

## **2020 St. Vincent's Youth Award Winner**

### **Kathryn Eisenhower Byram Hills High School**

#### **Finding My Purpose**

Where I'm from, spending part of your summer on a service trip is considered out of the ordinary. But to me, it's okay to be different from the rest of the group. While most are away at sleep away camp, I get to go to a new place every summer and give back to those in need. Whether it's traveling domestic to Pennsylvania or flying overseas to the Dominican Republic, I always learn something new.

Since the summer of sixth grade, I have been going on mission trips and doing a different project every year. My very first trip was to South Dakota where I helped to rebuild a church. We worked at the church for a week and got to know the people who lived there. But this was just the starting point. Two summers later when I started high school, I went to the Dominican Republic. I remember being extremely nervous because it was my first time going outside of the country. But all my angst turned into excitement as soon as I saw our work project. Our job was to dig trenches for the foundation of a soon to be children's center.

Every day that week I was digging in the trenches or moving wheelbarrows full of dirt to the other side of the work site. It was an amazing experience because I had never really seen or felt the difference that I was making until then. I could see the way the work site changed throughout the week and I felt a purpose behind the work. Since that trip I have tried my best to continue to find the purpose behind my work and I found that purpose in Puerto Rico.

In 2017 Puerto Rico was hit hard by two different hurricanes that left their land in shambles. One year later, I was able to help those affected by the storms. On my very first day of being there I met the people that would change my life forever. I was greeted with enormous heart filled hugs and when I say heart filled I mean these people could knock you down with the love they put behind a hug. While I went there to help them and to rebuild their homes destroyed in the storm, they helped me more than imaginable. They showed me what it's like to be grateful and have love no matter what. These people had their homes destroyed by the storm but they always had smiles on their faces and were ready to get down and dirty in the work process with us. Our group was in charge of redoing the second floor of the local church. At least 10 men from the community took off work for the week to help us rebuild. We worked with them all day long enjoying each other's company and learning about one another. However, while we were working upstairs the women of the community were in the parking lot cooking us lunch every single day. They weren't asked to and they were paid. They did it because they wanted to repay us for the work we did for them. When the end of the week came I didn't want to say goodbye, but I knew I wasn't finished there.

So again this past summer, I went back. I got to see old friends and make new ones. I got to see the finished project of the church's second story and damn did it feel good. This time around I worked in the homes of the community and got to see what home

was like for them. While they didn't have the biggest house or the nicest kitchen, they had the purest love. These trips have taught me more than I know. I've learned skills I will need in life to be a nurse. But because of them, I found me.