

## Why I do Community Service

By David Vieux

The first St. Andrew's chapel service I attended my freshman year, Reverend Hutchinson asked towards the closing that Jesus might set our hearts on fire, which is something usually not witnessed outside Indiana Jones movies. The image of spontaneous cardiac combustion seemed somewhat bizarre to me, although I am still interested in what that would look like to this day. Mainly, I could not understand what that concept meant, visually or otherwise.

In fact, it might be pretentious to assume that I can understand that concept now. But that is beside the point. I could not understand this idea, because all my life, I had been surrounded, taken care of, and essentially sheltered, to varying degrees. So I never really witnessed injustice, nor did I often feel compelled to look out for anyone but myself or my family and friends, all of whom live blessed lives.

I was a stranger to misery, and I was always in such a climate that I was never defenseless or left on my own. Never lacking in anything, material or otherwise, pushes one towards coldness of heart, and emotional distance. In my experience, an alienation from personal suffering encourages a lack of compassion.

In 2005, an earthquake devastated most of the Northern Pakistan region, and Kashmir in particular. Although I probably heard of this tragedy when it happened, I could not remember it. I learned of its occurrence and magnitude this past March, when a humanitarian project struck my interest. This summer, I traveled to Kashmir for three weeks as a part of this project, which is attempting to rebuild some of the ten thousand schools destroyed in 2005. The project is to hike through the Kashmir region, the completion of these hikes bringing donations from large enterprises and private parties that fund the rebuilding effort.

First of all, I encourage you to find a more remote place than the Kashmir Mountains to escape your comfort zone. That was a radical change from French pastries in the morning and classy street-side cafes. But more importantly, the misery I witnessed there took me aback and struck me deeply. The location was truly magnificent, of course. However, we spent most of our free time administering first aid to villagers who would walk two to three hours just to see us. They came with all sorts of ailments, infections and illnesses.

A child, no more than twelve years old, came with a gash possibly a foot long in his leg from slipping off the side of a cliff while tending the local goats. He had to receive twenty-two stitches without anesthesia. Not once did he complain. Nor would he have had anyone to complain to. He was so independent and brave and self-sufficient at such an early age that the misery caused by the earthquake became clear to me. This child, Essan, had to learn to survive and fend for himself. He had to deal with wounds by himself that Westerners would rush to the hospital to have stitched and disinfected, and

he had to deal with those with no guarantee of success, just the oppressive pressure of having to survive. The Kashmir region is full of over a million children in his situation. Children without schools, homes, hospitals, or anyone to care for them.

Since then, I have shamelessly pitched the project to any European that I've seen. I've written an article soon to be published in a major French newspaper documenting the expedition. I've helped in organizing fundraisers in French schools. I've tried to do all that I could to help, yet I don't feel that I should be satisfied with stopping now.

In Kashmir, I found what sets my heart on fire with passion. I feel compassion for these children, and I feel a moral obligation to help them. My advice to you is to engage in community service. Set your heart on fire by finding an issue that means something to you and devoting yourself to it entirely. If you are not interested in community service, I'd suggest participating in it anyway, because it makes you a warmer person, more sensible to the pains of others, more compassionate. If nothing else, it feels pretty neat to have your heart set on fire.