

## **Georgia Spring Break Service Trip 2018**

### **March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018 – Karim Williams**

Toda was one of the most adventurous days I ever had. As my fellow service peers and I left Asheville, we were on the way to Americus Georgia. Before we were able to reach our destination, we stopped for a great hike. We were exploring Tallulah Falls, Georgia. This place had the most amazing trails of purity within nature. The trees, water ways, and atmosphere was all just life changing. Tallulah Georgia has definitely been the highlight of the trip thus far. Now, I'm here in Americus exploring the culture and the ways of the South. I look forward to tomorrow and most importantly The Fuller Center. This is going to be life changing ☺

### **March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018 – Greg Parker**

Today seemed extraordinary long. Not only did we lose an hour of sleep when we skipped forward an hour, we drove from Asheville, NC to our final destination of Americus GA. Our travels took us through intense fog, high mountains, and rainy farmlands.

We left Asheville at 9 in the morning in a slight drizzle. Unfortunately, the rain traveled all the way with us to Americus. On the way, while driving through the Great Smokey Mountains, we could hardly see out the windows because of the thick fog. We reasoned that settlers might have named the mountains as such because the fog resembled smoke. We imagined the view would have been incredible if only we could have seen it.

During our travels, we make our first stop after crossing into Georgia at Tallulah Falls State Park. The park had a few water falls that sounded powerful. Unfortunately, the fog and drizzle from earlier did not subside so we only heard the two falls. I'm not complaining, however, because experiencing waterfalls with only hearing and without sight is a tremendous experience and highly recommend it. We went closer to the river and were able to see the rapids and water falls. Overlooking the rail of a wooden bridge that crossed the river. We were able to see one of the other falls that we were previously only able to hear.

To witness the beautiful view from the bridge, we had to trek down 300 steps. Upon hearing that total, we laughed at how easy that sounded – simply 30 staircases. These steps were very steep and wet from the rain.

We continued to drive through Georgia all the way to Americus where we met a Fuller Center employee. He kindly showed us around the Habitat for Humanity Conference Center, our home for the next week.

### **March 12<sup>th</sup> 2018, Mihir**

Today we started to work with the Fuller Center. IT was a great atmosphere. I was really moved by Thad's story. Thad is in a wheelchair and works for the Fuller Center. Even though he cannot use his legs, he is still so skillful and positive about his approach to the work. I was really inspired by him and seeing how even in his condition he works and helps the fuller center so much. I hope to take such a spirit in life and in everything I do. I was also inspired by how the Fuller Center does not take any money from members. The people who work here have other jobs too but they are so dedicated to the work. The Fuller Center is also so ingrained in the community. I hope other communities were so tight knit like

Americus. I am really enjoying my time here. The fellow Dickinsonians I share this experience with are also absolutely amazing. I wish that Dickinson continues to help the Fuller Center in the Future.

### **March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018 Alex Ramirez**

Today was our first day of service, we learned new things about the Fuller Center, (for the newcomers like myself) met amazing people, and most importantly, created a better bond with the service group. I am blessed to have such an amazing group for my very first service trip, we just match up so perfectly. From teasing Greg about his care ridges, to seeing Libby take some random anger out with a pick axe, I am glad to just sit back and enjoy the ride, or at least try when Greg is driving. The food so far has been great! Special shout outs to our cooks! I was just told that Rita was unable to sleep last night because everyone else was playing Pictionary and I felt bad but luckily she was understanding and almost welcomed the loudness. That is one thing that I have valued the most since I've been here, being welcomed! Since we came to Americus or to the Habitat for Humanity's Center (aka Dorm House) by Jody Wade, and the later at the Fuller Center by Kirk and Mark. Finally, were were welcomed by Jonathan and his whole family. Being welcomed is one of the most amazing feelings out there and I never take that for granted. I don't realize this as I'm experiencing these events, but doing this service trip is slowly and literally changing my life. I know I don't have many moments were I step and take a step back and comprehend what am I doing and why I am here. Meeting these new magnificent people throughout the day is the reason why I am here. I, along with my group, are slowly changing their lives and like I said before without realizing it, we are changing our own lives. Also, shout out to Thad for being so energetic and an amazing person! As well as the two interns Chris and Craig for making me realize that I can't be lazy on my summer break and be an intern myself. Well that's it for today, I can't wait for the next few days to come.

### **March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018 Skylar Young**

Today, I went to the site with Thad, Allison, Mihir, and Karim and Steph. Together we worked to continue and build the ramp that would allow a man, who has recently been disabled, to access his house. I enjoyed seeing the family and even working with one of their sons. Jonathon to help build the ramp. While at the site, I was welcomed inside to use the bathroom and the family kept us company while we worked. While working, many of the family's friends and neighbors stopped to join them and the mother of the home was watching their neighbor's son. The sense of community was inspiring and I'm honored I could be a part of the environment.

### **March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018 Libby Tower**

Toady's reflection was such a breakthrough for our group. We finally broke down walls and talked about what was going through our heads and how our experiences here related to our normal lives. We are now not afraid to approach "uncomfortable" situations and it has already lead to great conversations.

### **March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018 Natasha Di Centa**

Our second day here at the Fuller Center has gone by in a blue, and yet we've made so much visible progress.

The morning started with us all slowly making our way downstairs after getting ready. We had breakfast (of which there is so much choice, but I opted for Cheerios and yoghurt) and made ourselves a packed

lunch. Amazingly, both Karim and Alex surfaced and managed to get to the Fuller center 9a two minute drive away) early.

We were welcomed by Kirk and Mark who shared some stories with us before splitting into our groups. Yesterday Ken, Alex, Greg, Libby, Rita and I were helping a family on Lee Street so today we stayed in the center with Mark. Mark loves to sharing stories and it seems as though he's had such an exciting life. He even remembers driving through Carlisle when he was a truck driver which was amazing to here. He currently works at Georgia South Westered University and he's clearly super passionate. He works 7 days a week starting at 5:30 in the morning so that he can get as much holiday as possible as his holiday is worked out by how many hours he works. He then sues his holiday to volunteer at the Fuller Center – fabulous person!

So after listening to stories and being shown a mural that was found under wall paper. We started the work. Alex and Libby worked on screwing beams to the walls in order to eventually make a false ceiling to help ensure the building meets fire regulation safety measure. They worked really well as a team and honestly probably deserve gold medals. Meanwhile, Greg, Ken, and I worked at making vertical beams to support the ceiling and the top of the staircase. To do this we worked well as a team with Ken balancing on a five inch beam drilling screws in pretty much everyone was holding their breath for about an hour because if Ken fell he was either going to fall into a pile of fiber glass insulation and lightbulbs or fall 10 feet. Thankfully, neither situations occurred!

We then had lunch with the other team and shared what he had done in the morning. Those had stayed in the Fuller Center were excited to see the progress the other team had made on the ramp.

After lunch we split into our teams again. Derrick, a member of the Americus community made the mistake of saying hello to Kirk earlier during the day, so he was roped into helping us create the crown molding around the office. While the others weren't back to working on the beams for the fire regulation work, I helped Derrick. This was super super fun as we were using old crowns, so we could see how the Fuller Center reused old materials to create the best out of all circumstances. It was also difficult though because we were working with the mentality that the corners were 90 degrees – they weren't!! This mean that we had to redo the work we were doing quite a few times-but eventually we got there and if I say so myself. Derrick was also great because he was willing to share so much about his life. For instance, explaining how his son is hoping to go to University at Georgia Tech. Derrick was a perfect example of the friendliness here in Americus – so many people walked past us as we worked on the outside porch and everybody said hello and asked how he and his family were.

While we worked on the crown molding, the Fuller Center was having a board meeting. They have some exiting plans for the future. The board is full of different people with different experiences, including the local sheriff! Which indicates how inclusive the Fuller Center is at making Americus a good place for everyone.

At the end of the day we made our way back to our home for the week then went for a lovely walk in the Georgia sun. Skylar, Greg and Ken went for a run. We went to an old train station, opposite his station, there was a plot of land surrounding with barbed wire with a rotting house and a confederate flag flying high – an interesting site. I also loved standing in the middle of the train track and walking down as though I was one of the railway children.

Dinner was tacos – a clear favorite by everyone. Ken and Mihir both made different styles of chicken and we really had food with influences from around the world. I have really enjoyed dinner times as the conversation is organic and everyone is free to talk about anything and it jumps around so much.

A key part of service trips are daily reflections. We talked about our highs and lows, how Americus is similar to Carlisle and to our hometowns, and how families here adapt to problems, the Fuller Center has to adapt to new sudden situations and how we have personally adapted to change. The group was open to everyone's thoughts and opinions and it was a safe, inclusive space. As the day comes to a close I've had an amazing second day here in Americus, Georgia and I am extremely fortunate and thankful to have been given the chance to come and have the experiences I'm having and to learn constantly.

Let's see what tomorrow has in store for us!

PS: The Fuller Center has given us bright green neon shirts- they are amazing!

### **March 14<sup>th</sup> 2018 Steph Mazur**

I think Wednesdays are the most difficult yet infinitely rewarding days of a service trip. On one hand, on the rewarding side, we get to see the progress, both physical at the worksite and emotional in the relationships we have developed among ourselves and the community. On the other hand, it's difficult to realize that tomorrow, Thursday, is our last work day and we might not get to do as much work as we want to see the complete differences we've made for the family we are helping. Regardless, we had an amazing third work day.

We began today by going to the international headquarters for the Fuller Center for Housing also in Americus. They explained for us the history between the Fuller Center and Habitat for Humanity and the intentions of their organization. It was fascinating to see the larger mission of the Fuller Center and its return to Millard Fullers original faith-based perspective.

We divided into two teams again for the worksite at the Americus Fuller Center and the house on Lee Street – this time we switched up the teams so we could work with new people. Ken, Skyler, Karim, Natasha, and I joined Thad and Chris (the Fuller Center Intern) at the work site to continue building the ramp. (Allison Rita, Mihir, Greg, Libby, and Alex stayed at the Fuller Center with Mark and Kirk).

We started digging a ditch at the bottom of the ramp to pour concrete, but we accidentally dug too deep. Thad suggested we fill the pit partially with rocks and then add concrete. Thad said he knew where to get these rocks, and so we followed him in our van to get them. We assumed we were going to Lowes or a store to buy them but we actually ended up pulling over on the side a neighborhood street and throwing a pile of bricks into the trailer. Thad still won't disclose his brick dealer, but assures us they are not stolen. Besides, we buried them anyway!

Thad has been coming up with the most interesting nicknames for us. Yesterday, Skyler and I were Screw Girl 1 and Screw Girl 2 as we were in charge of drilling screws (a new skill for me); Mihir was concrete Man and Chris the intern was called Craig. Today, he called Natasha the Queen because she is from London. It added such a great sense of humor to the afternoon.

For me, my "high" of the day was getting to bond with Thad and Kirk throughout the day. When I came to Georgia in 2015 as a student, I bonded with Kirk about our roots in Scranton, PA, and I have been so thrilled to continue that this week as an administrator. Thad gave me great advice today after

introducing me to his wife: Love is something that you can't walk into and you cannot run into – you can only fall into. I loved hearing about Thad and Kirks lives and seeing how Americus and the Fuller enter has changed since 2015, all in a good and inspiring ways. After the work day, we had dinner at the United Methodist Church, which was lovely.

I think our reflection tonight was the most in depth reflection we've had – we all really opened up on our personal connections to service and religion and covered a lot of topics. Overall, I feel more connected to everyone around me, Americus, Carlisle and my life.

### **Friday March 16<sup>th</sup> – Rita Clayton – Trip administrator**

Today we are going to be going to read to some grade school children, tour several other places and it's our last day in Americus.

As I reflect back on this week, I am encouraged by all I have seen in this amazing group of young people and have seen strong leadership from ken and Allison. They have been extremely well organized. I have so much respect for the group. They atomically work to them for decision making and accept their leadership. There was incredible fluidness of the group and harmony.

I am not sure how long typical reflections last but our seemed to be hours. The group bonded and had several breakthroughs in discussing difficulty and painful topics. I personally was impressed by the amount of support and caring exhilarated by the group. Talking about touch subjects, different points of views can certainly be difficult but this group handled it with the grace and empathy I have come to expect from them.

I had some physical challenges during the service trip. I was again encourage by the care and concern of each of the team members. I never felt left behind and Alex, Mihir, Ken and all made time to work with me.

I wish I could express better the group and friendships and teamwork that I saw develop this week.

I will never forget the wonderful smiles, laughter, hugs, and sharing. It was truly an honor to be a part of such an amazing group.

I think each of these young men and women have incredible strengths and gifts and I can't wait to see how they spread their knowledge, caring, and enthusiasm throughout the world.

I am sad today that the time together is drawing to a close. The breakfast, lunch, and dinner conversations and food was amazing. The cultural exchanges, humor, music were phenomenal. Best wishes to all.

### **March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

Today was our last day in Georgia and we are all devastated it's over. The bonds we have made over this trip have been unbreakable. I came into the trip not knowing anyone in the group and now I cannot imagine my life without these people. These trips are so amazing because to a group of people coming from all different backgrounds and they create a space where people are able to share and learn. I can truly say that this trip has changed my life and the way I look at the world around me. While on this trip we have met so many humble and selfless people who live their lives helping others.