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It is appropriate to think about Cesar Chavez's service to others during the month of March because it is Berkeley High's Month of Service. As a member of BHS leadership, I will be working this month to spread the word about community service. I have worked over the past few years on community service projects, at both the local and global levels, that I think have reflected Cesar Chavez's vision of empowering others.

For the past two summers I have worked at Satellite Housing, which provides low income housing, mainly for seniors. One major ongoing task that I have had the privilege to work on has been an intergenerational oral history project, done in conjunction with a community group called Our Oakland-East Side Stories. I have done extensive interviews with three seniors who live in various subsidized housing locations in Berkeley and Oakland. After interviewing them I wrote out their stories and read them at a presentation ceremony. Some of the stories are on the Our Oakland website and some of them are being compiled into a book. Unfortunately, seniors are in a segment of our society that is often ignored. Taking the time to interview them and write out their stories let the seniors know that their lives are important and that others can learn from them. I have learned a lot about contemporary history just talking with the seniors and I believe that the experience was just as valuable to me as it was to them.

Since I started at Berkeley High, I have been a member of the Kiva Club, which raises money to fund microloans for people in developing countries. Frequently these loans go to women because they often have no status in developing countries, so they are rarely considered for bank loans in their own countries. Generally the loans are less than a thousand dollars, but that can be enough for people to expand their small business and become more financially independent. Kiva Club members also work at fundraising events for the Asante Africa Foundation, which builds schools and provides textbooks, uniforms, and scholarships for students in East Africa. Asante has followed up with the students who have received aid, and most have gone on to college and have been successful.

I also am involved in leadership at Berkeley High (as mentioned above), and this year I was on the Holiday Meal Committee, which planned the traditional community event that many people in need have come to rely on. The night before the event, I helped decorate the cafeteria and organized all of the clothing, canned goods, and books that people had donated. I also volunteered the day of the event serving people and working at the donations table. While it may not be an obviously empowering event for the community, the atmosphere was upbeat and the participants came away feeling that the community cared about them. Being cared about during difficult times can empower someone to persevere in the face of adversity.

It is valuable to have models like Cesar Chavez, who was truly able to effect change. It makes me realize that empowerment through community service is a real possibility.