

Nikki Katz
Education Foundation

May 2010

I nominate Nikki Katz for the education foundation scholarship for her work with the Blind Center in Vinh Linh, Nikki's work on behalf of this blind center is a shining example of what a teen can do, not only in Deerfield but quite literally across the planet. I am proud to be her teacher and feel she's a deserving candidate for recognition.

Sincerely,
David Komie, 8th Social Studies—Shepard

The following was written by Nikki to address the application's questions:

Since I was a little girl, I have always felt the need to give and to help others. My friends and I would have Lemonade stands, and shovel peoples driveways, in order to raise money for different causes. For Hurricane Katrina, and the Tsunami in Thailand, my friends and I raised about \$200 for each cause.

As my Bat Mitzvah was approaching, my mom and I had a meeting with the Rabbi about my Mitzvah Project. Tikkun Olam is the Jewish meaning for repairing the world. For B'nai Mitzvah children, it is recommended to take part in action in trying to make the world a better place. I wanted to help the less fortunate and give back in some way. As a result of my father's medical mission to Vietnam, and through many family discussions, I chose to raise money for the Vinh Linh blind center, in Vietnam. I thought this would be a great opportunity to really make an impact on the blind, less fortunate people of a Third World country.

Just the year before, my family and I had the opportunity to travel throughout parts of Asia. My dad was invited to speak in India about ophthalmology. We then travelled through India, and also to Nepal, and Thailand. I saw many people, both young and old, who were less fortunate than the majority of people in my community. While we were there, I saw poverty and homelessness, and many happy people with very small homes or no homes at all. There were people all over the streets begging, and starving children everywhere I looked, as well as people with all sorts of deformities.

This made me realize how fortunate I am, and how much I want to help these families in some way. We live in a community where we all seem to want more and more "things," though we have more than enough to survive and many of us don't appreciate what we already have. Over in parts of Asia, the people have almost nothing, yet seem to be very happy and content. I noticed this by seeing their smiling faces every day. It was amazing to me how appreciative the kids were when I handed them just a small bottle of juice or something to eat. Seeing the smiles on their faces showed that I made a difference and this made me feel so good.

Later that year, my dad went on a medical mission in Vietnam. While he was there, my dad taught a course to the doctors and examined patients in blind centers throughout the country. He treated their eye diseases, but unfortunately, for many of them, it was too late to fix. Some of the eye problems were from the war. My parents told me how interesting it was that everyone was so kind to them, even though they were Americans and what had happened in the war.

In Vietnam, they wanted to raise money to build a new blind center to house the blind and teach them skills to provide for themselves. The whole building was only going to cost about \$60,000, about the price of one luxury car in the US. This blind center will provide a safe work place, vocational training and an eye care clinic. Here, the blind people will be trained to make brooms, toothpicks, incense and tea and are also trained as masseuses.

Even though I didn't go on that trip, I can relate to my parents experiences, and I really wanted to help them out. This summer, we are planning to go to Vietnam, where the dedication of the building will take place.

I raised over \$2,000 for this foundation, GCSF (Global Community Service Foundation). I worked at the farmer's market, went door to door down my street, and I put a donation jar at the Vietnamese nail salon. I also asked all of the guests who attended my Bat Mitzvah to give only a dollar, because a little bit can go a long way.

The money that has been raised will house the blind, and also teach them how to be more self sufficient in their daily lives. At the Vinh Linh Blind Center, the poor, blind Vietnamese people will receive support and even some medical services. Personally, knowing that my actions are being appreciated and especially that others will benefit from the money raised, helps me understand what giving really means.

Upon returning from our trip to Asia, my family found it very difficult to spend money on items other than basic necessities. Money doesn't buy happiness.

This summer, we are planning to go to Vietnam, where the dedication of the building will take place. I am very excited to be a part of this blind center, and knowing that my actions made a difference makes me feel really proud. I hope to receive this scholarship, so I can continue to help others.

Whether or not I receive this scholarship, I know that serving others in need is a quality that I can never forget, in fact quite the contrary; the more I give, the more I will gain. the many projects and fundraising activities I have initiated have helped me believe that I will choose to work in a service profession as an adult.