

Neighborhood House AmeriCorps Stories of Service Fall 2014

Jimmy Huynh Burndale Youth Tutoring and Resource Center

I serve in the Burndale community in Auburn, Washington, South King County providing after school homework assistance and project based learning to low-income K-12 students living in public housing. Families in the Burndale community come from diverse immigrant and refugee backgrounds, from Eastern Europe to West Africa to the Marshall Islands.

When I first started my service year at Burndale, I had not met the Ukrainian boys. I was told that their attendance and participation from previous years was barely noticeable. Having learned that, it made me wonder as to how I would build my relationships with them if ever they came in.

Lo and behold, within the week a couple of them came into program and full of energy they were. It is hard to connect with early year teenagers due to their mind racing a thousand times a minute because they have so much going on. At first, it was difficult for me to engage them in activities and have them take out their homework and start on it. Over time, as the small talks turned into conversations over common interests, the relationship between them and me grew without any effort. It was naturally there and I could tell that the Ukrainian boys connected with me as well. I enjoy the presence and dynamics that they bring to the center. They have been coming into the center on a consistent basis now and they take out their homework whenever they needed help, after a healthy dose of computer time. I noticed that rather than telling them to do something which a lot of teenagers will resist, that it is better for them to come into it naturally, of their own accord.

Before I started my service year, I was told that it was all about relationship building with the youth and once I had established a meaningful relationship, then everything will fall into place. I didn't realize how straight-forward that advice was until now.

