

Character First Essay - Compassion

By Amy DePoy, Shenendehowa High School

Do you remember a time when someone made your day by opening the door for you, or offering to carry your groceries? Perhaps someone changed your life in a bigger way such as the inspiring story about a boy who offered to help carry someone's books which prevented him from committing suicide. These are all examples of compassion. To me, compassion isn't just a character trait--it's a mindset. Compassion is a way of viewing people: choosing to see their troubles and trying to make their lives better.

Although this might seem a trivial trait, compassion is vital for society to function. It is necessary for fostering an empathetic population of people who understand the needs and circumstances of others. Compassion is essential for producing citizens with globally oriented and accepting outlooks on life. As philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said, "*Compassion is the basis of morality.*" I believe that this is true; that compassion is one of the building blocks of the ethics of individuals and society as a whole. Compassion fights stereotypes and prejudices, and it fosters forgiveness in communities around the world.

Compassion has an impact not only on the societal level, but also on a personal level: it forms kinder people. The admittance that you don't know what is going on in everyone's life and as such should give them the benefit of the doubt is at the basis of compassion and the stem of kind actions. Compassion is being part of everyone's support network. Not necessarily a big part; a compassionate person can make someone's day by complimenting them or offering them a smile. Leo Buscaglia once said, "*Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.*" A compassionate life is one in which you live like that every day; when you look at every person as someone who needs those little actions.

Another reason why compassion helps people lead fulfilling lives is because compassion in its basic components is simply caring deeply about something or someone. Caring deeply about something gives your life purpose and use. A life full of love and deep relationships with people and activities you care a lot about is more fulfilling than one in which you breeze by life without caring deeply about anything. That empathy and thoughtfulness that compassion provides is rewarding and helps you think about and appreciate every aspect of your life more deeply.

Compassion also helps a person fulfill a life that matters because it gives perspective to her own life and troubles. It makes you less self-absorbed and more focused on society and your role in it. Compassion can make you happier and can help you leave a positive mark on the world. Everyone deserves compassion because every life matters. And that is why compassion is so important--because my life matters just as much as everyone else's. And thus compassionate people can stop thinking of their lives as greater or more important than others and that fosters acceptance and forgiveness which adds up to a happier and more fulfilled person.

To me, compassion is one of the most important character traits to possess. It leads to kindness, peace, and forgiveness; all qualities I strive toward. However, among the hustle and bustle of modern life I fear that compassion gets cut in order to save time or energy. So I urge you to make an effort to incorporate compassion into your daily routine or mindset, and to try to smile at someone you see is down. As a community and as individuals, we need to make an effort to encourage compassion and promote a coalition of kindness and consideration.

Amy DePoy is the daughter of David and Linda DePoy. She resides at 16 Christinamarie Drive in Clifton Park. Amy is a well-rounded student who excels academically and is involved in many extra-curricular activities. Amy is the recipient of numerous Green and White Awards at Shenendehowa High School, indicating her academic excellence and involvement in the school community. She is a member of the National Latin Honor Society, and is currently co-president of the Latin Club. Amy founded, and is also the current president of, the Model United Nations Club. She has been a member of the Cross Council, and the Speech and Debate club, since grade nine.

Outside of Shenendehowa High School, Amy has been a member of the Junior Friends of the Clifton Park-Halfmoon Library for five years. She has been involved with dancing and singing, and works a part-time job.