

Impact Through Action

By Caroline Blank

There's nothing worse than feeling like you don't belong. You arrive at a new place that is supposed to be home and you realize you know nothing about anything: the unfamiliar buildings, people, food, and why does everyone talk so funny? With all these ideas swirling through your head, you begin to think that you can't add anything to this strange place.



CCSJ logo.

You can't have any kind of impact when you're living in a place that you know nothing about because you have no authority to praise it or critique it. Is it possible to stop this unproductive cycle of not belonging? The simple—yet often overlooked—answer is community service.

At Loyola, the Center for Community Service and Justice (CCSJ) provides us with an abundance of service opportunities that range from tutoring Spanish to serving meals to neighborhood cleanup. CCSJ aims to "Engage Loyola students

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and faculty to serve, learn and lead for a more just and equitable world," but it does so much more than that ("Center"). When you actively engage in community service, you create unparalleled relationships with other service members and Loyola's community partners. These relationships with genuine, im-

pactful people will follow you throughout your college experience, and will serve as a strong foundation as you create your new world here at Loyola. If you visit [CCSJ's website](#), you'll find a [complete list of community partners](#); you'll be surprised at how

many options you have. If you aren't sure what type of service you're interested in, I highly recommend checking out the Tunbridge

Charter School service-learning track.

When you walk up to Tunbridge's grand, wooden double-doors, you can't help but feel like you are a part of something important.

Venus Okwuka, a Sophomore Evergreen and service-learning participant, described to me her experience at the young charter school: "Working at Tunbridge is refreshing. I like how they treat us like adults. They ask us to be really hands-on. The kids really love you. It doesn't matter if they don't know you. You'll be there for five minutes and they'll already be hugging you." The K-8 charter school, which was founded in 2010, is only a short walk away on York Road, and it is quickly becoming a force to be reckoned with in Baltimore. What makes

Tunbridge unique is that students are chosen based on a lottery system, which means they come from all sorts of socioeconomic backgrounds throughout Baltimore. This supports the idea that Tunbridge is devoted to improving "the intellectual, social/ emotional, and physical health of

[their] students," as opposed to being focused on fiscal rewards ("About").

Speaking of rewards, the benefits you reap when serving at Tunbridge simply cannot be discovered, cultivated, or taught in a

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Professor Guise - Gerrity***

traditional Loyola classroom. According to Nina Guise-Gerrity, an affiliate Philosophy professor at Loyola and service-learning endorser, "Service-learning is the academic experience we cannot give you in the classroom." Sara Doyle, the student coordinator for the Tunbridge service-

learning program, touches on this idea when she describes her personal benefits from working with Tunbridge: "You get to see so many different faces and actually engage, which I think is unique to Loyola." The simple fact of the matter is that service-learning is an extension of your in-class experience, and provides you with a deeper understanding of the knowledge and values your teacher can't convey in a traditional classroom setting.

By directly communicating with real members of the community, I am more knowledgeable and engaged in real-world Baltimore, thus giving me an advantage over my peers. I can intelligently speak on issues like poverty, food deserts, and the struggling public education system because Tunbridge has forced me to see these things in a new

way. Thanks to participating in service early on in my college career, I have become a balanced person, and “that’s why you come to college—to come out well-rounded” (Guise-Gerrity).

Creating well-rounded students is one of Loyola’s main goals and is represented by the core value *cura personalis*. *Cura personalis*

means “care for the whole person,” and this development is evident in everyone who participates in

weekly Tunbridge service:

“When they walk to Tunbridge—

typically in pairs or with others—and then spend time at Tunbridge, and come back from Tunbridge, I see students’ faces and they just feel enlightened.

They feel lighter—just this sense of I did something different today, I made a difference” (Guise-Gerrity). When you can say “I

made a difference,” you can say—without question—“I belong.” In addition to making a difference, students who participate in service are generally happier, I’ve found. Sara explains, “It’s fun to hang out with little kiddos! They bring something else to your day that is so different from the college atmosphere” (Doyle, ’21).



tunbridge public charter school

Tunbridge logo.

Although the intangible benefits such as personal growth and working with the community are arguably the most important benefits you gain from serving at Tunbridge, it is also great addition to your resume and talking point in various interviews and applications you will take part in. Not to

mention, it gives your professors excellent things to say when they write recommendation letters on your behalf: “If a student has gone to Tunbridge, it gives me an automatic narrative, which is pretty gorgeous. An employer knows you come out of college smart, but an employer wants to know what you do. And Tunbridge is something you

do” (Guise-Gerrity). Participating in service once a week throughout the semester is an easy way

to build your resume,

while demonstrating leadership and care for your community.

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If you want to get involved with service and make an impact with your Baltimore community but don't feel as though you have enough time for weekly service, CCSJ offers one-time service opportunities throughout the year. One of the biggest one-time opportunities offered is the York Road Community Days, where Loyola students partner with neighborhood leaders and members of the York Road Partnership, and clean up and beautify gardens, lots, and local businesses. It is an awesome way to meet people and serve with our York Road neighbors to make Baltimore even better, together.

With all this in mind, I must remind you of something: community service is not glamorous. There will be days that you would rather nap than play with rambunctious kids for two hours, and

days where you can't handle one more spilled milk in the rowdy cafeteria. However, every minute you spend at Tunbridge, and with any community partner, is a minute you are a positive force with the local community. It is a minute that lessens the burden of a teacher, a minute that

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gives a student a role model. Serving at Tunbridge gave me purpose; it has made me feel useful in the community—in my community. I wasn't doing anything earth-shattering, but I was doing something that mattered. Tunbridge gave me purpose, and

therefore helped me make this city my home. "'Why Tunbridge?' to me should be 'Why not Tunbridge?' Why not give service?" (Guise-Gerrity).



"About Tunbridge Public Charter School." Afya Inc., accessed 18 Feb. 2019, www.afyabaltimore.org/tunbridge/about/index.

"Center for Community Service and Justice." Mission, Vision, and History - Center for Community Service and Justice - Loyola University Maryland, accessed 18 Feb. 2019, www.loyola.edu/departments/ccsj/about/mission.

Doyle, Sara. Personal Interview. 19 Feb. 2019.

Guise-Gerrity, Professor Nina. Personal Interview. 18 Feb. 2019.

Okwuka, Venus. Personal Interview. 19 Feb. 2019.