

Learning More Than One Language of Love: Spring Break Service

Kim Patterson

As I scoured the internet for possible service opportunities to fill my week of spring break, I came across the Center for FaithJustice and thought “Why not?” After all, I had never been to New Jersey. I sent an e-mail asking if CFJ had any available service opportunities to accommodate me. That e-mail was the beginning of a journey of learning about myself, the needs of an underserved population, and my relationship with God.

When I arrived at the Center for FaithJustice, I had already been an avid volunteer. Starting when I was a little girl, most of my experience had been with children, especially those stricken with cancer. My week of service with CFJ, however, would provide a broadening experience, as my time was divided between [Enable](#), which assists persons with developmental disabilities, and the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen ([TASK](#)), which, I came to find out, was much more than a soup kitchen. They serve their clients in a plethora of ways such as tutoring, music making, and art. Through TASK I met a woman named Sue, who told me her life story and left a unfading imprint on my heart.

During my time at Enable, I helped with crafts, cooking, and activities for the mentally disabled clients. After the first day at Enable, I felt discouraged and lost. I was forced out of my comfortable little world, within which everyone communicated in the same manner. I didn’t know how to serve these people and knew that I wasn’t achieving much success with my current strategy. After speaking with CFJ’s Mary Carlson and Widian Nicola that night about my experience, I felt empowered to try a new approach the next day. I spent the night journaling about incorporating more than one “language of love.” The next day at Enable was one of the greatest experiences I have had in my twenty years of life. God’s presence at the day program was astounding. I noticed the little things that I may have neglected the day before. I appreciated being present with these wonderful individuals and learned as much as I could from them. The small acts of love, such as a hug, high-five, or smile meant so much.



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Looking back, I realize that my service was really an opportunity to learn. And the lessons were many. Learn to be appreciative; to love in a new way; to find meaning in the little things of life; to be a rockstar in a band at TASK; to genuinely care for the people around me; to be fully present and attentive; to embrace being outside of my comfort zone; to give more than I receive; to live simply; to find happiness and joy in any situation. The lessons I learned during this one week of service have stayed with me. I will not forget the faces of the individuals who taught me these lessons, simply by being who God made them.

Now, a few months removed from my week in New Jersey, it's easy to feel separated from the people who strongly impacted me during my service week (even as much as I resist this feeling). It feels like my world is completely divided from the people from whom I learned so much, but being aware of this has given me motivation to seek out the poor in my day to day life. I learned on my trip that there are many kinds of poor. I had tended to think of the economically poor, and while this poverty is very real, I now understand that to be poor means to be lacking something. The poor in spirit, the poor in optimism, the poor in faith, poor in decision making, poor in relationships: these kinds of poor surround me day to day. Thanks to the Center for FaithJustice, this realization has become clear to me. It has been my link back to the clients at Enable and TASK.

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