The morning of February 6, 2019 started like that of any other cold, winter morning. The air was frigid, the wind was blowing, and the sky was grey. I started my day like I do most Wednesdays: getting up, dressed, and out the door to drive myself to school for Social Action.

The Social Action program at Stone Ridge is our equivalent to service hours, except it happens every other Wednesday during school hours.

My group and I headed to the Catholic Charities Center in Silver Spring.

I was not completely sure what my day was going to look like because every trip to the center involved a different activity. Some days, we organized the maternity closet to make it easier for new and expecting mothers to find items for their babies. Other days, we filed paperwork for the dental clinic. While these tasks might seem mundane to some, the knowledge that my small contribution helped alleviate some stress from someone’s life brightened my day.

The task that has particularly stuck with me is the one I performed on February 6 when I worked in the food pantry.

I began my work in the food pantry by helping to restock the shelves. I learned that a significant portion of the food Catholic Charities receives comes from school food drives. This fact struck me because this was the first time I saw the indirect service my high school does, such as donating food to food drives, having a direct impact on someone’s life.

Food drives have always eluded my memory until the night before the drive ended. I would either forget to go to the store and buy something to donate or would raid my pantry for some cans to donate without being entirely conscious of what I was doing. I used to get the most out my service when interacting with other people such as working in shelters, but now I have realized that same feeling can be obtained through doing something that does not have an immediate or direct impact on my life. I have realized that something that does not seem important to me can make a big difference in someone else’s life. This experience has taught me to approach every opportunity consciously and to be aware of the impact, however small, my action could have on another person’s life.

My favorite kind of service involves face-to-face interaction with others. My experience serving at the food pantry offered me this ability to communicate with the clients firsthand as well as the unique opportunity to see the impact of something that seems small, like a school food drive, can have on a person’s life.

Every Social Action experience has shown me the lasting effects that strangers can have in each other’s lives and just how far a small, kind act can go.
For students who attend Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart in Bethesda, service is not about changing the world but about laying the foundation and tending the change for future generations to water and cultivate.

Stone Ridge participates in this ideal every Wednesday as students travel to various locations in the Washington metropolitan area, serving the greater community and helping others with the inspiration of St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, who founded the Society of the Sacred Heart in France, and St. Philippine Duchesne, who brought the Sacred Heart order to the United States, carried close to their hearts.

The morning starts with a presentation in which all Upper School students learn about the topic for the day. Then, girls depart on their way to serve the community with their minds open, hands ready to serve, and hearts filled with a contagious love for helping everyone they come across. After students get back from their day of service, they gather in small groups and reflect on the work they have done and the possibility of what more could be done in the future to help to create a positive impact in the community. At the end of the day, the students come back together to reflect on their experiences in small groups.

As a reflection leader myself, I believe this time also allows students to self-reflect on the work they have done and to think to themselves, “Did I make someone smile today? Or did I make someone laugh who might have been having a bad day?” It is not about the reward of doing service, but the opportunities it creates for members of the community who are struggling or in need. St. Madeleine Sophie Barat famously said, “Be humble, be simple, and bring joy to others.” This certainly is echoed throughout the entire mission of the Social Action program and Goal Three of the Sacred Heart Schools around the globe, “a social awareness that impels to action.” This social awareness can be easy and straightforward, or it can be radical.

Stone Ridge School’s Social Action program gives people the opportunity to practice advocacy with respect and empathy for all the lives students touch. It gives students the opportunity to spark joy in someone else’s life and to be inspired to live out a life of service, love, and compassion for all God’s children. The special connection and gift of Social Action inspires students to join in service outside of the Stone Ridge community with their families, youth groups, friends, or even strangers because we were all strangers once in the eyes of our peers.

"Service is not about changing the world but about laying the foundation and tending the change for future generations to water and cultivate."
An Unexpected Bond

by Christina DeNovio

I walked into the cafeteria on a Saturday morning in the middle of January. Immediately I saw dozens of young families sitting together and eating breakfast. They laughed and spoke rapidly in Spanish. Even though I too have grown up speaking Spanish, the community was somewhat foreign to me.

My school advisor had recommended that I apply to tutor for the Latino Student Fund. I agreed and was excited to start working with the kids. I had been a camp counselor for three summers and was well prepared to interact with children in an educational setting.

After I checked in, I took a seat and started talking with another tutor. He was a student at Georgetown University who had lived in China his entire life. He was struck by how young I was (I was in the middle of my 10th grade year) and told me that he had not really thought about community service until later in high school. We talked about school in China and how it was different from here. During this time, each tutor was being paired up with a student.

Soon enough, LSF’s Programs Coordinator brought over the girl I would be working with.

“This is Pamela. She’s in the fifth grade,” she introduced the girl. Pamela waved shyly and sat down next to me.

I immediately started asking her questions to try to make her more comfortable through talking. We talked about her school and her family. Pamela’s mother was there getting tutoring as well, since LSF offers English language classes and prepares adults for job interviews and the workforce. Her older sister was also working with another tutor across the cafeteria. I asked where her family was from originally, and we bonded over the fact that we both had Peruvian roots.

Eventually, we got started on the practice work. I was amazed by how quickly she worked. The fifth grade level worksheets seemed almost too easy for her. I helped her whenever she got stuck, but that was very rare. She flew through them so fast that we had time to play hangman and tic tac toe when all the other students were still doing math problems.

Every week for the next four months we repeated this routine. She somehow got even quicker, and I took note of an improvement in her reading and math abilities.

When official game time came, Pamela would invite her best friend, Chica, her older sister, and their tutors over to play Uno. We all played competitively; each of us took the game very seriously. We probably had the loudest table as the girls bantered over who said “Uno” first.

As May came, I was sad to leave Pamela. Fortunately, she wrote me a heartfelt note, explaining how lucky I was to have gotten her as a student. She later told me how much she loved having me as a tutor, and I told her that she was the most fun ten-year-old I had ever met.

I realized I had become part of a community. The group of people I felt so different from, I had somehow ended up clicking so well with. The experience taught me many lessons about myself and serving others and being a role model, but most importantly I learned that there was no “one” type of community for me but instead several that I can become a part of.

“I realized I had become part of a community. The group of people I felt so different from, I had somehow ended up clicking so well with.”
Upcoming Events

Want to learn more about homelessness in D.C.?

Join us on Saturday, June 1 at our New York Ave Men’s Shelter to learn more about the reality of homelessness in DC – see a new environment, learn about a typical day at the shelter, ask questions – and help us clean and maintain the shelter. All supplies will be provided; volunteers should bring work gloves if available.

For more information and to sign up go to www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/volunteercalendar

Grab a group of friends and join us on one of our Sandwich Brigades. Help us serve a meal to those on the streets in the area surrounding Catholic Charities’ office in Penn Quarter. The experience will begin with prayer, reflection, and an opportunity to learn more about the needs and characteristics of those people experiencing homelessness.

For more information and to set up an event contact Claire Sanfilippo at Claire.sanfilippo@cc-dc.org

Interested in food justice?

Join us on Saturdays May 18, June 15 and June 22 at our SHARE food warehouse. Thousands of families count on our SHARE food program each month for affordable, nutritious groceries that are sold through volunteer-run locations throughout the Washington metropolitan area. Help us bag dry food items in preparation for our monthly food distribution. Grab a group of friends and join us for an experience that is fun and rewarding while making a difference in your community.

For more information and to sign up go to: www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/volunteercalendar/

Once a month the Capital Area Food Bank’s Mobile Market comes to the Catholic Charities Center. Within 3 hours, 8,000+ pounds of free, fresh produce is distributed to about 250 low-income individuals and families in Montgomery County. We rely on the help of volunteers to make this possible! Volunteers collect client data, hand out numbers, distribute food, and assist with set up and clean up. Activities will include lifting and bending.

For more information and to sign up go to: www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/volunteercalendar/

Want to support returning citizens and recently arrived immigrant children?

Get involved by creating care packs that will help meet a very real need in the lives of those we serve. Gather your group of friends, your church group, your neighbors, or your family to purchase supplies and create a set of care packs at a date and location of your choice.

For more information visit: www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/care-packages/

Volunteer with St. Maria's Meals!

The Saint Maria’s Meals Program was created in order to meet the needs of individuals and families by providing a warm and nutritious meal. Every Wednesday night outside the Catholic Charities Hickey Center, Saint Maria’s Meals feeds men and women in need, many of whom experience homelessness.

Please note volunteers under 18 years of age must be accompanied by an adult.

For more information and to sign up go to: www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/volunteercalendar/

Volunteer with our Bike Brigade!

Bike Brigade Volunteers will ride 1 of 2 adult tricycles to deliver meals to men and women living in the streets close by to the Catholic Charities Hickey Center located downtown at 924 G Street NW. This role will help us to expand our outreach to those individuals living on the streets who are hungry and to share with them the other services they can access at Catholic Charities.

Volunteers must be 18 years of age or older and be comfortable riding a tricycle in downtown DC.

For more information and to sign up go to: www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/volunteercalendar/
To submit an article for the third edition:

Email submissions as a Word document to Claire.sanfilippo@cc-dc.org by September 20th. Subject line of email should read “Catholic Charities Newsletter Submission.” In the body of the email provide a short bio including your name, school, year, where you like to serve, and a fun fact. Pictures are also encouraged!

About the Authors

Jamison Rodgers

Jamison is a junior at Stone Ridge in Bethesda. She enjoys volunteering at Harriet Tubman Shelter with her friends from her journalism class at Stone Ridge. She also volunteers at Father McKenna Center. Fun Fact: Jamison has traveled to 30 out of 50 states!

Samantha Crane

Samantha Crane is a junior at Stone Ridge in Bethesda. She enjoys volunteering at So Others Might Eat and Harriet Tubman Women’s Shelter. In her spare time Samantha loves hiking with her family and playing basketball for her school.

Christina DeNovio

Christina attends Holton-Arms. She has previously volunteered at Catholic Charities last summer and plans on continuing to dedicate her free time there again this summer. She also volunteers at the Latino Student Fund.