



How “Learn To Be” Is Helping Eliminate Educational Inequality

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The issue of educational inequality is one that has had politicians, teachers and administrators tongue tied. While everyone has an opinion on how exactly to fix the problem, most people sit on their couch and do absolutely nothing. That is exactly at the heart of the problem. The amount of people that think education inequality needs to be stopped right away would surprise you, considering only a handful of people actually work towards stopping it. The reason is more or less due to the indifference towards the issues affecting the poor. In the developed world, only a handful of people identify as extremely poor, which means that the majority of the population consists of the middle and upper class. While educational inequality affects some of the lower middle-class population along with the poor, most of the developed world can afford to live in a good neighborhood with a well funded school. Nonetheless, even though you see very few protests and organizations working towards closing the inequality gap compared to other causes, there are some that are working towards making an impact.

Learn To Be is an organization that is trying to do just that. It is a nonprofit that recruits high school and college volunteers to help teach students between the ages of five and eighteen from underserved communities in the country. The students

can be from any state in the country, and most of the students that receive tutoring report circumstances such as receiving free lunch at school, living in a single parent home, attending a title one school and in extreme circumstances, even being homeless. While the organization leaves the subject being tutored up to the need of the student and the availability of tutors, most families request help in reading, science and math. When I first came across their website to apply as a tutor myself, I was impressed at the impact the organization was having, but was scared at the same time when I thought about the high standards I would be upheld to. I was astonished to know that eighty percent of the families being tutored made less than forty thousand dollars per year, but something that surprised me even more was the grade increases. The students being tutored were seeing a fifteen point grade increase and nearly a one-point grade point average increase.

As for myself, I started off tutoring a second grader who needed help in reading comprehension and spelling. I was given a little bit of background information from which I gathered that the student not only received free lunch at school, but her family also qualified for food stamps. I was quite nervous before my first tutoring session, having had no previous experience with neither teaching nor children. I took as much advice as I could from tutors I knew personally, but still found myself biting my lip ten minutes before my first session was about to start. In the end, my first session was a success and I was told that I was “very helpful and patient” by me student’s parents. It took a little more than five months for her parents to inform me about her progress, but we got there in the end. I was exalted when I heard that she scored above average on her final state test, when she used to score below average before. On my last session with her, I got feedback that said that “the tutor my daughter has is excellent, patient and willing to go the extra mile to help her”. Those words were few of the most meaningful that I had ever received. After having had success with one student, I felt great and decided to try tutoring another student in the fifth grade who also needed help on reading comprehension. I read her student description which told me that she received free lunch at school and lived in a single parent home. Unlike my first student, she took a little more effort, considering she was reading three levels below what should be by state standards. It took me a good solid month to adapt to teaching her, and even then, I was slightly lost on if me teaching was working on her. It was only after six months that her father contacted me with a huge smile and told me that his daughter had gone from a two out of four to a three and a half points. As of now, I am helping her prep for sixth grade reading. I don’t think I have ever felt such passion towards any cause.

As I interviewed a few volunteers, I realized that it wasn’t just me who felt passionate helping underprivileged children. I was lucky enough to interview a long time

volunteer named Rhea Cho. She is a seventeen year old girl who had found out about the organization in her sophomore year of high school when looking for meaningful ways to volunteer. She describes tutoring as a “way to not only provide [her] with volunteer hours for school, but an activity that would also help [her] grow”. I was glad to gain her trust as she let me on about how she had her doubts about her tutoring abilities at first, but figured that she would get better as she taught more and more. As I talked to her more, she gladly told me that volunteering for this organization had also helped her become more curious about education and confided to me that she saw teaching as a possible job option in her near future. She ended on a positive note, telling me that she “would love to contribute in bridging the inequality gap later in life, but for now hopes to continue tutoring students for the rest of high school and college”.

I also took a new angle and decided to get some opinions of the students as well. I was given an amazing opportunity to do this when a mother contacted me. She had a bright personality, and told me about her eleven-year-old daughter who had struggled in math and could not understand concepts, no matter how hard she tried, due to her struggle with concentrating. In the end, she told me that she searched up for tutoring programs and accidentally stumbled upon this one. As we talked more, she warmed up to me and told me that her daughter would get low grades that even reached zero, but has improved lately, and has been getting seventies and higher. In her merry tone, she also ended by telling me that she “absolutely loves this program and everything it stands for. The founders are amazing, loving and caring individuals, with a giving heart.”

As an individual, I used to be impressed when people did great things, but right now I am getting to meet such people on a daily basis. I would especially like to thank the founders, Stephen Chen and Neeraj Kapoor. If it weren't for their giving nature, there wouldn't be such an awesome organization to start with. I would also like to extend my thanks to Cassandra Zuria. If it weren't for her help, my tutoring experience would have been much rougher. Thank you!!