

Andrew Fried

Jeff, Mrs. Brown, and Boo

Jeffrey is what most of the kids in my high school would call “retarded”. I am fortunate enough to have him call me his best friend. I was able to meet Jeff through an organization in my high school called Best Buddies, a club that focuses on creating one-on-one relationships between students with intellectual disabilities and other students in their school. Without this organization of thirty or so students, the special education students in my high school would walk through the hallways with their heads down and eat lunch crowded together at the same table. Because they have been able to create these relationships with other students, they have friends all over the school, friends that really know them, and it makes all the difference in the world to them.

Every Tuesday after school since eighth-grade I have donned my blue collared shirt, exchanged my sandals for shoes, secured my nametag, and made my way over to Paoli Memorial Hospital. Mrs. Brown is one of the many patients I have taken from test to test during my volunteer shifts at the hospital. I specifically remember this patient because of a conversation we had in the elevator of the hospital. She asked me about myself, and after finding out that I was not interested in medicine and that my school did not require me to volunteer, she was utterly shocked and told me how much she appreciated me being there. It made every Tuesday well worth it.

All these people whose lives I have somehow touched have in return been able to leave a lasting affect on me, but none more so than Boo. Over my spring break a couple of weeks ago I headed down to New Orleans with a small group of people to help out with the victims of Katrina. Many people had trouble believing that a group of fifteen people could do anything for the thousands of people affected by the flood. My group was sent to the Lower Ninth Ward and given the assignment of helping a man to wire his house. I had no idea how personal of an experience this was going to be until I walked up the cement steps to what was left of Boo’s house. He invited us right in, extremely grateful for the helping hand we were able to lend. In two days we wired his entire house, a feat that he told us would have taken him two weeks by himself. The best part about this was that because of the time we saved him, he was able to go out and do some work and bring in some money for his family.

Jeff has lit up so many rooms with his smile because of the life a couple of students at my school were able to give him. Mrs. Brown was able to get to her tests because of a small group of kids sitting in the volunteer office, just waiting for the phone to ring so they can get up and make a difference. Boo was able to make great progress in the restoration of his home because of the physical help we provided and the opportunity we gave him to support himself. These people’s lives were truly changed by a small group of concerned citizens; indeed, it is the only thing that *will* ever change the world.