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TEEN HELPS YOUTHS LEARN TO LOVE THE OUTDOORS, STAND UP FOR OCEAN CONSERVATION EFFORTS

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Brittany Turner, 17, admits she didn't know much about sea turtles when she started volunteering for [Love a Sea Turtle](#), a nonprofit organization in North Carolina that promotes protection of sea turtles, which are considered crucial to ocean health, as they eat and help encourage growth of the sea grass that other marine species need. Some species of sea turtles are endangered. But Brittany soon found out that the Love a Sea Turtle group does more – it promotes ocean conservation in general and helps teach youth how to advocate for worthy causes, as they also learn to appreciate the outdoors.

Brittany is committed to making a difference in her community and she is today's [Daily Point of Light Award](#) honoree. Points of Light spoke with her about her commitment to service.

What inspired you to volunteer?

Four years ago, I got started by running in some of the 5K races that they hosted, and from there, I found out more about their volunteer opportunities that they have in the summer and year-round. I started volunteering in their summer camp. It's aimed at under-served youth in our community, to teach them about environmental conservation and water conversation. They do a lot of fun outdoor activities, such as biking, fishing, hiking.

Describe your volunteer role with Love a Sea Turtle.

After volunteering in their summer camp program, I joined the Love a Sea Turtle Youth Advisory Board, where I then began to help plan year-round events. I kept volunteering the next summer. The third summer, I became the Summer Camp Director. I plan all of the activities that happen throughout the school year. I've also started my own initiative called Youth Explorers. It connects a platform for kids to speak out about what they're passionate about.

What kinds of things is this group passionate about?

The biggest project I've done with that has to do with seismic blasting and offshore drilling off the coast of North Carolina. Last year, it was proposed that we start seismic blasting to test if there's oil for offshore drilling. It's detrimental to North Carolina's economy, as we are the No. 1 dive spot in the world, and it's hurtful to the ocean, to our water. I started a letter-writing campaign. I went in to Boys and Girls Clubs all across North Carolina and I had these kids write letters to Gov. Roy Cooper. It was a learning experience for them, as well as helping me.

Did anything come of that?

I was able to collect and hand-deliver hundreds of letters to Gov. Cooper. This happened a year ago, and as of right now, we are not seismic blasting and we are offshore drilling off the coast of North Carolina. Gov. Cooper did not the sign the bill to go on with that. I'd like to say that it helped.



What's been the most rewarding part of your work?

The most rewarding part for me was working at the summer camp and seeing the smiles on the kids' faces when they leave to go home.

What have you learned through your experiences as a volunteer?

I have learned that one person can truly make a difference in their community. In the back of my mind, I never really believed that one person could make a huge difference until I met these kids at the summer camps. Some of these kids have never gotten on a bike and they're 12 years old. They've never been in a kayak on the water or gone fishing. I learned I really was making a huge difference in these kids' lives.

Are there any future volunteer events that you are excited about?

We have National Make-a-Difference Day and Family Volunteer Day coming up. Those are big days and we'll have tons of volunteers coming out. One thing we will do is paint storm drains to say, 'Do not pollute this close to the river.' I'm super excited to be a coordinator for these events this year.

Why do you think it's important for others to give back?

I think it's self-rewarding to give back, and I truly believe it's our duty as citizens. It's important to give to our community just as much as we get from our community.

Do you find it hard to fit in volunteer work with school and other activities?

It can be challenging at times. I'm in quite a few extracurricular activities and I'm taking extra classes at school even. I'm in the marching band and on my school's mock trial team. It can be hard, but this stuff is important and it's OK if I don't get much sleep at night.

Written by Kay Nolan