

TYAF Outstanding Taiwanese American Youth Award Essay (2020)

My name is Josefine Liao and I am a sophomore at Thomas Wootton High School. My mother was born in Taiwan and my father is an ABT (American born Taiwanese). I visit Taiwan nearly every summer to visit my relatives, experience Taiwanese culture, and eat the amazing Taiwanese food.

Since I was one and a half years old, I have been attending and taking classes at the Washington DC Taiwanese school (WDCTS). Of course, this means that Taiwanese school has been a major part of my life. Not only do I learn the Mandarin language and Taiwanese culture, but I also get to experience volunteering at the school.

Starting from sixth grade, I began volunteering for Student Service Learning (SSL) hours, and I have volunteered for more than 400 hours so far. At first, I began volunteering for SSL hours because of the 75-hour graduation requirement. However, as I continue to volunteer, I found that I enjoy helping others and giving back to the community. One of the main events as well as my favorite event I volunteered for, every year, was the Dr. Liang Summer Camp.

While at the summer camp, I served as a counselor. I enjoyed assisting the young campers with various activities ranging from painting umbrellas, coloring cotton bags, tie-dying shirts, to constructing kaleidoscopes. A large part of the summer camp revolved around making a variety of foods and drinks that are traditional to Taiwan. This served to teach the kids about Taiwanese culture. Making Taiwanese food and eating it also happens to be my favorite activity! Such foods and drinks include tinn kue (甜粿), luo bo gao (蘿蔔糕), mantou (饅頭), dou jiang (豆漿), dou hua (豆花), and lun piann (潤餅). My main duties as a counselor were to clean up, wash dishes, and to make sure the children were staying safe while cooking. From this unique experience, I learned how to be patient with and handle young children.

Along with volunteering at the summer camp, I also volunteered at Taiwan Fun and Potomac Day, as well as Winter Solstice and Mother's Day events at the school. During these events, I helped promote Taiwanese culture by running fun activities such as ring toss and Taiwan trivia. I also helped serve food and even performed Mandarin songs and dances! One of the most memorable events that I participated in was the dragon boat racing competition. During this event, I helped the Taiwanese School youth team win the bronze, silver, and gold medals.

On a different note, almost every summer my family and I visit Taiwan to see our relatives and experience Taiwanese culture for about a month. During this time, we visit famous landmarks such as Taipei 101 and the National Palace Museum. One notable experience in Taiwan was when my family and other families from WDCTS got together and went to visit the Presidential Office Building. The tour guide there showed us the history of the building along with many historical objects and pictures. Afterward, we met the President of Taiwan, Tsai Ing-Wen! We even shook hands with her and took pictures together.

Recently, because of the current coronavirus pandemic, I had limited ways to help my community. So, in order to encourage the frontline healthcare workers that have it especially rough during this pandemic, I made posters with many thankful quotes from WDCTS students. These posters were delivered to the hospitals to encourage the hospital workers during these hard times.

Volunteering in the Taiwanese communities is extremely fulfilling and provides me a connection with my culture. I am proud to be Taiwanese and will continue to serve the Taiwanese community.

