

MLK Day of Service

Madonna joins hands with Phoenix Academy on the MLK Day of Service

By: Kayla Daugherty

Email: intern.service@madonna.edu

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Congress deemed Martin Luther King Jr. Day a national day of service in 1994. Since then, every third Monday of January is nationally reserved for service. Through this service day, individuals can join with their communities to strengthen, empower and mobilize those in need. Madonna University honored this day by participating in the day of service in Detroit Mich., with the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service mainly led by AmeriCorps.

Madonna currently has a partnership with Phoenix Academy in which first-year students from Madonna encourage 8th grade students to graduate high school and attend college. They do this by traveling to Detroit and spending time in the class rooms before the Phoenix kids come visit Madonna for a day.

"We are small but we are hardy!"

This is how Chris Benson described the Madonna group of volunteers when they showed up to Phoenix Multicultural Academy in Detroit, on January 16, 2012.

At the school on Monday, the mission for the day was to clean out the boys and girls locker rooms which were used as a poorly utilized storage space for the past ten years.

Once the locker rooms are cleaned, the hope is that they can be returned to a functioning state. That way, students facing hardships that would otherwise not have access to running water can shower and get ready for school.

Benson, Madonna's Dean of the First-Year Experience, was one of the numerous volunteers that showed up at the MLK Jr. Day of Service. Joining Benson at the elementary-middle school from Madonna was Nicole Hier, a Sociology major and Sharrona Johnson, who studies Sign Language Interpretation.

Martinez, Director of Madonna's Office of Service-Learning knows that it is important to be part of something bigger than yourself.

"It's important when you realize individually we have a lot to give," said Martinez, "and learn collectively the power of the group."

Of the several locations in Detroit, the majority of Madonna students went to the Phoenix elementary-middle school. Volunteers were greeted by members of AmeriCorps, and the principal of the school, Alexander Cintron. He has high hopes for the school as well as the community as a whole.

"As people," said Cintron, "and as human beings we can help each other, make the world a better place, and I think that's why we are here."

Before cleaning the locker rooms out at the school, the representative for the 12th district of Detroit, Rashida Tlaib, spoke with other volunteers. Tlaib graduated from Phoenix when it was Wilson school and has noticed many changes since she left. The most significant change was the number of students graduating. She shared a story about how she was asked to speak at the eighth grade graduation two years ago.

"When I came to speak to the middle school graduates, I was super excited!" said Tlaib, "I walk in the room and saw that only 14 of the kids were graduating. I actually thought it was the honors class and it

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was a special ceremony for them. And it wasn't. It was really sad because when I graduated it was in the same room. And there were 100 plus kids graduating and going to high school."

This experience is a reminder of how the school has been struggling. Currently AmeriCorps team members are actively working on assisting the Cintron improve the school both ascetically and academically. By making the locker rooms functional, students are guaranteed to have their basic need of water met. When they have to worry less about meeting their basic needs, the kids can focus more on exceling in school. Within 2 hours, both the girls and boys locker rooms were empty. Hundreds of books, dozens of chairs and numerous tables filled the once empty auditorium.

Feeling quite accomplished at cleaning out the locker room ahead of schedule, the Madonna students returned to school. One of the Madonna students who worked the school site, Sharrona Johnson, wanted only one thing at the end of the day.

"I wish I could have seen the kid's faces," said Johnson, "when they saw the empty locker rooms."