

# RAYS OF SUNSHINE

SUMMER NEWSLETTER-JULY 29, 2005

COMMUNITY SERVICE COURIER

## A GRADUATE'S WORDS OF WISDOM *BY- CHRISSY KOWALSKI*

Wow, I am a Villanova Alumni...I feel so old. But now that I have a very expensive piece of paper that tells me that I have accomplished something, let me offer you a few words of wisdom about Rays of Sunshine...

**SIGN UP FOR DIFFERENT TRIPS.** It's easy to get really involved with one group, but try your best to experience a variety of activities. In the end, you should pick the one you like best, but you have to know what's out there.

**GO REGULARLY.** I know that this sounds like a very parental thing to say, but it means a lot to the people who you are visiting with when you show up all the time. It's definitely easy to get caught up when you have a test to study for or a paper to write, but these trips are a great way to relax and take a break from school business.

**GET INVOLVED.** It's not enough to just show up. You have to really get involved. If you have ideas, bring them to your team leader or to Lori. The agencies would love to have us bring in activities—storybooks, arts & crafts projects, whatever you can think of.

In my four years at Villanova, nothing made me feel better than seeing a warm smile or receiving a big hug from one of the many individuals I met through Rays of Sunshine. I loved every moment I spent with the children, adults, and my fellow Villanovans. Knowing that I will not have the opportunity to participate regularly in this organization in the fall is certainly disappointing, but the memories that I am bringing with me will last a lifetime. So thanks, Rays of Sunshine, for all of the wonderful memories!



*Senior Laura Malone works with children from St. Phils.*

## THE POWER OF VOLUNTEERISM *BY- VANESSA PRALLE*

Upon mentioning that I'm involved with facets of community service, sometimes I'll receive a suspicious arched eyebrow accompanied by the quintessential inquiry of, "So, what did you do?" as though most community service is no longer voluntary- instead a euphemism for punishment.

In response I silently reply, "I've gotten to do everything."

For me, it was through friends that I first began to volunteer. A hiatus from what can be at times the stifling materialism of

school to spending time, talking and listening to people from different walks of life. The expression, "No man is an island" resonates deeply when spending time with those in need. I realize more and more how life is simply luck of the draw in a lottery; the distribution of health, resources, love and care is as random as the notion of one's very existence.

Two years ago, I volunteered once a week at a home for physically and mentally disabled children. Majority of the

activities entailed reading, talking and playing with the children in their bedrooms or in either of the massive gender-divided playrooms. As though kings and queens visiting from a distant land, we always received displays of great enthusiasm; one boy took to clapping his hands in a frenzy until acknowledged and another girl just wanted her hair combed while perusing prom dresses in teen magazines. Many of the children appeared to be far younger than they actually were, due to atrophy of the limbs from disability and lack of use. Some suffered from incurable genetic illnesses and disabilities, requiring daily feedings from tubes; others were born to substance-abusing mothers, and many had neurological damage and diseases affecting the motor skills and mental capabilities. Each child was provided

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with his or her own bed, adorned with wall decorations including personal touches and pictures of family members and friends.

One girl always caught my attention. Around the time I first began visiting, her immigrant parents dropped a scared and mistrusting child off at the home. Unable to communicate effectively in English, her exasperated mother squeezed gold bangles on her daughter’s wrists, kissed her and abruptly left. For weeks, I was informed, the girl banged her head on her cot and spat up any food placed in her mouth. Her cocoa-flecked black eyes showed no signs of recognition or communication. The

staff was dubious of her survival.

Our visits with her usually consisted of rubbing her back or tickling her toes. One evening in particular, three volunteers and I made our routine trip over to our solitary friend’s cot, only to be astounded when she dazzled us with a radiant smile. As time progressed, the child once classified under the “failure to survive” category was hardly recognizable in the jubilant little girl who would giggle incessantly upon our arrival and loved having her bangle-clad arms swung around as we played pee-a-boo.

The spirit of volunteering, I came to understand, is not

merely encapsulated by a romanticized version of the heroic Mother Theresa cliché, nor as the polar opposite avenue for punishment; instead community service forces you to appreciate little wonders, such as the miraculous little girl who came back to life. Although my time spent with her barely amounted to an hour a week, I’ve never experienced such a sense of fulfillment or happiness as when she greeted us with her toothy grin and dancing eyes after witnessing what she had been before.

YOU’RE INVITED!!!!

WHAT- Welcome Back BBQ

WHERE- Sheehan Beach

WHEN- Wed, Aug. 31- 5:00-7:00 p.m.

WHAT TO BRING- Yourself and a Friend

Please email lori.blake@villanova.edu to donate a meal from your meal plan

UPCOMING EVENTS:

(Wed) August 31, 5pm-7pm- Welcome Back BBQ- Sheehan Beach

(Wed) August 31, 7pm.-9pm- Activities Forum/Recruitment- Pavilion

(Sat) October 29, 4pm- Rays Night- NEW EVENT THIS YEAR! We’re bringing kids over the age of 12 to campus for a BBQ and VU Football Game.

SIGN UPS FOR FALL SEMESTER VOLUNTEER TRIPS:

Please go to www.villanova.edu/sunshine to fill out the RETURNER’S Application.

Once that is completed, stop by Dougherty 215 to sign up for your trips.



DEEP THOUGHTS FROM OUR FEARLESS LEADER... BY- ERIN LEMBO

Over the course of the last school year we saw Project Sunshine grow and expand into the larger and more diverse organization we now call Rays of Sunshine. In its very first year the student executive committee was able to accomplish quite a bit, but there is even more in store for the 2005-2006 year. Although after school tutoring and mentoring programs will still be the primary form of committed weekly outreach, we are hoping to add a lot of new opportunities to work with other

types of service organizations that need our help. Part of the Rays of Sunshine program includes “once and done” Saturday service opportunities. Because space is limited and scheduling sometimes conflicts with classes on campus many students like to get involved on the weekends or whenever they have a free afternoon or two. This year there will be more one day opportunities to volunteer with Rays of Sunshine and even take a leadership role in some of these events. Our organization is open to all stu-

dents and majors, and we are always looking for new volunteers who want to get involved. Joining Rays of Sunshine is a great way to meet new people and spend time serving the community in all sorts of ways. Whether you are a returning volunteer or newcomer to the organization, look for us at the activities forum in the fall and stay posted for more information.