Action Is Magnanimous (AIM)

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The goal of my Action Plan is to address poverty and sustainable development. The club that I created under my Action Plan, AIM (Action Is Magnanimous), raises money by selling baked goods and sends that money as a loan through Kiva.org. Advocacy is also a strategy and goal for AIM. By flaunting our club around school, supporting causes that deal with the same issues—for instance, One Day Without Shoes, created by TOMS—and getting new students involved as often as we can, advocacy remains a foundation stone in our club.

Initially, we used the fashion room and its sewing machines at our school to make ‘circle scarves’. In January, another student started making circle scarves under her own label and with much more capital, started selling them to other students and now has her own line in a boutique. We immediately shut down the project and began brainstorming for new ideas. This was an enormous setback for us. We had been working each week to make our donated fabric into money that would be sent to ailing business-people. But it all ended when a wealthier person—with a website—was able to custom make the same product. After this we resorted to what we as high school students know best. Bake sales. We call our sales, “Cake for a Cause” and hope to keep them going until the end of the year. In addition to this we have one project that has been working since the start. We call them ‘chip bag bracelets’ because they are made from the recycled plastic bags that you find pretzels or chips or snack mix in. They are sold for only five dollars and are great because they are easy to make and most importantly, recycle waste that otherwise would go straight to a landfill. The money that we make is going to Kiva.org to people whose businesses or projects we wish to support. We have picked profiles from Cambodia, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, Pakistan, and Bolivia. In addition to this, during the holiday season we raised money for Heifer International and gave the students who contributed, the opportunity to choose which animals they would like to see donated.

There are about ten people involved in this project. There are roughly eight students in the AIM club not including myself and we also have a supervisor. There is also another teacher in my school who is a great help to us and who cares very much about our work. In the club we work on different tasks each week—some people work on advertising and designs, some make chip bags, and others work on research.

This project has made me a better person entirely. It has also made me realize how lazy I can be, and how lazy entire populations can be. It has brought out the worst and best in people that I know but most importantly it gives me great satisfaction in knowing that I am not idle. I am not waiting for someone else to give me an opportunity to help others, I am taking the initiative for myself. This experience has only made me more focused and sure of the fact that I need to work with others in life. Next year I’m going to college and I’m majoring in International Relations so that I can work in an NGO or in diplomacy after I graduate.
I hope this project has positively affected the people around me. I think that it has given the opportunity for kids in my school to get involved in something that they didn’t think they could get involved with before. And not because they don’t care—and many don’t—but because they needed something or someone to give them the access to helping others. They didn’t quite know how to get involved or what to do until the opportunity presented itself. Recently a fellow student of mine was walking next to me in the hallway and said, “I really love what you’re doing, I think it’s great and I think what you’re doing is really cool, I wish I were more involved.” Little things that people do and say like this remind me that we do make a difference, however small it is.

The biggest motivator for me is guilt. If I haven’t done something or thought of something new for the club or our projects I feel guilty and idle. Reminding myself that no change can occur if I’m not doing anything is what makes me move.

The Symposium has without a doubt affected my work. I gained confidence, new ideas, and connections from being there. When my novice plan wasn’t going as well or as quickly as I had hoped, the Symposium gave me confidence and reassurance that things take time. The group sessions and mentors helped me figure out different routes of action and helped me answer difficult questions I had had. Overall my plan has benefited from it.