

Hello! My name is Emily Speakman, and I am 15 years old. I currently live at Vance AFB in Enid, Oklahoma. Over the past few months, I have directed a service project to plant a community garden in my town. The garden, which provides a variety of fresh produce and herbs, is open to everyone in my community. It was, and still is, so inspiring to see friends and strangers alike come together and donate their time to help those in need. Service isn't always easy, but it is always rewarding. Even if I don't personally see the tangible effects, I am rewarded with the knowledge that I have made a difference in someone's life. I believe it is our duty to help others in any way we can. This belief emboldened me to live a life of service, ever since I first donated my hair at 5 years old. To give is to love. The ability to love others – affirming their value as fellow human beings – is becoming rare. I want to do my part in making a loving difference within our society.

I owe my love for service to my mom, my hero. She has always shown me what genuine service looks like. She is always willing to step up when no one else will. She always serves with a smile on her face. People are drawn to her because they see the joy and love she radiates. But what makes her a hero?

When people imagine a hero, they often picture a superhero performing impossible feats. This saddens me, because heroes exist all around us. We should open our eyes and appreciate the hidden heroes in our everyday lives. A hero must be selfless, always ready to put others before themselves. They need courage to do the right thing, even when no one else will. Lastly, heroes need to lead, but that doesn't mean they must be the main character. Instead, the best leaders are often unseen, quietly supporting from the background. These qualities outline a hero, but many faces fill the template. I am proud to say my mom is one of them. I want to follow in her footsteps. I want to say, "*I have done my duty, and more.*" One day, I want to say, "*I have been a hero.*"