

Volunteering at the city shelter taught me that leadership isn't always about giving orders—it's about listening, observing, and adapting to the needs of the people you serve. I had been assigned to organize a weekend literacy program where teenage volunteers would mentor younger children, helping them improve their reading skills. I arrived full of ideas, expecting the program to run smoothly, but the first session quickly revealed unexpected challenges. Some teens were shy and hesitant to engage, while others were easily distracted. Several of the younger children were struggling with focus and comprehension, making my initial lesson plan ineffective.

Recognizing these obstacles, I decided to rethink the program rather than forcing it to follow a rigid structure. I introduced collaborative storytelling, where teens and children co-created short stories, and added interactive reading games to make learning more dynamic and fun. I encouraged mentors to share personal experiences and allow children to express themselves, creating a supportive and inclusive environment. By leading through example and showing patience, I inspired both teens and children to participate actively, building confidence and trust over time.

The program gradually began to thrive. Attendance increased, children's reading improved, and the teens became more confident in their roles. This experience taught me that effective leadership requires empathy, flexibility, and the ability to motivate others by understanding their needs rather than just directing them. I hope to bring this student-centered approach to your campus community, creating initiatives that empower peers, foster collaboration, and support personal growth. Leading is not about authority—it's about creating opportunities for others to shine and achieve their full potential.