

A Day of Service and Awareness

I was lucky enough to spend the day with my Daughter Marissa Terrell on April 28th, 2017 at her school St. Mary of the Lakes School(SML) in Medford NJ, for their Annual Day of Service Event where all the students partake in the day. They have done many things in the past, such as cleaning up the grounds, updating flower beds, cleaning up parks, making sandwiches for the poor and much more. This year Marissa's teacher, Mrs. Hofmann came to me and asked if we could incorporate Marissa's Foundation, The Sturge-Weber Foundation(SWF) into the 2nd Grade Day of Service. With the help of The Foundation, Mrs. Hofmann and I came up with a plan. It was packed full of fun, service and awareness. When Mrs. Hofmann presented it to Mrs. Hoover she agreed it was a good project!



The Month of May is the Awareness month at SWF. The idea that the SWF came up with this year are Sunflowers with a little watering can. The meaning behind it was that the Sunflower will always face the sun no matter where it is located. It is an ideal flower as it promotes acceptance! When showing it to the children at St. Mary of the Lakes School they learned that God is the Light of the World and therefore The Sunflower will always be facing God. Just Perfect.

The 2nd Graders, including Marissa, began the day by planting The Sunflower Seeds in a little pot, adding ribbon and a Sunflower Card that they attached. Marissa and I told her story in both classes about Sturge-Weber Syndrome. We handed out a pamphlet with Marissa's picture on it. There were many questions which melted my heart and Marissa was very good at answering all of them and I helped where needed. She also showed her classmates her Sturge-Weber Family from past conferences.

We as a group then went to the Chapel to hear a story of Service from one of our priests Father Carlos, where he spoke about how he helps those that are less fortunate than ourselves in his home country of Columbia. A beautiful story of a 3-year-old boy named Henry who needed something as basic as clothing and another story about a woman who slept on sticks and a makeshift bed. They were humbling stories that made you realize at all ages what it really means to need help and how to be grateful.



Afterwards we went on a road trip to see our friends at the Medford Leas Home. The children and the residents got to play a game like Bingo called Jingle where you could see all the players young and old helping each other through the game. The children then presented the residents with the potted plants of sunflowers!

After some lunch and some play time, the children then went on to create cards for The Sturge-Weber Families that are new to the syndrome. With the help of Mrs. Hofmann and Mrs. Peterson, they made sunflower drawings and did finger painting trees to be used by the Foundation in the future.



The day concluded, with all the children coming outside and planting some sunflowers of their own in front of the chapel.

When I began this day with Marissa I thought we were the ones teaching about awareness and service. What happened was we did teach, but we were taught too and we all learned a great deal that day.



The next time we drove to school I was reminded how we were first accepted at St. Mary of the Lakes School as I looked at the location where the new Sunflower seeds are. Marissa would say, "Mom this is my new school." Now when we look at that same spot each day at drop off we will be reminded about that day of service and how two very different worlds have come together. Now it is time to watch all the seeds grow!