

## The Thumbs Up Guys Scholarship Essay

The muffled sounds of members of the National Guard and hurricane victims fill my ears. Hundreds of people filled the room; some looking to help, others looking for help. A room that was once filled with kids happily playing basketball, our community center, was now paralleling that of a soup kitchen. The response of my community was overwhelming. People flocked to my local community center in hundreds, eager to help. A simple flyer posted by my aunt reached further than I could have ever anticipated. When I told her that I wanted to spread the word I did not expect the outpouring of support.

Myrtle Beach had just been stricken by a hurricane, one harder than had been seen in recent years. My family had been blessed with no damage to our home and we were all safe. Other families were not as fortunate. I saw on the news that families had been left without power, and in extreme cases left without a home. I also saw how gracious the National Guard members were, risking their safety and forfeiting their comfort for others. I knew I needed to take action. With these stressors I knew that they would not have the time or energy to prepare a meal for themselves.

When I first began to plan what I would do to support those in need I only had intentions of providing food to a small portion of those affected. My family prepared a few extra portions of our dinner to bring to the soldiers. We found it deeply upsetting to know that those who were willing to sacrifice everything weren't even given a hot meal at the end of the day. We brought down the extra meals, weaved through a maze of large tactical vehicles that were now lining the parking lot that was normally littered with mom's minivans, and carefully avoided the sleeping soldiers on the floor. Seeing how everyone in the community center was living sparked a need to help.

It wasn't until I involved my community that I realized it could be so much more than a couple meals. Food poured in as fast as we could distribute it. Families came with cans of food, cooked dishes, and take-out from their favorite restaurants. All those who donated were from the area and had also just been affected by the storm. I found this idea of helping others despite also facing your own struggles inspiring. Business also happily donated food. These businesses had been facing financial hardships, as they weren't able to stay open during the storm, but they still managed to donate to the cause.

My cousin and I were hauling full cars of food from shelter to shelter based on what was needed. We saw the eyes of those in the shelters light up as we handed them food. It was much more than a meal for them, it was proof that they were still thought of. We continued this for a period of time to come, and continued to spread our love for the community.

I learned more than just how to make a home cooked meal or how to run a soup kitchen. I learned how to show someone how much they matter. I learned how much volunteering does really make a difference. I learned that helping others is beyond rewarding. I will continue to volunteer as often as possible, and go above and beyond to help those in need.