



## **My service hours**

*By Austin Taliaferro- Columbus, Ohio (USA)*

Last September, I started volunteering at Run the Race, an afterschool program of the Brian Muha Foundation. It was founded by his mother, Rachel Muha, to help children and families of the Hilltop area of Columbus, Ohio after Brian was murdered by two boys from that area 11 years ago. In the face of hate, she showed the boys mercy and forgiveness, and even fought for them to receive life in jail rather than the death penalty. She vowed that no child in the area would be neglected so that no other family would experience what she did. At Run the Race, children find a welcoming place, after-school activities and a meal, and learn about God.

I was told that they needed a piano teacher. It was my opportunity to see a different side of town, help the children of that community, and pick up a few service hours for school. On my first day, kids were running everywhere and there were almost no adults. My introduction to the place went like this: “Hi, how are you doing?” “Awesome. Nice to meet you.” “Please go down there and help those kids.” “OK.”

I was put to work and started giving piano lessons. I immediately realized this would be a huge challenge.

Growing up, I never really had it bad: I had a nice family, a good house and a pleasant childhood. I realized things were different for some people in my own town. They were harboring hate; it was sad. They were quick to fight and in need of attention. I also felt they were more aware of the realities of the world and grew up quicker than most children do.

One day, it was after 6pm and I had gone to volunteer directly from school. I was really tired. Mrs. Muha was trying to get the kids packed up and ready to go home; there were about 40 kids and only three adults. She told me, “One of the kids has taken a crowbar and is beating tables inside the gym. Could you go and get him?”

I was hungry and ready to go home, but I went out of love for Mrs. Muha. The little boy was really pounding on this table. Instead of insisting that he needed to leave, I felt I should give him some time. I stood back and asked him kindly to give me the crowbar. When he finally turned to face me, he looked really mad so I asked him if he wanted to talk about it. It took a while and I was getting frustrated, but I kept asking him, until he finally put down the crowbar and walked towards me. He hugged me and started crying; I had never talked to this boy before so I was taken aback.

I asked him to sit down and asked him what had happened. He told me that the night before his mother had been taken to the hospital. I realized I needed to put him first and love him. I sat and talked to him for about half an hour. His mom had been beaten by his stepdad almost to the point of death, and the only thing that had stopped his stepdad from

killing her was this nine-year-old boy. He said, "I've always heard about God from Mrs. Muha but I don't know how to pray to him." I told him, "All you have to do is talk to him and hope for the best."

That evening I got home later than I wanted to, but I really felt I helped a child out and he was doing better because of it.