

Good evening. My name is Maura Welch. I am a 9th grader at Christian Brothers Academy in Syracuse, NY. Over the past 5 years, I have been involved with the organization, Free the Children, an international organization of children helping children who live in poverty around the world, with a focus on child labor. I have had the opportunity to travel to Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador to investigate child labor first hand. Through these travels, I have come to see the importance of education in the world today. And also how important education is to end child labor. While I was in Peru, I met two brothers named Juvenal and Betron who worked on the streets of the tourist city of Cuzco selling post cards. Juvenal is 10 years old and Betron is 12 years old. Juvenal attends school from 8-1pm and is in 5th grade. Betron is not in school. Betron has to take care of his 5 younger brothers and sisters so he does not have time to go to school. Juvenal and Betron sell postcards from 2-9pm everyday. Between the 2 of them, they make about 66 cents-\$1.65 everyday. This is just enough to buy food for their family. When I asked them what they wanted to be when they grew older, Juvenal quickly responded saying he wanted to be a teacher or a policeman so that he could help others. Betron responded saying that it would be nice to become a teacher or official tourist guide but he has come to realize that it will never happen. He said that without an education he will be most likely selling postcards on the streets the rest of his life. As I interviewed more and more kids who worked on the streets I came to learn that usually kids 10 and under still had hope for the future but kids older than 10 had lost most hope for the future because they had been on the streets long enough to realize that it is not probable that their lives will change. Another reason that Juvenal had more hope for the future is because he was receiving an education. He told us that he hoped to continue his education so that he could learn English and learn how to read and write well enough to make a good tourist guide. I came to realize that without an education these kids do not have a bright future. It is not right for children to have to chose between work and an education. Education is the solution to improving their lives and ending child labor.

I have attended school all my life and I have taken this privilege for granted. I sometimes complain about going to school and having to do homework. I can't even imagine not being able to do simple things such as reading writing, and simple math. Education is essential to succeeding in the world today. In about 3 weeks I will be attending the Children's World Congress on child labor in Florence Italy. I hope to hear what kids all over the world are doing to ensure education for all. I hope to bring this information back and share it with the kids in the U.S.A. As kids who have the privilege to attend school, we have an obligation to help those kids who do not have the opportunity to receive an education.