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Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. posed this question to society in his quest for social justice and equality for all. He sought to forge common ground on which people from all walks of life could join together to address important community issues. Acknowledging dignity and respect, strengthening communities, alleviating poverty – these goals are what Dr. King envisioned for people of all races, ages, and backgrounds to achieve by working together. The best way to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the Lynchburg community is by volunteering through a variety of services which focus on doing something on the behalf of others.

I have found that volunteering in the community gives me a chance to interact with people I might not normally encounter. For instance, I have volunteered for the past several years in preparing and serving dinner for the annual Kids’ Haven holiday dinner at St. John’s Episcopal Church. Kids’ Haven is a grief support center for children ages three to eighteen years old and their families. Lynchburg can boast that this program is the only one of its kind in the central Virginia region. These children come from different racial and economic backgrounds but one thing that they share is the loss of someone significant in their lives. Through support circles they help each other to cope with their grief and loss. Sharing a meal with these children was a way to reach out to them and let them know that people in the community are there to help

and care for them in their time of need. The children really appreciated someone from their age category being there to interact with them.

Serving Thanksgiving dinner at the Daily Bread to folks who do not have anywhere else to go is one of the most rewarding experiences. The people who volunteer to cook and serve those less fortunate are true community heroes. There is a genuine familial atmosphere in the room with everyone enjoying each other's company while feasting on their Thanksgiving meals. A room full of strangers quickly forms strong bonds of fellowship around the communal dinner table. The volunteers benefit as much as the recipients in that everyone feels a strong sense of a caring Lynchburg community. The Daily Bread does not only serve Thanksgiving meals, but it also serves meals year round. People in the community donate nonperishable food items as well as monetary funds to help sustain the program. The Daily Bread brings people together from all over the greater Lynchburg area.

The Boys and Girls Club of Lynchburg works with young people of all backgrounds so that they can become responsible citizens and leaders. The club provides a safe environment for children to play sports, do homework, receive tutoring, and develop character and leadership skills. People in the community serve as mentors for the children and help them realize their full potential and achieve their goals. The club also has drug and gang prevention programs that serve the youth population. These programs will help reduce the amount of violence and crime throughout the city. Without volunteers and mentors from the community, the Boys and Girls Club could not fulfill its mission to improve the lives of children. Families depend on the services the club provides which ultimately benefits and strengthens the community. Those who volunteer at the club realize that our greatest resource is our children. They believe in the youth of our city and invest their time and energy into nurturing them to become successful young

adults. Hopefully children who go through the program will come back one day as adults and mentor the next generation.

As we move forward and reflect on the dream Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had for our country, Lynchburg can feel proud of the strides it has made over the past fifty years on improving human relations. We continue to address the needs of others in our community and have worked together to make Lynchburg a more inclusive and thriving city. When people get involved and volunteer their time they get a chance to work with all types of people to reach a common goal. Working together and getting to know one another gives us a stronger sense of community. People of all races and backgrounds have come together to do something on behalf of others and gain respect and dignity for all human beings. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would be grateful that the people of Lynchburg have strived to unite and solve the social problems that face our city.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: Sustaining the Dream

“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’” It was August 28, 1963 when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in front of thousands of people, addressing the entire nation with his “I Have a Dream” speech. Alluding to the principles of equality highlighted in the Declaration of Independence, Dr. King called for the abolishment of racial segregation and discrimination that had contaminated America for over two hundred years. Spoken with eloquent grace, clarity, and sound logic, King’s speech acted as the impetus of the movement that ultimately led to racial equality throughout the United States. It succeeded tremendously, as anti-discrimination laws were passed the following year, 1964. Since then, our nation has gradually become integrated. Racial prejudice, however, is still fairly prevalent, and it will take time for it to completely cease. As American citizens, it is the responsibility of this generation of young adults to live out Dr. King’s vision; it is incumbent upon us to treat everyone with respect and kindness, educate others on the negative effects on racism, and reach out to the community to help ensure that discrimination ends.

Too often, people tend to treat members of a different race differently than those of their own race. In my school, E.C. Glass High School, this constantly happens. Oftentimes, we teenagers have a tendency to stereotype others, especially minority races. They are often labeled as impoverished, unintelligent, lazy, and/or inferior. Conversely, whites are often ignored and stereotyped by minorities in response. Although these trends

are generally less prevalent, they are still major social issues in our country. In order for America to truly live up to Dr. King's expectations, all people, and young adults in particular, need to treat everyone else as equals with the same amount of courtesy and consideration. The well-known maxim "treat everyone as you would like to be treated" speaks volumes about this concept. By simply going out of our way to try to make friends with someone completely different, we can make ourselves more accepting people. Making an effort to include those of contrasting backgrounds and exhibit compassion toward them can help us break strong racial barriers and ease tensions. As Dr. King firmly believed, the key is to regard a person on the basis of his or her character and strengths rather than his or her color. If we, as a society, were to all exhibit these traits and extend ourselves to people of all ethnicities, segregation and prejudice would cease to exist.

Although education about racial discrimination has come into effect across the country, it needs to be taken even further in order to ensure that Dr. King's vision stays alive. The instillation of values into children by schools and parents is only the beginning; it is up to young adults to pass on these anti-prejudice virtues. Discussing the issue of racism with peers, classmates, and even adults is essential; it assists in spreading positive, anti-discriminatory messages that can truly create a difference. If one knows someone who is a victim of discrimination or who is racist, he or she should take the time to speak to that person. People appreciate assertiveness in this regard and will often act in response to it. Empathy and attentiveness on just one person's part can cause many others to stop their prejudicial behavior. If the affects of just one person are so tremendous, then imagine if everyone contributed to spreading the message of anti-racism.

Furthermore, appealing to the community is another obligation of young adults in maintaining Dr. King's dream. Going beyond educating others and actively getting involved in the fight against discrimination is what led to its ultimate end back in the 1960s, so it should continue to play a role. Whether it's a club in school or a community organization, there are numerous ways in which young people can spread the message against prejudice. Speaking to school classes, handing out brochures, talking to groups at church, simply hanging posters around the school—all are examples of ways young adults can make people in the community more aware of the issues. Whether we believe it or not, people truly listen when we make this kind of effort.

The nation that Dr. King envisioned has, for the most part, come to life. There is still much work to do, but our country has gradually become a beacon of acceptance and tolerance in this world. Conditions will only improve, especially if young people live out King's dream by accepting all others, regardless of race.

"I have a dream..." are some of the most famous words ever spoken. Not only are they now so famous, but at the time they were incredibly powerful. The words he spoke were not just words; it was a vision, the future. And it not only was it the future, it was a beacon of hope. Thousands of people with that same hope gathered in Washington D.C. in the dead of summer in 1963 to support a great man with an even greater dream. This dream was one that not many people dared to have, but one certainly worth having. His dream was "...that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal." He wanted to see people treat each other with respect, like human beings with feelings and not like wild animals. He wanted the equality of not only blacks and whites but of all men, women and children. He wanted our twisted world to reevaluate, our way of thinking to cease, and to never go back to the depths of cruelty that we as humans are so capable of reaching.

That dream was a very achievable one, although it may not have seemed like it at the time. Over the years more schools would begin integration, blacks were getting hired more often, and children learned that they could be friends with children that may look different than them. Now, forty nine years later, the President of these United States is of African descent, something that the population of 1963 could only imagine. As a country we have overcome many hard times, and to overcome one of the cruelest times in our nation with such progress is astonishing, and something to be more than proud of. However, no matter how far we have come, there is always room to improve.

As a country there are still problems within our cities, towns, and schools involving overall human and race relations. On a smaller scale, there are even still issues involving race in Lynchburg, VA. Even 50 years after integrating Lynchburg City Schools there is an obvious amount of segregation within the school. There is so much diversity that some kids aren't sure what to make of it. Although some believe that this can be cured within the schools locally, and some of it can be, the majority of change must come from the families. The home is where morals and ethics should be established, along with teaching of manners and social skills. And considering how out of date segregation and racism is supposed to be, it should be taught within the home to be respectful and accepting of those who may look, act, or believe differently than you.

Although it should be starting within the home, as the Lynchburg community there could be even small improvements. Something as simple as more "Get Downtown!" events, more community activities and possibly more workshops for leaders within the school for adults and children. As for the programs already in place to help reduce the problem, they could easily be expanded on. It is a matter of learning as much as possible about the community, its past, what works and what doesn't, and how to get young people and families involved in all of the changes that should be made. As for within the schools, something as simple as a field trip to enlighten the children on the history of Lynchburg's racial past could be helpful. Administration could make it a point to allow the recognition of all religious and racial or ethnic groups. And there

could be the establishment of more in-school workshops so that relationships could physically be formed, as opposed to just learning how to form them.

Racism, in all of its heinous forms, can bring a community down. The key to a smooth running community is to be accepting of all points of views, walks of life, race, ethnicity, religion and preference. Although Lynchburg has come a tremendous way throughout the years, there is so much more than can be done, not only as a city, but within the home, and the schools. The change has to start somewhere, so why not here. Starting small may lead to a huge positive response, which could in turn spread to surrounding areas. The nation needs help, but we have got to start small.