High School Helping Katrina Victims
Sarah Peters

When I first left Brown’s Leadership Institute, I had my mind made up about my action plan. I was going to create a documentary about the current situation in New Orleans after trying to recover from Hurricane Katrina. But once I left the inspiring atmosphere at Brown, I realized that I was actually really passionate about another cause. I want to help improve the education system in New Orleans. New Orleans does not have the best public school system, but the high school I go to happens to be the best public school in the state. I realized that my school has the ability and resources to help improve the education of other students who may need some help. I wanted to set up a peer-tutoring program between my school and an underprivileged public middle school in my city.

My project has been difficult to get started. The main difficulty has been trying to get the support from my school. I first sought out a teacher to sponsor my club, yet no one was willing to take on a new project. I met with my school’s assistant principal twice to discuss the possibility of setting up a tutoring program. I also met with another teacher who, before Katrina, had sponsored a similar program, except now she had no interest in sponsoring a club again. I found myself stuck without any assistance from my school. Instead of giving up on my plan, I have decided to continue to attempt to work with the administration and to start my program at the beginning of the next school year. In the meantime I have been trying to raise awareness about my plan to try to get students in all grade levels interested in bettering the education in New Orleans. So far it’s been challenging working by myself, but students have shown interest in the program.

My project has shown me that it takes a lot of persistence to reach a goal. I’ve always wanted to make a difference and education is something I’m passionate about because being educated is the foundation to making a change. But sometimes I do get discouraged because I feel like I’m all alone and pushing against a barrier that’s blocking me from reaching my goal. Sometimes I question whether or not I, or my school, will ever be able to organize a peer-tutoring program because of the current situation of New Orleans. But I’ve realized that this is something I’m really devoted to because I truly want to improve the education system, not just in New Orleans but also all over the world. My project has made me a stronger person because I’ve learned not to give up when the journey gets difficult. I read stories in the news about kids who went to underprivileged schools who have raised themselves up to beat the odds and go on to highly selective universities, and I want to make this a possibility for more kids. Over the summer, all the other students and their desire to make a difference inspired me. The Leadership Symposium helped remind me why I’m still trying to reach my goal. I was motivated again to keep raising awareness about the unfortunate education system in New Orleans and the lack of decent education systems in many poor countries. I try to keep myself motivated with the idea of a better future because I believe that one person’s idea can make a difference and start a revolution.