

Michaela Barry · 1 day ago

Barry's Winning Essay: 'Breathing in the Sweet CROYA Air'

While a senior at Lake Forest High School, Michaela Barry wrote a piece about Committee Representing Our Young Adults (CROYA) following these guidelines: "Write a 1-3 page essay on what CROYA means to you." Her write-up won a CROYA Founders Award in the Margot Martino Spirit of CROYA Essay Contest. The following is what she wrote:

CROYA is like a breath of fresh air. People often say that they need to "step outside" or "go get a breath of fresh air," and that is exactly what CROYA has been for me. For four years now, in the midst of hectic school weeks filled with sports, homework, stress, and drama, CROYA has always been my breath of fresh air. No matter the meeting, Wednesday nights have become my favorite time of the week, and for four years, I have breathed in the sweet CROYA air every single Wednesday.



Michaela Barry (right) offers a hug during the CROYA Spring Retreat.

As I reflect on CROYA as a whole, I think about everything that it has taught me. This is everything that I have been breathing IN these past four years. Taking a deep breath IN, I recognize all that I have learned. I have learned the knowledge of the upperclassmen that I have watched. All of

the CROYA kids that I have met and become close with have not only become my best friends but have taught me so much about living. Specifically they have showed me what it means to be high schooler in Lake Forest, and how I can leave my mark on our community.

I have breathed in and learnt the lessons of peer training, and what it means to be a good friend. My freshman and sophomore year, I took peer training over and over again with different groups of kids just because of how much fun I was having. I continuously learned how unconditional positive regard can truly change your outlook on life and those around you. My sophomore year I was elected to the CROYA high school executive board, and as the youngest at those meetings I learned how incredible it was to have your voice heard in our community.

Leading retreats my junior year and continuing my journey on exec, CROYA taught me everything I know about being a leader. I breathed IN and learned lessons from my leader partners and adult chaperones, as I hoped that I was making the retreats as amazing as I could. Attending CROYA work trip, I learned how important it is to stay involved in community service, and learned all about giving back and what a difference it can make in the lives of others. I am so lucky to have been able to breathe IN all that CROYA has to offer.

As I am at the end of my high school CROYA journey, I can't help but let all of my air out and hope that I have given to CROYA a fraction of what it has given me. Breathing OUT, I am able to reflect on how I have poured my heart into CROYA. Being sure to carve the time out of my week specifically for 7-8 on Wednesday nights has been the easiest decision! I hope that my presence meant something to CROYA kids over these four years, and that giving my presence and energy every week helped keep the *Spirit of CROYA* alive and well.



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CROYA co-founder Margot Martino shares a check with Michaela Barry for her winning essay.

Juggling exec meetings and leading three retreats, adding the time slot of 5:30 to 7 followed by 7 to 8 got trickier, but knowing that every time I walked into CROYA I could take a deep breath is what kept me coming back. Honored to be a retreat leader, giving back to younger CROYA kids has been simply the best. It feels as though I am passing on my CROYA knowledge and I couldn't be happier. Spending a week in the summer for two years in MaComb, Illinois was oh so great!

Giving my time, service, and energy to help a community less fortunate than us is something that I wouldn't trade for the world. Everything that I am breathing OUT, are the things that I was so lucky to have given CROYA.

I can only hope that as I take this deep breath and let all of my air out, I am giving CROYA passion. As I watched the older CROYA kids lead and run meetings, their passion for CROYA quickly spread over me. I hope that I can give younger CROYA kids the same passion I have, so that the youth of Lake Forest and Lake Bluff can keep breathing in the sweet CROYA air.