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Upon hearing the word “thoughtfulness” in the context of community, the most common images conjured in a person’s head would include giving alms to the poor, dedicating personal time to volunteer for those in need and engaging in activities that help better our environment. Although these activities are imperative to maintain a healthy community, we often overlook the little things, the small mountains in which people have to climb, in order to promote an idea they feel will help others. And these ideas, however small, are what truly defines a thoughtful community member. We can all contribute to our society through work directed by another person, and while this is an incredible act of kindness in itself, most of the time the motivation behind these pertain less to helping others, and more for benefiting themselves. According to the National Council for Voluntary Organizations, major motivating factors for people to volunteer include expanding their social horizons, establishing a clear route to future employment, and to help with their own mental and physical struggles. Clearly, we must explore the idea of true societal thoughtfulness beyond volunteer work, and how these revolutionary ideas benefit a community long term.

First, we must uncover the meaning of being a true thoughtful community member. Fabien Pfortmüller defines community in his article “What Does ‘Community’ Even Mean?” as a “group of people that care about each other and feel they belong together.” A person who is considered to be a part of a community must care about other community members, or else the sense of togetherness invoked by this type of society falls apart. So, in order to be a true thoughtful community member, you must be willing to care about everyone in your community, and have the motivation to assist them no matter how inconvenient it may be. Rather than just mindlessly enlisting in a volunteer job, a thoughtful community member recognizes what they

can do to assist those personally, and acts on that idea in hopes of bettering the lives of their own community members.

So, what can we do as thoughtful community members to help leave a meaningful legacy? As a busy high schooler, I still find myself making time to create a positive impact. I am in the process of establishing a mental health program in my school. This program would aim towards destigmatizing mental health in the classrooms, and establish an anonymous letter box for students to have the opportunity to talk to a fellow student about their struggles and not worry about negative backlash. We will have a dedicated adult to report to if an anonymous letter contains anything about wanting to hurt themselves or others, and a system to help identify those who are in need of further treatment. Although this organization hasn't taken hold in my school yet, I am currently discussing ways to get it started with people on the school board and the counselors in our counseling office. I hope that this organization will help create a more accepting and safer school community, and that this new program will help pull others out of dark places and get them the help they truly need. Now you don't have to come up with some elaborate organization like I did, but you can participate in other groups similar to this. We have students in our school who are part of the Yellow Ribbon Group, which is a suicide prevention panel. They go to schools around our district to help explain to kids how to get help if they are struggling with suicidal thoughts. We also have a Gay-Straight-Alliance group, who help those struggling with their sexuality to come to terms with who they are, and encourage creating friendships between gay and straight people alike. However, a true community member is not characterized by just high school support groups, but through their willingness to help others with simple tasks. Helping someone carry their groceries, walking the neighborhood dogs,

providing compliments to someone who is down or (however cliché it sounds) helping the elderly cross the road are all acts of simple kindness that help establish a meaningful impact.

We all want to live in a community full of thoughtful people. We all want to be friends with thoughtful people. We all want to *be* a thoughtful person. And we can do this, if we only work towards helping others, providing support, and talking to those in need. One small act of kindness will *always* go a long way.