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How the experience of distance learning impacted the way I will contribute to society in the future.

The world is filled with so many uncertain and confusing times. On a personal level, it has been a difficult adjustment for me to change my way of functioning. In high school I was never a very social person. I had a few friends but even then I barely talked to them. When the pandemic was in the early stages and the schools were closed I saw this as a vacation. A vacation in which I did not need to talk to other people or socialize. I was so ecstatic to be alone with just my thoughts and I. However, this dream was very short-lived. After a week into quarantine, I began to feel as if a dark veil began to consume me. My body felt like it was being weighed down by bricks. I realized then that the lack of being able to talk to any of my classmates I have grown to love has created a dark cloud over me. And this feeling grew even worse as my academic life changed as well. All through high school, I was invested in my academics and strived to be valedictorian and give that graduation speech. But just like my social life, this dream was ruined. I often felt that all the hard work I committed myself to was pointless, so why would I even try to keep participating in the google classroom sessions. I wasn't going to walk across that coveted stage so what was the point of doing anything. When the sorrow was too much to handle I called my friends. When I heard their voices the grey clouds surrounding me

suddenly vanished. After a while, I asked them if they were feeling the same disconnection as I was, and I was surprised that they felt the same way I do. I found comfort that many of my friends were experiencing the same social withdrawal as me. I began to feel more and more like this weight was off my shoulders because I was not the only one. I slowly became more invested in more work because I saw I have friends and acquaintances that are backing me up because we face the same problems. One day, a thought popped into my head; my other classmates and many more felt the same way I did. I had first-hand experience in the kind of emotional distress this lockdown can put on someone, and the relief someone feels when they talk about that feeling. It took time, but I found a purpose in this madness.

After talking with my small group of friends, I began to expand to my outer circle of friends. I asked how they were doing and how they were holding up. While messaging one of my tennis teammates, he told me about how nice it was to have someone check in on him because I was the only one from his friend group that has tried to talk to him. This occurrence solidified my role I need to play with the people I know. With experiencing this feeling, I know the pain of others. I am able to sympathize with their struggles. The benevolent side of me has never been stopped by anything and I will not let a pandemic stop me for caring about people, in times like this. These times are tough, and all anyone wants is an ear to listen to their problems and their thoughts. People need to know that they are important and matter to others outside of their families. I can be there for people to offer my thoughts and listen to their problems. I understand what is going through their minds. Because in all of this chaos and the lockdown, many people just want a friend to talk to. Whether I help 1 or 100 people deal with this struggle, I would

without hesitation be there to help them and talk them through this dark time they could be going through.

While in this pandemic, I learned the importance and impact of talking to someone. Everyone, no matter their at-home situation, can benefit from just venting their frustrations and their mind. I function in a similar way. And the only way to un-vent these emotions is to let them out. Bottled emotions can stem long after this pandemic is over. People will always have volatile emotions that they want to release, but have no avenue to express themselves. So I am going to be there to check in on them and be the ear that will listen to them. Even while I'm away at college, I can imagine myself texting my friends to see how they are doing every month. Every person is different but everyone just wants someone to listen to them and ask how they are doing, including college students. College can be a stressful part in a person's life, so I will continue to be there for my new college peers. I can make them feel like they are heard and they have a voice. I can continue this even through my career. Employees and co-workers may have transgressions about their office environment, so I can be there for them and hear out what they are saying. No matter at what level of age or title, everyone deserves to be heard and I will provide them with the comfort that their issues are heard and that they have someone who will be there for them.