with me was assisting in the distribution of safe administration tools. Many individuals approached hesitantly, carrying visible fear and uncertainty, but by meeting each person with respect and calm reassurance, I watched their trust begin to form. Although it was difficult to set aside personal opinions about addiction, I learned that compassion must come first. Recovery cannot happen in a single day, but safety can. In that moment, my role was not to judge or solve, but to ensure people felt supported and knew they had a place to return to when they needed help. That sense of trust, even briefly established, reinforced my belief that empathy, especially toward those often stigmatized, can be transformative.

Both experiences taught me that impact is not always loud or immediate; it shows up when a patient feels seen, when a client feels safe enough to ask for help, or when someone leaves an interaction feeling less alone than when they entered it. These moments affirmed my commitment to service rooted in compassion and consistency.

Community service has shaped the way I move through the world. I now understand that committing to service isn't just volunteer hours or checking boxes, but about choosing to change your everyday; a change where you choose to help the old lady across the street, a change where you choose to compliment someone, and a change to look for ways to give back rather than waiting to be asked.