

The journey had started. I was extremely uncertain about what to expect for a week long SEND trip to Pennsylvania. Little did I know that I was going on one of the greatest trips of my life. Over the next six days, our group visited a homeless shelter, listened to the stories of many who are marginalized in society, worked with a great Habitat for Humanity organization, and had dinner with the Religious of the Assumption sisters who live in Philadelphia and Lansdale.

This trip opened my eyes to the world around me. After hearing people at Our Daily Bread, a homeless shelter in Philadelphia, discuss the challenges in their lives, I realized that these people are not much different from us; they are just in a different situation and need support. Working with Habitat was a hard type of work but still a very rewarding experience. Regardless of how dirty or tired our group was after the day, the overall feeling of knowing that our group made a difference was great. At the end of two of our service days with Habitat, our group set off to have dinner with the sisters. These heartwarming sisters were some of the nicest people I have ever met; they were so open to learning about everyone. They were curious to hear each of our individual stories and to find out what motivated us to travel to Pennsylvania. The sisters accepted us with open arms in a home away from home, and I will never forget the laughs we shared during dinner. I will always remember one of the sisters asking our group, “Did everyone find it hard to give up your spring break..?” Before she even finished her question, our entire group said an emphatic “NO.”

I am not afraid to say the SEND Pennsylvania trip changed my life. I am sure my group would agree, as well as anyone who went on a SEND trip this year or in the past. SEND trips encourage students to put others in the center of their focus and to realize that each person is more than just a face, that each person has a unique story. In Pennsylvania, I realized that helping others carry their burdens in life is an extremely fulfilling sensation.

Not only was this a great trip, but every activity we took a part in was connected. We witnessed how every action done with love has deep meaning. From hearing the stories of those in the

homeless shelter, to working with Habitat, to visiting the Religious of the Assumption sisters, we realized putting love into action brings together community. I have never had a trip in which I saw everything had a clear purpose. As we completed these activities, our group recognized that the hearts of these communities were all interconnected and all shared the same goals: to help others and to give everyone an equal opportunity for a good life. By putting our faith into action through service, we discovered that a committed group of college students can make a huge difference.

This trip has allowed me to realize the importance of helping others who are not as fortunate as I am. This service is not hard labor of any kind, but it is an act of love that is extended to every person you encounter. This experience has awakened me to knowing that everything in life has a purpose or a greater meaning that many people overlook. From my week with my SEND group, I know I can be myself, enjoy life and still make a difference in other's lives.

This trip is also *not* a one-time experience; it is much more than that. Little did I know, before the trip, I walked by half of my group on a daily basis. Now, seeing them brightens my day. This journey extends far beyond one week of service. This is not only a chance to meet and serve others, but an opportunity to become a close family. Each person on SEND PA has changed my life in one way or another, along with our two leaders who were great models of leadership and faith.

A SEND trip is *not just* a trip; it is an experience. Will I participate again in SEND? Absolutely. Having another group of people I can call a family is truly a blessing (much love, love to the SEND PA group). Being a first year student and being able to meet so many amazing people through the SEND experience (as well as other Campus Ministry activities like the START 1 retreats) is something I will always remember. If you are looking for a new experience you will never forget, sign up for a SEND trip next year or look into other Campus Ministry programs. Ask me, or anyone else who has been on a SEND trip and you will probably get a similar response. If you see an uplifted person who is always smiling while walking around campus, ask this person about their SEND experience. I am sure they will greet you with a smile and share a story that reminds us all that everything in life has a deeper meaning.