

## **2015 Greenfield Peace Writing Scholarship Honorable Mention (Katie Lively, Thurston High School)**

I became a reporter for my school's newspaper at the beginning of my sophomore year. Naturally, as the youngest on the staff at the time, I was assigned the monthly "teacher feature," which profiled a different first-year teacher each issue. Although most of the writers were not excited about the idea of teacher features, I believed that I could find something interesting to say about each teacher, even if there was not much material to work with. I was right—with some teachers, I had to put forth a significant effort to find something interesting to say. However, others just fell into my lap, such as the one that helped me understand the true importance of education.

When I interviewed English teacher Caroline Comerford, she informed me that her first teaching job had been through Teach for America, a program I had never heard of until she mentioned it. I didn't understand the significance of Teach for America, so I was surprised when she elaborated, "There were a lot of problems. It was a challenging experience." This wasn't making much sense to my uninformed self, so I decided that I needed to further research this program before writing an article to which said program was a key.

Once I was on Teach for America's website, it hit me that Ms. Comerford had not just been discussing a basic teacher placement program; instead, she was saying that she had voluntarily participated in a program that places teachers in harsh situations in impoverished, sometimes violent communities. I was initially surprised that she took that opportunity over others available, but the more I considered the issue, the more it made sense.

Around here, most of us take education for granted: we can choose to drop out and make our own way if that is what we desire, but education is free and readily available to the tune of 1,200 public schools in 197 districts in the state of Oregon (according to Oregon Blue Book). However, not all areas of the world or even our country are privileged enough to have at least thirteen years of education right at their fingertips. It's no coincidence that places with poor education systems also tend to be dangerous and unsanitary areas with high crime rates. Most University of Oregon football fans remember the story of Terrance Kelly, a young man who intended to escape a violent neighborhood by attending college at the UO, only to be murdered in his hometown before he made it to campus.

Education gives us something to strive for, something to be proud of, something to distract us from risky temptations. In addition, it provides what is often a student's greatest support system: their teachers and friends at school. This support system can improve the lives of teachers and students alike, for when we can see the potential for better lives than those of our peers, we are more likely to influence others to improve themselves and help us achieve that goal.

In short, I now am able to fully understand why Ms. Comerford elected to serve others through such an emotionally difficult experience. As well as showing underprivileged students the possibility of a future beyond the streets, education has an impact on these educators themselves. Most students have access to a decent K-12 education, and helping those who do not is what can really change our outlook for the better. The benefits for both teachers and students more than support Malala Yousafzai's belief that "One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world."