

The summer of 2019 I worked with Americorp and Seattle Parks and Recreation, through a program called "Summer Meals" where I gave out free lunches to the children in my area. My coworker Samantha and I were stationed at a park in the center of a lower-middle to low income neighborhood, my neighborhood, at a park I used to play at, with people I have seen my whole life. Every day at nine o'clock, my coworker and I would get to the park rain or shine, set up our pop-up tent, get out toys, coloring pages, and sports equipment then pack our lunches away in our small fridge until it was time for us to feed the young patrons of the park. It didn't matter the background, as long as the person was under eighteen we fed them lunch. Many times we would come to work to find we had been broken into, our supplies were rummaged through, our pop-up tent, our coolers, our art supplies, the few sports equipment that we had, and always the leftover food from the fridge were stolen. The tent, the cooler and the food I could understand, but our toys? Why would someone steal these things, the things we use to keep children that have nowhere else to go entertained, the things they have no use for. The Seattle Parks staff tried their best to help, but they couldn't get the gnarly smell of urine out or the looming feeling that our private space was not so private at all.

Through all these roadblocks my coworker and I always showed up with a smile for all the children, parents and guardians that came through our park. In the many weeks spent in the dumping rain and the hot sun, we kept things moving, kept the children fed, and the feeling of safety strong.

Children returned everyday, they started remembering our names and though they were shy in the beginning, stepped into their personality in front of us. We got to see children of many different backgrounds become friends, we saw quiet children stand-up for themselves, we also got to see the inner workings of family dynamics.

Americorp and UnitedWay are amazing organizations and the work they do is unparalleled.

There is no comparison to the compassion they have for the people in their communities. I would have definitely done another round with Americorp if I hadn't been going back to school. I

loved the work, I loved helping the children, and showing them an example of the people that are in their community that cares for their well being.