

## **Inbound's 2013-2014 "My American Experience" Essay Contest**

### **FIRST PLACE: Atem Nkeng-Asong, YES-Cameroon**

Before coming to the US, I was class head in my class and had a lot of influence in decision-making. I therefore thought leadership was giving instructions. But since my arrival to the US, my way of seeing things has radically changed. Attending workshops with other exchange students permitted me to see new ways of being a leader but little did I know that the rest of my time in the US was going to shape me as a real leader. I rapidly changed my idea of what leadership was all about. Being a student council member participating in several activities and observing Student body officers work, was a wonderful learning experience.

Now I don't only observe but I take part in the activities and try to understand why things are done the way they are done. As a result, I became more active and inspired making me the student council member with the most volunteer hours. The most unique role I have had in my community is my activeness in volunteering. Being a student council member has influence me so much that I have thought about creating a student council or some group similar to this in my home school. I have already spoken about this to my local coordinator back in Cameroon. What I learnt is that the leader isn't the one with the most power on decision making (because all have as much power as he does) but he is the one who aspires confidence and organization while always keeping respect and equality in the group.

Another important factor, which improved my leadership skills as earlier said, is volunteering. I started volunteering as soon as I arrived in the US. At first I was just interested in volunteering the 30 hours required-but all this changed as I started my community service in St. Mary Corwin Hospital and Pueblo zoo. I also volunteered on several occasions with my local coordinator; one of which one was Operation Christmas Child. We packed Christmas presents in shoeboxes and these boxes were sent to children under privilege all over the world. A week before attending the AC re-entry workshop, I learnt from my Local coordinator that some of the shoeboxes went to the coastal regions in Cameroon my home country!!

Despite having learnt that being a leader doesn't only mean advising and volunteering, one of the most precious things I learnt is that leadership is manifested through the taking of actions. The Global new media lab and the Civic education workshop were turning points to my understanding of the importance of leadership. These have had an impact on me and have made me so open minded than never before. I have a social media for change blog thanks to the GNML, and have learnt how Non-Profit organizations work, how to raise funds and create awareness where there is ignorance.. After attending the CEW I felt like I could make a difference. Together with my alumni friends, we combined both our GNML projects to give rise to an even bigger project, which will make people realize that the change we want to make in the society starts from us and even though we cannot change the world, we can change our own small society.

Likewise, I have had projects such as collecting can food from the college campus and neighborhood for the families that couldn't afford to buy these products. All these and more have thought me that leadership is not giving orders, being the head, being the most influential but leadership is the responsible taking of decisions for the good of a people.