Georgia Reflections 2014-2015

3/8/2015

Debi S.- Administrator

We had a fun trip to GA over the weekend. I’m enjoying this opportunity to get to know the students, as I didn’t know most of them before the trip (aside from a couple of meetings, of course). The welcome to GA by Fuller Center board member and Charles, the youth pastor at the church where we’re staying has been so warm. Not to be trite, but it seems like what they say about southern hospitality is true. While we were starting work at the Fuller Center office today, they asked us what experiences that we wanted to have whenever we met Kirk and Thad. While working with them and with the group, I’m really enjoying the conversations. Off all our experiences meeting Kirk and Thad has helped me learn so much. They have patiently answered questions about equipment and tasks as we organized and moved on to other projects.

Hearing their experiences about the Habitat/Fuller split as well as about the needs of the communities provided even more understanding about why here to serve. However, learning about their lives and how they both landed here were equally challenging. You see, in their stories, they cause me to examine how I can be caring and doing more to help other people whenever I’m at home. Speaking of home, we went to a homeschool co-op chess class tonight with Kirk. A nine year old beat me, and that is why it’s like home. I told them today they’re just like my nephew who are a little older, but also are home schooled and go to co-op with a smile. My nephew wanted to know today if these boys had prepared me to challenge him to chess again. No! I would still laugh at not understanding the strategy as I did tonight. Looking forward to the rest of the week and to more conversations!

P.S. It was cute when the boys said “Yes, ma’am” to us, I don’t see that here.

3/10/2015

Mackenzie J.-

Day two was another fantastic day! We started out at the office again, but this time with a devotion with Kirk. It was really rewarding to hear him speak about his passion and commitment. Some people continue working on putting a floor in the back room, and others kept organizing and painting. For lunch, we went to Monroe’s Hot Dog Place to have slaw dogs, combo dogs, and chili dogs. After that we walked down to the Habitat for Humanity Global Village. It’s sort of a park that you walk through and you pass between a recreations of a shantytown. The experience was very impactful and gave a more accurate representation of the extreme poverty that exists, but we don’t necessarily see every day. I think it is very easy for me to be caught up in my own daily issues and the little things that inconvenience me, and I often forget putting my experience into perspective. The Global Village really took me out of that. For me, realizing my problems and concerns are not manly consequential importance helps me and allows me to take some pressure off myself. We passed the rest of the day working in the office, starting cleanup of paint on the floors, organizing tools, and painting ceiling tiles. Towards the end of the day, we all started to run out of things to do and we kept ourselves busy and happy.

It was really impactful at the end of the day to see Thad enter the small room that David, Eddie, and a couple others worked on, and have him say that he had never been able to go in there before, and now he could. I was so grateful for the day and everything I got to help with.

For dinner, we went to a church group with Charles to have dinner and sit in on a worship. We all shared fried okra, green beans, fried chicken, and mac and cheese, and shared with each other about our lives and experiences in Americus. It was really nice to get a perspective on things from some people our age. I thought it was really interesting that people kept on praising us for “giving up” our spring break for service, when I feel like I’m gaining so much by being here.

Colleen B. –

Today is Wednesday, March 11, 2015. We started the morning with breakfast made by Linda Lee and Frank. Then we went to the office to finish up work there, which meant painting and hanging the ceiling tiles, shop vacuuming, and putting away the rest of the tools. It was nice to see the place clean after we messed it up. I’m glad I could make a place that will be useful to the community and help grow. We then went to the home to start work there. Had met us out at the home to ensure that we did the work correctly. We spent the whole day painting. First there was primer that went up in the entire house. Everyone got busy painting the day away. People were on ladders edging the corners, while others were rolling the walls. The sun was shining so we took our lunch break outside on the lawn. With our generic cookie creams, aka Oreos, we played the minute to win it Oreo eating competition, where you have to lay on the ground and eat an Oreo that is placed on your forehead. I won in less than 10 seconds, don’t like anyone tell you otherwise! Then the primer was done drying so it was the time for colors to go up. Brown paint went in the living room, kitchen, and hallway. Silver-y blue went into the bedrooms except for the girls room, which was purple. The place transformed from white walls to a colorful home. Dinner was served at the Methodist Church. It was delicious homemade chili, cornbread, baked potato and salad. Then we had service with the youth group, which was singing and a service by Charles. It was nice to see the youth so engaged, Overall it was a great day! “Happy to be alive!”

3/13/2015

Tyler R.-

I thought today was a great day! I really enjoyed reading the stories to the students at the elementary school. Natalie and I were partnered up. In the first room, I read Batholomew Cubbins and the Oobleck. I had a lot of fun doing different voices and hand motions, asking the students questions, and seeing their genuine excitement and interest in the stories. Natalie also did a very good job reading her story, the ABC book by Dr. Seuss and the Scary Squirrel. It was a lot of fun driving off to the first location with David, Eddie, Alex, and Katie M. and singing One Direction and Taylor Swift. We also had some nice discussion about the trip and getting to meet one another. Also, I got to hear Katie M. and David sing which was great.

Later in the day, we got newspapers from the local paper with our picture on the front page. I felt that this was a nice way to commiserate our time here in Americus.

After that, we went to Koinonia Farm and met some workers on the farm. Colleen, Debi and I talked to a novice worker, an intern, and a long-time volunteer who was married to the director. It was interesting hearing their stories. They were all very much laid back and easy going.

In the car afterwards, David and I had a very nice conversation about service trips. We also talked about how we hope everyone can remain friends, even after the trip is over. During the day we also went to Plains, GA, the POW/MIA museum and Pat’s for dinner. We got to spend a lot of time with Jody and Judy, who are fantastic people. It was a pleasure getting to meet them. I had some great conversations with Judy at Pat’s. We talked about concerts, math, and problem solving… All things I love!

For the reflection today, we did an activity where people tapped on the shoulder of people who indicate if that was kind to them, inspired them, mad them laugh, etc. Although I was not a part of the circle, I really enjoyed getting to see the joy and satisfaction everyone received. It created a very positive atmosphere. I almost wish I could have shared how I felt about everyone, so instead I will try to talk to everyone about it individually. As I am writing this, a lot of people are playing Egyptian Ratscrew and are so tired, they are giggling with giddiness. It’s very entertaining. I’m happy that everyone is having a lot of fun with each other. I know it will be a fun ride home, but it will be sad to have to leave everyone.

Tuesday

Stephanie M.-

Second day of service! While also being still exhausted from yesterday’s work, our excitement, motivation, and momentum seems to have increased exponentially. Tuesday (today) was extremely busy: we continued organizing the tool library from the last minute trailer of yesterday evening, continued to paint the ceiling blocks and trim, and continued whatever mystrerious loud project that Thad and the boys were working on (saws and sledgehammers were involved). I was very happy to see the “completed” tool library and I was SO excited to have a chance to paint the ceilings (only got one drip of paint on my shirt!!) The work day ended on an overall “chill” note as we all realized our exhaustion and accomplishments.

It was been great to get involved with the local culture of Americus, Georgia. We ate lunch at a local restaurant called Monroe’s Hot Dogs (“The best dog ever eaten by man”). We also went back to our favorite coffee shop from yesterday that Kirk showed us. One of the most unexpected parts of the week so far was going to Habitat for Humanity’s Global Village where they show examples of the houses they build in other countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia in comparison to those here. While it gave us all some mixed and complicated feelings and thoughts, it showed the international side of poverty and how poverty means different things in different places based on culture and shifted some perspectives on poverty both home and abroad.

Back at the worksite after lunch, Katie and I had the opportunity to join Kirk on an excursion to Koinonia Farm, an important part of the culture surrounding Americus, the Fuller Center, and Habitat for Humanity. The whole group will be touring the farm on Friday but this sneak preview was very exciting and gave us the opportunity to ask Kirk some questions and more importantly, be the first to meet the farm dogs! We got acquainted with some of the farm workers and left with two huge bags of Koinonia chocolate (in addition to fresh gingersnap cookies that were still warm!!) as well as an understanding of the significance the farm as, its history and the future of the farm.

We ate dinner with some college students at a local college and then joined them for their church service, which was something we all weren’t particularly sure what to expect from. I thought It was a bit different from any service I’ve ever been to but I was able to take away something new and relevant to my life as well as a content for the local significance of religion in the area and the South in general.

I’ve been struck by the overwhelming gratitude shown from Pastor Charles and Kirk and also everyone we’ve met in the community. So many have said how wonderful it is that we would give up our spring break, whereas I am only glad to be here and don’t particularly see this as “service”. Regardless, the interaction and immersion we’ve had in Americus has broadened my understanding of both their culture and has given me insight into the culture that I feel as though I’ve missed in Carlisle or even my hometown. Everyone has been so incredibly welcoming- I don’t think I want this week to end!

Goal for tomorrow: POWER TOOLS

3/11/2015

Sydney C.-

It’s Wednesday. Today was the first day on the house worksite- “the Lewis House”. This house was built from scratch as opposed to renovating an already existing house that is dilapidated. Before heading to the house, we cleaned the Fuller Center office. All the tiles were in (freshly painted!) the tool library was organized and some new flooring was installed. It was amazing to see the progress we made in just two days. At the beginning of Monday, it was overwhelming to see all that had to be done. However, I was so impressed by the enthusiasm and hard work everyone put in. We all had different jobs so it was neat to see the progress of everyone else come into fusion.

We moved to the house around 10am after the drywall was up. We all worked on painting. It was actually really nice to all be working on the same project. There was a sense of comradery, all working together. I got to talk to people I hadn’t really talked/worked with in previous days. We were all so motivated. We primed and painted the entire interior of the house. We still have some top coats of the painting to be done. Painting was oddly meditative. Also, it gave us an opportunity to have deep conversations with all our peers. Thad helped us with the painting with his infectious humor. It was an exhausting day but very worthwhile. We got so much done!

We had dinner with the church people we were staying with. The congregation was very welcoming and provided us with a nice meal. We then went to a youth service. I met a girl who lives at a local center of girls. Her mother in in jail. I really felt the energy during the worship portion of the service. I think it is so awesome that all of the kids of many backgrounds can come to a safe space to be together and come away from whatever hardships they have be going through. Meeting the girls from the Methodist home made me realize how wonderful it is that no matter your beliefs or lack of belief system, this church and Christian community provides people in need with resources and love. I think this also applies in the Koinonia farm, for example, this community reached out to another community in need.

Today I learned to not be afraid to reach out to people in starting conversations both from our group and in the community and to be open minded about where other people are coming from and their perspective. So far, this trip has helped place my life in perspective. I often worry about my school stresses. However, this trip has helped me see there is much more value to life other than my Dickinson bubble and career. The things I have gained so far are immeasurable, beyond just building a house.

Thursday

Eddie F.-

Damn, today was a good day. Woke up feeling like ass because he have no ventilation in our room. The chili last night did not help throughout the night. None the less, I continued with my attitude of open mindedness and set out to conquer my day. Started off with an egg sandwich with David then we set off to the house. Enjoyed One Directions new song as I drove and everyone else slept.

Once we got to the site, we began to paint. I was still drowsy until Colleen remember to bring the speaker. Alex began to play music and “Oh Boy” by Juelz came on. Tran goes “Oh, shit I can turn up to this” and broke out dancing. I will never forget that. David and I bowed to each other and joined Olivia. She actually has some really good moves, it made my morning.

As the day progressed, I became more and more lazy. Once I saw the sun, I was straight outside, got a lil sunburn, but what’s a spring break without that? I think my favorite part of the day was laying on the ground ordering Colleen, Olivia, and Tran around. They weren’t listening to me but I still thought it was fun. During Katie H’s game, Tyler and I got matched up. Tyler and I could not be any more opposite, yet we managed to come in second. This was really cool because it showed me how much we came to know each other, without this trip there is no way we would know each other at all.

3/12/2015

Olivia F.-

Today was our fourth day working and our second day working on the house. We started out finishing up the painting from Wednesday. We completed the trim and the walls of each room within an hour, then moved on to other tasks.

I helped Thad and Syndey with sweeping up the dry wall dust in the kitchen. I was granted the privilege of vacuuming this dust, which proved to be highly satisfying. I worked my way around the periphery of the room with the vacuum tube, sucking up the dust. After that we lay down some of the glue for the linoleum tiles. Sydney and I chatted with Thad for a while about his own experience with the Fuller Center and the importance of service in its facilitation of new experiences. After lunch, I moved on to painting doors and trim for the remainder of the afternoon. Among others, topics of conversation included finding “pesticides on sushi at Mt. Fuji” (Direct quote from Rachelle) to our live aspirations following college.

The sun blazed all afternoon which was actually extremely welcomed considering the abominable Carlisle winter this past winter. I got my first sunburn of the year, which I regrettably always take pride in. The Georgia weather has been a nice break, and I’ll be kind of sad to return to Carlisle’s gloom and grayness.

Until we left, I painted doors and door frames with Tran and Colleen while Eddie watched and complained on the grass. At 4pm several of us headed to Food Lion so that we could get ingredients for dinner. David and I did all the cooking at dinner and Katie M. and Natalie chopped up some vegetables and made guacamole. That was fun to work with all of them in composing a meal, made with lots of love for everyone else. We devoured the fajitas and then played Katie H’s newlyweds question game. All in all, it was a successful day filled with laughs, sun, Mexican food, and fun. I can’t wait to continue the service work tomorrow and bring back all the lessons I’ve learned to Dickinson.

3/13/2015

Natalie P.-

Today was our last full day in Americus and I think it was a perfect culmination. After working at the Fuller Center Office and the Lewis Family’s new house, I really feel like I have changed and gained countless skills that I can use throughout my life.

We started the day at 8am with devotions with in the Foundry with Kirk, which was nice, but I definitely struggled to stay awake. However, I thought that it was really nice of Kirk to offer to come to us to start off the day on a positive note. I’ve also been amazed at how much time he has given to work with us and show us around the area.

One of the really special things that we did this morning was go to the Americus Times- Recorder newspaper office. It was my first time being on the front page of a paper and I think it’s with an amazing group of people!

After receiving our newspapers, we took a trip to Koinonia Farm (coin-a NEE-uh). I really enjoyed this part of the day, especially getting the opportunity to tour their pecan processing area and kitchen. The super-hot hairnets were also a plus! Being a consumer, I also thoroughly enjoyed the gift shop and all the really unique and organic products they made and sold. Oh shoot, I knew I forgot something! Before Koinonia, we read to the students at Sumter County Primary School, which was a ton of fun! I was partnered with Tyler and we read to two kindergarten classes. I really enjoyed this part of the day, as the kids were all really cute and seemed excited to have us there. After the school we actually then went to Koinonia.

Next we drove to Plains, GA the birthplace of Jimmy Carter, the 39th president, which I thought was really cool. Kirk escorted was around the very small town, which was really adorable. We went to an antique shop and peanut shop, where Debi graciously bought us all tasty peanut butter ice cream.

Then, we drove to Andersonville, the site of a Civil War POW and MIA Camp and it is now the National POW-MIA Museum. Although we were all exhausted and the weather was kind of gloomy, I really enjoyed the museums and the connections I was able to make to both my Dickinson education and my personal life.

Going back again, before Andersonville, we left Kirk and met up with Judy, Jody’s wife, who showed us the POW museum. Before we left, though we borrowed the really expensive Southern store, which was scary.

We ended the day with dinner at Pat’s, which was really special for unexpected reasons. We all squished together and Jody got yummy nachos. The best part though was when we were leaving and several locals we had never met thanked us for everything we had done over the week. This really made me feel like the community valued our time and efforts and that we were making a difference.

Finally, back at the church, we did a great reflection/warm fuzzies activity, and topped the night with one last game of Mafia <3.

3/11/2015

Alex K.

We finished the tool library!!! Two days, many tools, and a few less walls and now we have accomplished the first job. It feels really good knowing that for years to come, people will walk into that store and now have the ability to acquire tools that they may not have had the money to buy before is a great feeling. Just being a part of that is awesome. The opportunities are endless.

For me (the anonymous author who’s initials start with A and K), yesterday was a bit less physical. With the large wall knocked down the closet mostly organized, I focused my attention on the ceiling by taking down and putting up tiles. I became even more appreciative of the ladies work with the organization since I spent more time in that room and saw, first hand, how nice everything looked.

Afterward we attended a service with Charles and other students. I do not like standing and singing along, but no one forced me and it wasn’t too uncomfortable. I did like his lecture and it addressed some questions even I had about God and what some people may think of him during natural disasters or war. It was nice getting to know the other guys and gals from around the area. They were warm and welcoming. I look forward to what the next two days have in store!

3/11/2015

Tran T.

Today was the first time we work at the house after two days helping Kirk at the office. The house was 15 minutes away from town, with no proper toilet (which still freaks me out), but in the house had a nice garden at front. All the walls were not painted (4 bedrooms, hallway, 2 bathrooms, kitchen, and living room). It was fun to see everybody working on the same project. We all starting with priming the walls, split into 2 groups (one with the brush for trimming and one with the rollers). I really enjoyed painting and having conversations with everyone.

What I love the most was lunchtime, both because of the food and the chilling time we had. Under the sun, on green grass, and talking with each other. I didn’t win the Oreos game, but I’m sure I’m getting better at it.

The rest of the day we continues painting the walls with color this time. It was really exciting seeing the house’s transformation. What kept me motivated was seeing everyone covered in paint, sweat, book (maybe, I don’t know) but still pushing ourselves to do the best. It was tiring though but overall I enjoyed it.

Dinner was nice. First time having cornbread with chili. Not that bad. When we spent 1 hour and half on reflection, it didn’t feel that long. I’m touched to see everyone opening up and sharing stories like that. It makes me feel welcome, included in a way! Really looking forward to finishing the house’s make over tomorrow!

Thursday

Katie H.

Today was the last day spent at the house and it is incredibly statisfying seeing the progress over the last two days. From having drywall that was exposed to plain boarded floor, we have gotten so much done. All the rooms are painted with trim on the doors and trim. We started putting floor in the kitchen and the hallway and both bathrooms.

I felt very empowered to do things I’ve never done before, like lay tiles and helping build this house, which is incredible. It’s not just a house, it is a beautiful home for a very deserving family, the Lewis family. I am blessed to be a part of all of this!

I have gotten to know the community, everyone that is on the trip, Kirk and Thad and it has been very meaningful for me. I definitely value all the conversations we have and reflections have been very powerful having people open up and give their experiences and backgrounds.

As an administrator, I was worried that students would not connect with me or shun away because I am not a student, but their age. I am very pleased to say that it has been the opposite! I think I have gotten to know the students and they have opened up to me outside reflection as well. This week has gone by insanely fast, and I don’t want it to end.

This is an experience I would do again in a heartbeat and I am sad to see it again, but I am confident that I will be doing something through the Fuller Center or doing another service trip again in the future.

Friday

Katie M.-

Today we spent the day travelling and sight-seeing as well as reading to kids at a local elementary school. I really enjoyed interacting with the kids and answering their questions. It reminded me of when I used to be a summer camp counselor and made me miss that job.

We also visited Plains, GA, and the hometown of President Jimmy Carter. It was interesting to see where he was raised and that it was such a small town. I also enjoyed going into the antique store because it made me feel like I was witnessing a part of history and I could imagine myself in the different time periods. It was interesting to witness their peanut obsession as well, and to eat the delicious peanut butter ice cream!

Although I already had a sneak peak of Koinonia Farm earlier this week, I enjoyed taking the tour and learning more about how the farm was started and its history especially in regards to race, religions, and its progressiveness. It was also interesting to learn about the pecan production process and the day to day life of the farmers.

Finally, I really enjoyed visiting the Andersonville POW museum. I had never heard of Andersonville before and had no idea about its history. I was moved when I learned where prisoners were kept. It was interesting they had information about POWs in other wars as well because I’m particularly interested in WWII history and the role of women in wars. Overall, I really enjoyed the day and feel like I’ve become so much closer with everyone who I probably never would have met if I hadn’t participated in this service trip. I just want to thank everyone for being so supportive and welcoming. Thanks for making this a great trip (especially Colleen and Tyler)!