



MoCo CARES Charity Race—Volunteer Reflection Report

By: George Wang



On October 4, 2025, I had an amazing opportunity to volunteer at the 4th Annual MoCo CARES Charity Race, an inspiring community event hosted by So What Else and Covenant Life School. The race brings together local families, businesses, and volunteers to support children and families in need across Montgomery County.

I participated as a proud member of CYOC (Capital Youth Outreach Club), a youth-led organization that partners with So What Else to support their mission through service and action. Together with other CYOC volunteers, we helped make the race a success through early-morning set-up, cheering on runners, ensuring the safety of kids, participating in the post-race service project, and assisting with clean-up.

We arrived at 7:00 AM, when it was still dark and cold. The air was crisp, and I could see my breath as we got started. Even though it was early, there was a lot of energy and excitement in the air. We knew this event was special, and it felt good to be part of something that brought people together for such a meaningful cause.

Morning Set-Up

Our first task was to help set up the event area and the 1Mile/5K race tracks. We placed signs and markers, organized tables and booths, and made sure everything was ready for the runners and families arriving later that morning. I also teamed up with other volunteers to set up fencing for the bike race, making sure the track was clearly marked and spectators stayed safe. It felt great knowing our efforts helped ensure a smooth and secure race for both participants and the audience.

Bounce House Supervision

One of the biggest physical challenges was setting up the giant inflatable slide. It was really heavy and required a lot of teamwork, communication, and strength. But once it was up and running, it became one of the highlights for the younger kids at the event.

Some of us were assigned to help supervise the kids playing on it. My job was to keep the kids organized, make sure they waited

their turn, and most importantly, prevent rough play or fighting that could cause injuries. I quickly learned that even something that seems like pure fun from the outside actually requires a lot of focus and responsibility to keep safe and enjoyable.

Race Marshaling and Cheering

During the race, we also served as race marshals. We stood along the route to guide runners, offer encouragement, and cheer them on as they passed. It was inspiring to see people of all ages participating — some smiling, others pushing themselves to their limits. The energy and support from volunteers like us helped create a fun and uplifting atmosphere for everyone involved.

Community Service Project

After the races were finished, we joined other volunteers and So What Else staff to participate in the community service project. We packed non-perishable food boxes that will be delivered to local families in need for the Thanksgiving holiday. So What Else distributes thousands of meals each year, and this project helped kick-start their efforts for the season. It felt meaningful to know that something we packed today would go on to help real families in our community.

Clean-Up and the Inflatable Challenge

Finally, we began the biggest challenge of the day — cleaning up. The most physically demanding part was taking down the giant bouncing slide/house. This was my first time doing something like this, and I had no idea how much work it would take. First, we had to walk on it, squeeze it, and press out as much air as possible. It took about six or seven of us working together to roll it tightly, while others continued pressing out the leftover air.

Once it was mostly deflated, we rolled it into a large cylinder and I helped strap it tightly so it would stay secure. Then, with the help of several other volunteers, we lifted the heavy roll onto a trailer, where it would be taken away for storage. It was exhausting, but incredibly satisfying to finish the job knowing we had made a real contribution.

Final Reflection

At the end of the day, I realized something important: things that bring joy often require a lot of unseen hard work. The bouncing house brought laughter to so many kids, and the entire MoCo CARES event brought fun and purpose to hundreds of people. Being a volunteer behind the scenes made me feel proud — even if most people didn't see the work we did, I knew it mattered.

This event gave me the chance to connect with my community, work alongside my fellow CYOC teammates, and grow as a person. I learned a lot about teamwork, leadership, patience, and responsibility. Most of all, I discovered how meaningful it is to serve others and be part of something bigger than myself.

I'm honored to be part of CYOC, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to support So What Else in their mission. I look forward to coming back next year — stronger, smarter, and ready to serve in even bigger ways.

Fueled by Spirit, Not Speed Camille Hu

A charity marathon is more than a race; it's a movement of compassion and unity. Each stride represents care, perseverance, and a desire to make the world better. Participants run not just for themselves, but for those who can't. Behind the scenes, there are always people working hard to make the event possible. As a member of the CYOC, I volunteered to help set up at the charity marathon on October 4. It was an amazing experience filled with energy, teamwork, and joy. The event took place early in the morning, and volunteers like me helped set up water stations, hand out food, and organize activities for children. It felt wonderful to be part of something that brought people together for such a meaningful cause.

After most of the runners finished, the area turned into more of a festival atmosphere. There was food, music, and multiple large

bouncing houses for kids. When things slowed down, I couldn't resist joining in the fun. I jumped and played in the bouncing house, laughing like I was a kid again. It was a simple but joyful moment that reminded me volunteering isn't only about helping others, it's also about building community and sharing happiness.

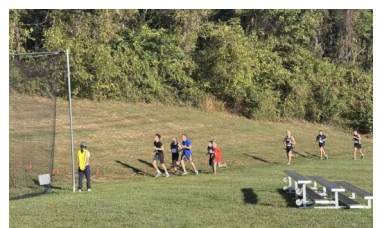
One of the most memorable parts of the day was seeing the smiles on everyone's faces, the runners, the children, and even the other volunteers. Helping at the marathon made me realize how important it is to give our time and energy to causes bigger than ourselves. Even small contributions, like cheering someone on or making sure a child has fun in the bouncing house, can leave a lasting impact. I also learned the value of teamwork, as the event could not have run smoothly without everyone working together. This experience reminded me that volunteering is not just about helping, it's about connecting with people and creating joyful moments that everyone can share.

By the end of the day, I was tired but proud. Volunteering at the charity marathon taught me that even small acts, like handing out water or helping set up games, can make a big difference. I also realized that serving others can be both meaningful and fun. It's an experience I would love to do again.

Behind the Finish Line: My Marathon Volunteer Experience By: Diana H. Zhao

When I volunteered at the charity marathon, I thought it would just be another early morning event. I didn't expect it to be such a fun and inspiring experience. I signed up to help out and earn some service hours, but I ended up learning how powerful teamwork, encouragement, and kindness can be. From setting up the inflatables and helping kids, I learned that helping others can be just as rewarding as running the race itself.

The event started early in the morning. The sky was still gray when



I arrived, but the energy was already bright and loud. CYOC's team was setting up where the marathon would start and helping with the marathon itself. Everyone was smiling and ready to help.

I was assigned to the inflatables station. There were all sorts of inflatables, for example, bouncy houses, and one of the bouncy houses had a slide inside. There was even a small one for the baby/toddlers! The biggest and tallest at the station was the Roblox slide. It looked terrifying at first, but once you go on it, it's a lot of fun. The slide was also the most popular inflatable out of the 4. Some runners even thanked us between gasps for air, which made us feel part of something special. Even though we were a little tired, the excitement of being part of something big made it easy to stay positive.

The event was special because it partnered with CYOC's Help, an organization that supports young people and community service projects. Working with CYOC made the experience even more powerful because we weren't just volunteering alone—we were part of a bigger team working together to make a difference.

Volunteering at the charity marathon with CYOC's help was an experience I'll never forget. It showed me how teamwork and kindness can bring people together for a great cause. I learned that even small actions, like handing out water or cheering someone on, can make a big impact. Most of all, it reminded me that helping others feels just as good as crossing the finish line yourself.