

Youth and Students for Peace Bay Area's Alternative Spring Break Service Event

Naokimi Ushiroda
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On Saturday, April 20, 24 volunteers gathered to help with a beautification project along Edes Avenue in Oakland, CA. Volunteers representing eight different organizations came to participate, with the majority of the youth coming from the Bay Area Family Church High School Youth Ministry.

The project was primarily organized by Cynthia Arrington of Sobrante Park Resident Action Council. G. Soulman, the Youth and Students for Peace (YSP) coordinator for the Bay Area Family Church, collaborated with Cynthia to create an opportunity for their local youth group as an alternative spring break activity.



"The highlight of the project today was all the volunteers who came to help," Cynthia said. "None of the other residents came out to help today, so I'm very grateful for the youth group to come support us."

Volunteers arrived at 9:00 a.m., where tools and materials were provided by the city of Oakland. They began by picking up garbage and sweeping up glass in an empty lot that was used as an illegal dumping site. After they cleaned the lot, Gabriel had the opportunity to share YSP's perspective of peace through service with the entire group during the welcoming segment.

Next, the volunteers put on gloves and vests and continued to pick up garbage along both sides of Edes Avenue for over a quarter of a mile. Once they were done, the volunteers removed overgrown weeds along the sidewalk to give flowers and plants room to grow and flourish.

The service project concluded in the early afternoon, after which the Bay Area Family Church High School Youth Ministry was shuttled to a nearby park for lunch and sports.



Reflections:

"I first found out about the service project from G. Soulman, the YSP leader in our region. When I showed up at 8:50 a.m., nobody was at the intersection we were supposed to meet, so I waited a couple minutes. Once it turned 9:00 a.m., I was amazed how one by one people started showing up. We started by sweeping the parking lot with street brooms, ridding them of broken glass. When the parking lot regained its original purpose of being a parking lot, I felt the atmosphere change from a low life energy to a giving and sacrificial energy.

We then transitioned to picking up garbage on the street of Edes Ave. We each received a garbage bag, trash picker and reflective vest and formed into groups. My group started from the far end of the street, and as we drove down we saw just how much trash there was. But after filling up the first bag, I was amazed that the work was relatively easy. After the service project was over, we were about to leave but the people who hosted the service project gave us fruits, bagels and granola bars. I was able to feel the love and that YSP made an impact on them. Thank you to all the leaders and participants who came and made this possible!" -- J. Buerger, Junior

"My experience doing the trash pickup was great. Although it was early in the morning on my spring break, I woke up and decided to pick up trash. Why? At first I decided to do it because I had nothing better to do that day, but when I got there and saw all the trash everywhere, I became determined to clean it up. Many people may ask why I would do that even though it's not my community or it wouldn't benefit me, but the satisfaction that I received and the feeling that I might have inspired someone to do the same or even seeing that even someone like me can make a difference in a community really inspired me. And I met many new people there, and seeing everyone work as a team and do something for the greater good, really made it feel like a family rather than a community. And when people drove by and thanked us for the service it really made me happy and inspired me to do more and more for the sake of others instead of for myself. I'm very grateful to my church community for making these opportunities for us!! And I really liked how they didn't just give us cleaning tools, said "clean" and just sent us home but after we cleaned, they brought us to the park, gave us lunch and we played volleyball!! So it was hard work then fun. All in all, it was a great experience and I enjoyed it very much!! I hope more opportunities like this will come up!! Thank you!!!" -- A. Ishibashi, Freshman