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My day as a Substitute (Health Occupations) Teacher

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My day as a Substitute (Health Occupations) Teacher...

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Back then I was not a teacher, but rather a school nurse who loved to be involved in students' lives and the business of a school day. When the school called and asked if I would please teach hospitality at the Joint Vocational School of course I said yes, and then wondered how.

When I arrived I found eight challenged young men and women about 16 or 17 years of age. They were in this particular program because they could not succeed at much of anything else. Here they would learn to wash, dry and iron, set a table, fold towels, and work on a food line. This day I was told we were in charge of a banquet for 45 people. We would be responsible for creating the plates, serving and cleaning up and of course making sure the "regular" work was done. A daunting task for the best of teachers and I was a nurse, a nurse!

I rolled up my sleeves, we divided and conquered, and I cajoled and encouraged, and provided teamwork opportunities. There were the usual squabbles and name callings that

go with the teenage crowd, but for 7 hours we worked, sweated, and hastened to get all of it done. Right before the bell rang, I surveyed the area, with all of the laundry done, dishes put away, and kitchen clean. These kids had done laundry for a 10-acre building: for cosmetology, automotives, childcare, and culinary, plus hosted and served a luncheon.

They tried to get the “sub” to let them out early, but I said “No”, in fact I had them pull their chairs into a tight circle so we could review the day. I asked what they did and did not like about the last 7 hours. But first I said it was my turn. I told them how sad it made me feel to hear the name-callings, the fighting and the bickering. They were a class. The little girl who had been picked on the most turned to her tormentor and apologized. With tears in my eyes I heard the “bully” also say she was sorry. Then I told everything I liked about the day: the teamwork, the togetherness, the comradely, and the kindnesses I saw extended. I told them how awesome they each were and how they should never let anyone tell them they did not have worth.

Sixteen pairs of eyes started streaming with tears and the bravest one said, “No one has ever told us we have worth or matter. No one has ever made us feel special before.”

I said good-bye to each of them before I collapsed in a rocking chair and sobbed. Not only was I bone tired after one day, but I realized these kids do this routine everyday.

And these kids, until today, never knew they mattered to anyone.

Now they do!