

**2024 CUNY Ethics and Morality Essay Contest Submission**

**From Isolation to Impact: Finding My Voice Through Charity**

**Jun Lin Jiang**

**Baruch College, Zicklin School of Business**

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In middle school, every word felt like a risk. English was new and heavy on my tongue, and every time I spoke, I could feel my classmates' eyes on me. When I finally forced words out, their reactions said it all—laughter, whispers, exaggerated impressions. The humiliation was instant, and my face turned red as I fought to hide my embarrassment. I quickly learned that staying silent was the best option. But that silence wasn't freeing—it was confining like I was locking myself away to avoid the sting of judgment. I felt like I had no voice, no way to show who I truly was, and the silence grew into an “invisible wall” between me and the world.

For years, I accepted that “invisible wall” as my reality, but I always knew it wasn't the life I wanted. I wanted to connect with people and step out of my comfort zone. By the time I was in high school, I realized that hiding was holding me back far more than my accent ever could. When the COVID-19 pandemic happened, everything seemed to turn upside down. Suddenly, everyone was feeling isolated, and I started to wonder if maybe this was my chance. It was time to break out of my shell, to finally do something that mattered—not just for myself, but for others. I wanted to help people who, like me, felt isolated as well.

I began volunteering as a tutor for Asian children from working-class families, many of whom faced struggles I understood all too well. The students I worked with didn't just need academic help; they needed support, someone who could truly see them and understand their fears. According to the Greater Good Science Center, “volunteering can increase empathy, foster resilience, and create a sense of purpose” (Hopper). In spending hours with these students, I found myself connecting to them on a level I hadn't anticipated. They reminded me of myself—their hesitation, their quiet resilience, and their hunger to learn despite everything. With each session, I began to find my own voice again. My confidence grew as I saw the impact I could have on others.

Over time, volunteering became more than a commitment; it became a calling. I devoted over 250 hours to three educational organizations, working tirelessly to support my students' academic and personal growth. But what I gained went so far beyond academics. Each time I watched a student grasp a difficult concept or gain a little more confidence, I felt a sense of purpose that was entirely new to me. This journey helped me realize that Charity isn't just about giving time or resources—it's about being there for someone, about helping them see their own potential. Research shows that volunteering benefits not only those we serve but also the volunteer, creating a deep sense of fulfillment and connection (Segal and Robinson). I felt that connection, and with each hour I spent, I grew in ways I hadn't imagined.

As my confidence grew, I felt the urge to do more. I co-founded an educational organization to create a safe, supportive environment for students from diverse backgrounds. I wanted them to feel valued and understood, to see that their struggles didn't define them. Each time one of my students improved, gained confidence, or found joy in learning, I could see that our work was creating real impact. Robert Puff describes this as the "ripple effect" of generosity—a concept that resonated deeply with me (Puff). Each act of kindness, however small, has the power to touch lives far beyond what we can see. The ripple effect was visible every time a student smiled, every time they told me they felt proud of themselves. I realized that, through Charity, I was becoming someone I was proud to be.

The transformation didn't stop there. My volunteer experience gave me confidence not only in English but in my ability to communicate and express myself. For years, I had hidden my voice, afraid of being misunderstood or ridiculed. But now, I was starting to see that my voice had power—that it could connect, uplift, and inspire. Eventually, I became the VP of Fundraising for Ascend Baruch, where I had the chance to hone my leadership skills and embrace every

learning opportunity. Through Ascend, I found new ways to grow, both professionally and personally. I took on challenges that once seemed impossible, learning to lead initiatives, coordinate projects, and navigate complex situations with confidence.

Currently, I am a Mentor at Ascend Baruch, giving back to the very community that helped me discover my potential. Mentoring others has shown me that leadership is not about authority but about support—about encouraging others to be their best selves. Through this role, I have found a deeper understanding of what it means to give and to lead, and I am grateful to be able to help others grow in the same way that my volunteer work helped me.

Of course, this journey hasn't been without challenges. The pandemic meant I had to adapt to a new form of learning platform, which came with unexpected difficulties. Technology issues, limited face-to-face interaction, and constant distractions tested my patience. There were moments when I worried that I wasn't reaching my students as effectively as I wanted to. But each challenge taught me something new. I learned to get creative and to use interactive tools and personalized feedback to keep my students engaged. Patience and flexibility became my guiding principles, and with each session, I felt myself growing stronger, more resilient, and more adaptable.

Looking back, I realize that Charity has become an essential part of who I am. Practicing this Virtue has taught me resilience, compassion, and the power of human connection. Charity is not just about giving time or resources; it's a commitment to seeing others, to uplifting those who feel unseen, and to creating spaces where people feel valued and heard. In today's fast-paced world, virtues like Charity can be easily overlooked, but they are exactly what we need to build meaningful relationships and strong communities.

Through this experience, I have come to see that Charity doesn't just change the lives of those we help—it transforms us in ways we can't predict. Every act of kindness, no matter how small, creates a ripple that touches lives and changes the world. For someone who once felt too afraid to speak, I now know that my voice has power. It can connect with others, inspire, and make a difference. Moving forward, I am committed to continuing this path of giving, knowing that every act of Charity brings me closer to the person I want to become—someone who leads with compassion, who uplifts others, and who uses their voice to create positive change.

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