**7. What have you done to make your school or your community a better place?**

I have been volunteering at a non-profit organization called MEarth, an eleven acre property that focuses on environmental, outdoor and culinary education, for six years. I started volunteering as a student after school where I worked in the organic and native plant garden helping to pull weeds and plant crops. I also helped with native California plant restoration projects on the MEarth property as well as the nearby Carmel Middle School campus.

After volunteering for three years, I had made connections with the staff at MEarth and was educated enough on the natural sciences that I started gaining a leadership position at the organization. During the summer of 9th grade, I was a camp leader at MEarth’s first summer camp called Go Native, and I was a camp intern during the next two summers that followed. During my time as camp leader, I was able to work closely with kids who were excited about learning about the environment, and I developed my skills as a teacher.

One of my favorite activities as a camp intern was going out into the garden to catch bugs or pick crops with the students and being able to witness their reactions as they held a blue-bellied lizard for the first time or spotted an endangered red legged frog peaking its head out of the pond. What I love about continuing to volunteer at MEarth is that I am constantly learning new skills and knowledge that I am able use in my everyday life such as gardening techniques or new recipes while also getting to give back to my community in the process.

Volunteering at an organization like MEarth has been an incredible experience that has fostered my passions in environmental science and nature, and I am extremely appreciative that I have been able to use the knowledge I have gained to teach and inspire kids and other members of the community.