



Elizabeth Fitzgerald and Dudley, a Service Dog.

## Whispers of Thank You

I think that when people choose to spend their time volunteering it is a clear indicator that they have a good world view, because they are taking time out of their life to help others. It was nice to be able to meet other people that share my viewpoints, and my enjoyment of volunteering.

On our first visit, Jodie took the other volunteers and me to the assisted living area of Sunrise. We spent about an hour visiting residents with service animals. The one thing I will never forget is how almost every resident we visited seemed to relax when the therapy dogs and mini-horses came around towards them. They visibly loosened up and smiled when Dudley snuggled his face into their lap, or when Buffet slipped his head under their hand to pet.

It may sound cheesy—but seeing the effect that the therapy animals had on these people really touched my heart. It just shows how simple it is to give back to those around you, and while it only was an hour of my time, this small action made a big difference in the lives of these residents.

On another visit, I went into the hospital room of a woman who had so many pipes and other equipment surrounding her that I could only imagine how suffocated she felt. When I approached her, I couldn't help noticing how sad and lonely she looked. It reminded me how lucky I am to have my health and my youth with me now, and it helped me make up my mind even more to use those gifts to help those less fortunate. After Dudley, a service dog, had spent a little time with this woman, I heard her whisper "thank you".

Those two words are something I will carry with me for the rest of my life. I think that sometimes teenagers are blinded by how normal it is to have our health, money, youth. Volunteering has reminded me of the privileges we possess, and it's opened my eyes to how much a small action can impact someone. I am incredibly grateful to have opportunities like this available to me as a teenager, and I hope that others in Barrington can realize that making a difference in the lives of others is easier than they think. 

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*Elizabeth Fitzgerald is a freshman at Barrington High School. She enjoys volunteering and believes it's important to give back to her community and the rest of the world. She also enjoys dancing, singing, and spending time with her family and friends.*

**V**OLUNTEERING HAS ALWAYS BEEN a prominent part of my life. There is absolutely nothing like the feeling you get while helping those less fortunate than yourself. It fills me up with a joy that I really can't describe. I am a firm believer that every action creates ripples, and it's your own responsibility to make sure that they are positive.

I've always had a soft spot for animals. So, when I found out about SOUL Buddies—a club at the high school run by the SOUL Harbour Ranch Animal

Therapy Program that gives students the opportunity to become service animal handlers—I was eager to join.

For the first couple of meetings, Jodie Diegel, the founder and president of both SOUL Harbour Ranch and SOUL Buddies, taught me and a couple of other students the proper techniques and commands to use when guiding and handling service dogs. I got to know a few of the other students that were volunteering alongside me, and it became clear that they were just as dedicated to the cause as I was.