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Sponsors for Educational Opportunity

Celia Cruz Bronx HS of Music

Student Diplomacy Corps Italy Mare Splendente Post Program Essay

This summer, I experienced something that has forever changed my outlook on life and my understanding of community. The highlight of my summer was receiving the opportunity to travel abroad to Italy on the Student Diplomacy Corps' Mara Splendente program. The experience was nothing short of mind-blowing, filled with new experiences, insights, and unforgettable moments that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. Among these, a boat ride early in the program along the magnificent Amalfi Coast stands out as the most memorable.

As we cruised along the stunning coastline, I had the chance to interact with a group of Italian kids who were full of pure positivity and enthusiasm. Despite the language barrier, our conversations were lively and filled with laughter. They were eager to learn about where I was from, and I found myself teaching them New York slang while they taught me some Italian phrases. These exchanges were not just fun; they were eye-opening. I realized how much positivity and kindness can impact others, even in the simplest of interactions. The kids' curiosity and warmth reminded me of the importance of spreading positivity wherever I go, and how such energy can ripple out to affect others in ways we might not immediately see.

One moment in particular will forever be etched in my memory. As we were disembarking from the boat, a young Italian boy asked me a question that seemed simple on the surface, yet was loaded with significance: "Ronaldo or Messi?" (Top Soccer/Futbal Players) Without hesitation, I replied, "Ronaldo!" To my surprise, the boy gave me a huge hug, and we even did Ronaldo's signature handshake celebration. That moment brought tears to my eyes—not because of the question, but because of the connection it symbolized. Here I was, thousands of miles from home in the Bronx, connecting with a child from a completely different culture through a shared love of futbol/soccer. It was a powerful reminder of the universal language of kindness and the impact that even the smallest gestures can have.

This experience has had a profound impact on me and how I view my role in the community. It made me realize that if I can have such a positive impact on a group of

kids during a brief interaction, I can certainly do the same in my own community. It reinforced my desire to make a difference in the lives of others, to spread positivity, and to lead by example. The friendships and connections I made during the SDC program also helped me improve my networking and communication skills, invaluable assets as I move forward to college and work life. I learned the importance of getting along with people from different backgrounds, treating each other like family, and always listening and being curious about their stories. These are lessons that I will carry with me as I enter college and beyond.

Moving forward, this experience has taught me to seize every opportunity that comes my way. I now understand that each experience, no matter how small it may seem at the time, has the potential to play a significant role in shaping who I am. This mindset will guide me as I embark on new adventures, whether it's participating in clubs, leading community initiatives, leading discussions in class or simply spreading positivity wherever I go.

Lastly, SDC reminded me of the importance of enjoying life and cherishing every moment. Being surrounded by the beauty of Italy, learning new ideas and skills from my host family, and connecting with others gave me a peace of mind that I hadn't ever experienced before. It taught me to appreciate the present and to embrace the joy that comes from experiencing new things. As I move forward in life, I will carry these lessons with me, using them to grow as a person and to positively impact the world around me.



In conclusion, the best thing that happened to me this summer was not just the trip to Italy itself, but the insights and realizations that came with it. It was a journey of personal growth, a deepened understanding of community, and a newfound appreciation for the simple yet powerful act of spreading positivity. These lessons will undoubtedly shape my future and guide me as I strive to make a difference in the world. Thank you.