

Eugene Fradkov
J-Teen Trip Essay
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Pigtown's name comes from the community of butchers who used to work with the pigs that were offloaded from trains coming from the Midwest on America's first railroad, the Baltimore & Ohio, and herded the pigs from the railroad and into the slaughterhouses in southern Baltimore. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad was founded almost 200 years ago in Baltimore. Baltimore's historic Pigtown community, southeast of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad yards, originally a community for railroad workers in the 1840s, developed over the next 20 years as the related industries grew rapidly. Unfortunately, today, the industries related to railroads have become outdated. Once a thriving community, the employers have left the area and today, Pigtown is a food desert. A food desert is an area where it is very difficult to buy fruits, vegetables, or other fresh and healthy food. The town has a very high crime rate, and 90% of children in the town qualify for reduced price on hot lunch.

I and the 24 other volunteers I was with put on our matching white "J-Teen Leadership" printed t-shirts and walked into Paul's Place. Paul's Place has been improving the quality of life in Pigtown and surrounding Southwest Baltimore communities for over 34 years. The volunteer who gave us a tour of the building told us that the industrial plants and other businesses that employed the residents of Pigtown over thirty years ago have disappeared. She told us about some of the thirty-six programs that they offer, which included Computer Skills Training, Adult Basic Literacy, Hot Lunch, and After-3, a "weekday after-school program for children in 1st- 5th

grades, which provides a safe, structured environment for children.” She split us into three groups and showed us to the room in which the group that I was a part of would be helping. We sorted the huge amount of clothing donations into three separate piles: Men’s, Women’s, and Children’s and we then passed them onto another group of volunteers, students at Johns Hopkins University, who were in “the store” down the hall, who were to size each piece of clothing and hang them up in the store. The store is a concept that is unique to Paul’s Place, and was where three times a week, homeless people are allowed ten minutes to browse through items and pick out items of clothing that they need. She showed us a similar store-type room which they used during the holiday season for people to pick out donated gifts for their children. She explained that people who are not homeless often take the ability to choose what they wear for granted, and that the “stores” allow choices for the people that will shop there so that they are in control. The other groups packaged food and sorted our donations to Paul’s Place. The lady that showed us where we would be working informed us that the 940,000 hours of community service help that they had received from volunteers in 2015 helped them save \$500,000 they would’ve spent on paying staff, and that money was able to be used elsewhere.

Next, we went to Living Classroom, an amazing facility that allows inner city children of Baltimore a place to do homework and many other activities after school is over. Before the kids arrived, we sorted our large donation of canned and boxed food for the thanksgiving drive they were hosting and made gift bags filled with our donations of calculators, pens, pencils, notebooks, and other school supplies. When the children arrived, we split up into groups and some of us played basketball while others played volleyball with the kids and others danced together. We had a ton of fun together.

Paul's Place and Living Classroom genuinely try very hard and truly help a lot of people. They've shown me that if we work together, we can really make a difference, and that we should spend more of our time devoted to helping others.