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Prompt #3

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### Life in the Backstretch

In the English dictionary, the word community is defined as a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. It's also defined as a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals. Although both of these definitions are correct, the second definition is the one that defines the backstretch. The backstretch community is known to be a tight-knit community because of the sense of unity, companionship, and acceptance that it brings to our backstretch workers. Having first-hand experience growing up in the backstretch I've had the opportunity to interact with such a unique community, as well as experience the challenges, and benefits that have been brought about.

The backstretch is a unique community compared to others because people value true friendships, family, and happiness. The backstretch's main focus is to provide adequate resources to their workers. Backstretch workers are often minorities and mostly undocumented, therefore, it is important to provide them with easy and accessible resources. For example, we are provided with dental, medical assistance, and laundromats. The ITHA has always fulfilled its mission to accommodate the living of backstretch workers and has also focused on providing resources to children like transportation to school, libraries, summer camp, and school supplies. Our community is considered tight-knit because over the summer it is often seen that neighbors invite others to their cookouts as they listen to music over conversations and sharing laughter amongst each other. Unlike other communities, everyone gets to know each other and result in lifelong friendships. What I mean by this is that everyone who lives in the backstretch knows

each other, there is never an unfamiliar face, it's as if we were all a family. What I like about the backstretch community is that if there is ever someone who just came from a different racetrack, and lacks resources such as transportation we are always there to give them a helping hand. For example, helping them move their personal belongings or taking them to buy their groceries. Although our community is tight-knit and has provided resources that not many others would, there still exists cons.

Having spent 18 years living in the racetrack I've encountered many challenges along the way. One of the biggest challenges that I continue to face is the patronizing racism that the security department offers to the backstretch workers. For as long as I can remember the security department of Arlington Park has always been discriminatory and in nicer words unkind to the people living in their temporary housing units. Due to the language barrier, many of the workers in the security department condescendingly talk to the backstretch workers. I believe that the security department needs to be more compassionate and respectful to the workers because they take advantage of the power that is being granted to them. For example, entering rooms without notice, tossing bedrooms as if our people were prisoners in a cell. Although you see more privacy being granted we still have securities who continue to show patronizing behavior. Another challenge that I experienced growing up, was when I use to live in dorm 2 as a child and had to deal with the unsanitary bathrooms that were shared by hundreds of people daily. At the time, the only issue that I had with this was having to wait for the bathroom until the next morning because I wouldn't want to walk outside by myself at night. As I've gotten older, I've reflected upon this situation and realized how unhealthy of an issue it was for everyone because the bathrooms were open for anyone meaning a man or women could walk into the opposites sex bathroom, you could see others nude when they would come out the showers, and infections

could be transmitted more easily to both adults and children. Another challenge that I faced growing up was spending a lot of time alone because my parents spent their days at the barn. It's as if some trainers didn't acknowledge the fact that their workers had families to attend to. Even though we were provided with resources I do feel that I still missed out on some childhood experiences such as owning a dog to provide comfort when alone because the backstretch does not allow pets.

However, some of the challenges have shaped me into the person I am today. Being an educated first-generation student has allowed me to speak up for myself not only towards the securities at the backstretch, but for any controversial topic, I speak for those who are afraid to speak up and won't allow my people to be silenced. Some of the benefits of growing up in the backstretch are creating lifelong friendships and developing plenty of childhood memories. The ITHA acknowledged that children were being apart from their parents due to their long hours of labor, therefore, they would grant us resources like summer camp, picnics, and physical activity resources like the old volleyball court they use to have, the basketball court, and the soccer field. Growing up in the backstretch has taught me how to be independent, value my education, and become a hard worker. Having the privilege to grow up in such a unique community has allowed me to stand out from hundreds of people who typically live an ordinary life.

Overall, growing up in the backstretch has been a privilege that I take into consideration because of everything that it has offered to my family and me. My childhood could be described as unique compared to others who have experienced life out of the track yet so similar to those who experienced the same lifestyle as I did in the backstretch. The backstretch is considered unique because we treat each other like family rather than just neighbors. As I create my path by

pursuing a career in the medical field, I will always treasure and be grateful for the lessons that have been taught to me as I grew up in the backstretch.