

***A World of Hope:
Reflections On My First JusticeworX Experience***
Doug Schmidt

When I entered the beautiful facility at the St. Raphaela Center in Haverford, Pennsylvania, I wasn't quite sure why the counselors were acting so strange. They seemed bubbly and overjoyed, and at first, I was skeptical. How was I going to survive in a new environment with around 15 kids I had never met? But slowly and surely, with the help of a great faculty, we were eased into the discomfort of the reality that so many people around the world face every day. First, we were told of the poverty and desperation of immigrants and the destitute, but then we were shown firsthand at our work sites.

My work group helped the Philadelphia Horticultural Society – weeding and planting and harvesting within urban gardens as part of the Philly Green Project. The gardens were in varying states of advancement, but each was helping to beautify the neighborhood and strengthen the ties within the community. Each day, we could count on the smiling face of Nic, a 26 year-old earth enthusiast. Nic lived a life of sacrifice without many of the amenities we take for granted, yet he smiled and laughed just as much as we did.



As the days progressed, work became more purposeful and our group became more closely knit. Together, we had seen some of the toughest neighborhoods in Philadelphia. The most exciting thing for me to witness was the change in myself and in the people around me during our nighttime sessions. When we talked about

the gifts and challenges each day presented, there were laughs and even tears. Our sense of what is important in our lives was being ripped away and quickly was replaced with a more loving reality. JusticeworX showed me in only a week's time what it really means to lead a Catholic life, to value the power and strength of my relationships with my friends and with God, and most of all, to "love radically."

On our final night at the Philadelphia Art Museum steps, under the glowing light of the Philadelphia skyline, we sang our song of action and discussed the importance of maintaining action. At this point, I knew why the counselors were so overjoyed. They had made a choice long ago that they were going to ignore all meaningless distractions that life has to offer in an effort to promote action amongst themselves and in others. When I returned home to a new school year, I was inspired. I wrote letters of appreciation to undervalued immigrant employees in my workplace, and made an effort to include more friends into my life. If there's one thing I learned from JusticeworX about taking action, it's that nobody really expects anything from us, but everything truly depends on us. I would urge you to allow JusticeworX to open your eyes to a world of hope, and I hope that you answer the call.

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