**7. What Have You Done to Make Your School or Community a Better Place?**

Last winter, as co-president of my high school’s environmental club, I felt compelled to find a cause that would bring more purpose and focus to our club. After some research, I reached out to the Elkhorn Slough National Research Reserve, which has always been a source of inspiration for me. Memories of school field trips and birding expeditions with my brother flooded my mind, and I knew that it would be the perfect outlet.

After months of networking and planning, I coordinated a movie night, panel discussion, and silent auction fundraiser that raised over $2,000 for the restoration of the Visitor Center Pond at the Elkhorn Slough Reserve. From soliciting student artwork for the silent auction, to promoting the event at Carmel City Hall, to talking with Elkhorn Slough biologists and conservation scientists, it was clear that I had my work cut out for me. With my dedication to environmentalism and passion for collaboration, I was in my element. The extra-long lunch meetings, discussions about logistics, and drives to the Elkhorn Slough did not feel like “work,” but the growth both the club and I experienced as a result reinforced the fact that we did get work done.

This December, our environmental club and interested environmental science students will be planting over 500 native plants grown in the Slough greenhouse. Not only will the plants provide habitat for endangered species like the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander and California red-legged frog, but they will also provide precious space and time for local students to learn, appreciate, and be in awe of the natural world. Over 8,000 students annually from schools across Monterey County will benefit from the development of the wetland pond, as the Elkhorn Slough Foundation will now be able to create a new science curriculum that focuses on the organisms inhabiting this freshwater ecosystem.