Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

I was not entirely sure what compelled me to apply and interview for Xavier’s Summer Service Internship, and I was even less sure of what to expect when the time came for the program to start. While I was not in search of the somewhat cliché “life changing experience”, I knew that I wanted to do something that meant more and went beyond crunching numbers behind a desk, which is the typical kind of position offered to Finance majors like myself.

Prior to interning at Starfire this summer, I had never worked with people with disabilities, and that made me uneasy. To add to my nerves, my supervisor, who was the only person I had met before my first day, informed me that she would be out of town for my first week. To be perfectly honest, I was freaking out, but the other interns were keeping their cool, so I had to keep mine. The morning of my first day, however, I woke up to a note of encouragement from last year’s Starfire intern, Molly. The significance of what that short note meant to me cannot be understated, and although there was certainly still nerves, an immense weight was lifted from my shoulders. From that moment on, I have been looking forward to writing a letter of my own to the person lucky enough to be in my shoes next summer.

There were times I asked myself why I was doing this. I would tell myself things like “You are a business major. Companies are not going to be impressed by this when they look at your resume”. But when I really thought about it, I knew that the experience this summer would put on my life’s resume carried significantly more weight than anything on your typical post Grad resume. After all, the Jesuits would be disappointed if we did not recognize by now that the true value of education comes from the development and growth of the whole person. Those who know me well know that I derive my energy from interaction with others, and know that I sleep best at night after days in which it is evident that I have impacted the lives of others in a positive manner. With that being said, this summer has provided me with unprecedented levels of energy and long nights of deep, satisfying hibernation.

During my first week of training, a fellow staffer asked a group of members what it was like to live with a disability. Not only were the answers unforgettable, but I was also moved by the lack of hesitation from the members in answering a question that’s bluntness had caught me off guard. My friend Shane responded by saying that God made him the way he is for a reason, and that instead of considering what he is not able to do, he is dedicated to making the most of the talents he has been given. My other friend, JR, claimed that he had his health, and therefore he was blessed with everything he needed. It took every part of who I am not to burst into tears on the spot. I firmly believe that those will be some of the most moving words I will ever have the privilege to hear. If two mentally handicapped young men can appreciate who they are and be thankful for their health, who are we to ever do anything but be thankful for those same things? That is just one account of the many humbling and motivating experiences I have had in my time at Starfire.

There are not many things in life that I would say I have felt “called” to do, but the Summer Service Internship is one of them. I had no idea why, and I may never know the reason, but I went on a whim and did it. I thank God every day for
that whim. Getting an opportunity to live with and get to know 19 other incredible people, work at a non-profit made up of unbelievably special people with an inspiring mission, and dig deeper on the issues that plague our world all in one summer is something that most people will never have the chance to experience. When people ask me how I spent my summer or why I chose to do this, my first reaction is to pity them for never having or seeking out the same opportunity. A group of 20 people coming together, with different stories, ideas, and motives, but with one common mission at the same time, is bound to yield an experience unlike any other. Without you, this incredible blessing would never have been possible, and for this I, and the rest of the 2014 interns, will be forever grateful.

God Bless,

Brendan Tenney
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

My name is Michael Ryan and I am a rising junior at Xavier studying Business Finance. Service has always been a part of my life and who I am so when I first heard about the summer service Internship I immediately jumped at the opportunity. I applied, went through the interview process and was placed with Stepping Stones. So far it has been one of the greatest experiences of my young adult life! First off I'd like to thank you for your support of the Summer Service Internship. I can’t fully express my gratitude to you for your generous gifts to this program and for your faith in the program and current and future interns but I am going to try my best in this letter.

Working for Stepping Stones has far exceeded my expectations and has been one of the best experiences of my life. To say I love this job would be an understatement. Words can’t describe how much I enjoy getting up every day and going to Camp Given. The staff is amazing, the environment is incredibly welcoming, and I have learned more than I could have ever imagined from the children I am working with. The experience has exceeded every expectation ever had for the program.

First, as I mentioned the other staff at Stepping Stones has been amazing and has welcomed me into their already close community with open arms. Every day I go into work and feel comfortable that if I ever had any questions or hesitations in the work place that each and every one of them would be there for me. I have made some lifelong friends and have formed relationships that have taught me a lot about myself as I learn more about others. Also, the diversity of college majors has really opened my eyes to the world outside of business. Most if not all of my co-workers are occupational therapy or special education majors. Working with them has done two things for me. First I have formed a great respect for what these people will be doing for the rest of their lives because it takes a lot of patience and is so impactful for the people they work with. Second they have inspired me to put my business skills to work at a non-profit like Stepping Stones when I am out of school.

As I connect my experiences to my major, I am struggling to connect my daily work with the participants. But to be honest I don’t think that is the point. All summer I have struggled to connect the work I have done with the work that I will be doing in the next 5 years as I leave college and go into the work force, but this is what I have come up with...

Every day I show up at work at 8:15 and get my assignment for the day. I am almost always given a One-on-one, which is basically taking care of the same participant for the entire day. Our first contact with the Campers is at “driveway” and it is my favorite part of the day. The campers come in cars and on buses and they are all so excited to get to camp that you can’t help but to smile as a feeling of joy takes over your entire body. I could get into the details of everything we do day to day but everything I would say has to do with how the kids just want to have a regular camp experience. They come to Camp Given looking to have the time of their lives and it is my job to allow them to do that in the safest way possible whether that involves swimming in the pool, playing by the creek, or getting in a paint fight with the other members. We are there to basically do two things: make sure the kids have fun and stay safe at the same time.
So as I said before my struggle has been connecting this with my future and what I have come up with is simple. One of my biggest philosophies in life has always been to have fun and be light hearted in everything I do and working at Stepping Stones has taught me to do this in the best way possible. I have learned that the easiest way to help others is to do it through fun and learning. I have learned that a smile and a helping hand goes a long way when it is for others around you and I hope that I can apply this to my daily life in everything that I do and everything that I hope to do in my future.

Thank you again for your generosity, and I hope that you will continue to be a part of this program in the future.

Thank you,

Michael Ryan
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

There is a glimmer of resilience in the eyes of a refugee that is all kinds of triumphant, sorrowful, and beautiful all at once. It is undeniable and begs the questions: “what joy and sadness have you seen of this world?” and “how have you come to be where you stand in this moment?” and “who have you been and who do you now hope to be?” This glimmer of resilience that shimmers through both the tracks of diamond teardrops on weathered cheeks and the crinkles of smiling almond eyes reveals not only the story of the refugee; in the stillness of reflection, it captures and holds the experience of humanity.

Your contribution to the Xavier Summer Service program has given me a glorious glimpse of this human experience.

This summer, my mornings were filled with endless excitement as I prepared for whatever new adventures my makeshift Steno-notepad calendar proclaimed the day would hold... almost all of which were promptly disrupted by some other completely unplanned and spontaneous adventure instead. Some days, I learned about case management and the importance of patience as I painstakingly went through every step of a food stamp or employment application with a non-English speaking client. I fumbled through my own language as I sat alongside the students in my English as a Second Language class, sometimes with as many different native tongues present as there were individuals. While they quickly acquired new vocabulary and pronunciation skills, I slowly acquired flexibility in lesson planning, gentleness in correcting mistakes, and a sense of whimsy in weaving together elements of culture (namely food, of course) with the English language. I gained a new knowledge – and, praise God, a better sense of direction – of downtown and our Metro system as I walked and bussed my way around the city for cultural orientations, always amidst a somewhat comical entourage of startled new arrivals still fresh in traditional dress, interpreters jabbing a finger at every landmark, and other miscellaneous interns, volunteers, and even the occasional curious stray. I heard story after incredible story of journeys across nation borders, living conditions in camps, and travels to a new home – a new home that can offer freedom and relief, but also a demotion in career, a struggle for housing, a roadblock in language, and a sense of loneliness among so many people. I saw heartbreak and jubilation side-by-side, and inevitably deeply felt them both as well.

One Friday morning was filled with this juxtaposition as I sat down with an Iraqi client. A strong-willed personality, this man had impressed me with the robustness of both his confidence and his mustache since the day I had met him. However, he entered my cubicle with shoulders hunched in defeat, took a heavy seat in the chair directly across from me, and rasped, “No job. No friends. No English. No money. No hope for family.” As he began to weep with huge, heaving breaths, I sat in astonishment of the weight of troubles this man had to carry and felt a deep pain from my own breath away. After imagining some alternatives together, his exit from my office was followed by the entrance of a wispy little Eritrean woman with a bundle of papers clutched to her chest. This woman and I had connected almost instantly on my very first day of work, and I was delighted to see her after such a difficult encounter just moments prior. She thrust her papers at me with an illuminating grin and bouncing toes. The documents were verification of a goal we had been working towards for her: a housekeeping job. Their printed words meant food for her son, fare for the bus, rent for her home, and more opportunities for herself. We shrieked and hugged and danced in the tiny confines of my cubicle, all cobwebs of lingering
sadness cleared away. It was a moment of elation and triumph that had taken both of us a challenging journey to arrive at.

Most importantly, I worked in an environment that not only tolerated and accepted new cultures, but truly celebrated them. Every single day in my office has ultimately been a celebration of the world, near and far.

I have learned that these encounters, in some ways unique to refugees, hold the essential themes of what it means to be human hidden within their midst. We feel everything from weariness to wonder across the globe, regardless of culture, race, nationality, language, income, or what have you. We all need a sense of independence, but one that comes from a rooted sense of interdependence and belonging. We face hardship and hurt in some way, but muster up courage from the deepest parts of our souls to carry on, to survive, to thrive. We each interpret our experiences through a lens of our history and focus on the future with understanding of our past. We care, maybe a bit or perhaps a lot, to heal our world, our selves, and our most beloveds in the best ways we know how. This, I have learned, is the core experience of humanity told so clearly through the lives of our world’s refugees.

Thank you, funders, for giving me the opportunity to see the world from a simple little office on East 8th Street. Despite the fifth floor’s unassuming cubicles and beige walls, that office is a beautiful place of hope because of the vibrant people who bring it to life. It has been my privilege and my honor to share in the lives of these people through the Xavier Summer Service Internship.

With gratitude,

Rachel Piepsny
Catholic Charities of Southwestern Ohio – Refugee Resettlement Services
Xavier University Summer Service Intern
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

The past few weeks have been an eye-opening experience for me that I will always remember. Due to your support of the Summer Service Internship, I have been able to be a part of a wonderful community, work at my dream job, and get to know who I am on a deeper level. From the application process to the interviews to training and beyond, I have learned professional skills necessary for my career after graduation. Group reflections, journal prompts, and conversations within the community have taught me to look deeper into the social justice issues facing my hometown of Cincinnati and to seek solutions that get at the root of these issues. Working with a knowledgeable and passionate supervisor has helped me to see my passion for working to protect natural areas in lower-income areas, especially areas right here in Cincinnati. Thanks to the funding that made this program possible, I have become a more confident member of my community.

When I first applied for the SSI program, I thought I knew everything there was to know about myself and about what I was most passionate about. My dreams were to stop deforestation in Latin America by working with governments and local environmental activists. However, my experiences of living in community with 20 other interns as well as working at Imago Earth Center in Price Hill have shown me that there is still a lot of change that is needed in my own community. As I worked at my agency, I saw that even a simple conversation with a young nature camp participant about a line at the water fountain can promote sustainable change and future leaders. I'll always remember the conversation I had with Owen the day someone cut in front of him in line. This was my third day at my agency, and I had no training on how to handle crying children who no longer want to participate. Instead of calling my supervisor over to handle the situation, I remembered that during our SSI training week we learned that we are assets to the agency, and that we should use our own gifts and talents to help the agency fulfill its mission statement. With that in mind, I decided to get to know Owen's story and what he was truly feeling. Instead of worrying about what activity was next, I noticed how refreshing it was to just sit and allow Owen to express his feelings and be himself. Through our short conversation, we gathered that he felt disrespected. Then I gave him the opportunity that the SSI program has given me: the opportunity to think of a solution that will allow others in the future to no longer experience the issue. 6 year-old Owen came up with the solution himself of having the counselors call each child up to the water fountain by name so that everyone knows who is next and so that no one will feel disrespected. After our talk, Owen happily got up and became engaged in the next activities.

For me, that is one of the most impactful moments of my life. It was all about hearing the issue, having those affected have the opportunity to find solutions and have their opinions valued, and most importantly just getting to know another person by simply listening to his story. I love working with children at my agency because it helps me to clearly see larger issues, like racism, poverty, sexism, and more on a smaller scale. Maybe Owen will never remember that moment, but what came out of
it was allowing the community to take leadership to create long-lasting change that stops the issue from continuing. I didn’t have to travel the world to make a difference, and I didn’t need to work with governmental leaders to form a solution.

As I hear other SSI interns share their experiences working at their different agencies and focusing on different issues, I see how important it is to form relationships and to just be in community with others. The relationships my friends have made with different colleagues and clients have taught them different ways of seeing the world, and the stories they share with me help me to put my own work into perspective. Jim Schenk, the founder of Imago, told me once that living in community is the best way to stop oppression; the community will work together to fight the issues. I’ve come to see this in not only the relationships I’ve made with the SSI interns and those at my agency, but with those people I continue to meet on the bus to work, or while I’m exploring new parts of Cincinnati with my friends in the program. Relationships are powerful; they have shown me that I love working with people here in my hometown, but they’ve also shown me that community can be anywhere from Price Hill to Latin America.

Thank you very much for all of your support for the Summer Service Internship program. This experience continues to teach me new and valuable lessons every day, and I couldn’t imagine how I could have learned to be a more reflective member of my community without this program.

God bless,

Nicole Bell
Summer Service Intern 2014
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

I would like to take the time to thank you for kindly funding the summer service internship program here at Xavier. I’ve learned so much during my time here so I thought I might share some of my newly learned insights and breakthroughs with you. First though, I want to tell you a little about myself. I am a rising junior with a passion for those who are blind and visually impaired. I’ve wanted to become an optometrist since the third grade and I hope to combine my talents and my service to give my life to others. I commute to school for financial reasons so this is my first dorm experience and I love every minute of it! My roommate and I are very similar and I’ve learned so much from conversations with her! Similarly, I’ve also learned a lot from living in the intern community. We’ve spent hours discussing everything from white privilege to selfishness of doing service to the biological nature of dating.

Having a love for eyes and vision impairments, I was placed at Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The mission of Clovernook is to empower those who are blind and visually impaired so that they be self-sufficient and full participants in their communities. This mission really speaks to my heart because the fostering of independence of those with visual impairments is one of the main reasons I am so passionate about optometry. I have a lot of eye problems myself, and there was a chance I could have been blind. While I cannot understand exactly what the people at Clovernook experience, I can sympathize and help the blind and visually impaired work toward a better future.

This internship is not merely a summer job for me; rather it is a learning experience for my future career. I have learned that I am not necessarily passionate about optometry. I have come to realize that my love is for those with visual impairments. At Clovernook, I am a staff member for the summer camps for children aged 8 to 22. All of the participants have some degree of visual impairment and some also have cognitive disorders. The camps each run a week long and there is a new theme each week, some of which include technology, art, and activities of daily living. These camps teach the participants skills so that they are able to become more independent. We also teach them that they are so much more than their disability, which society often chooses to define them by. Some of the kids do not realize that they can go to college, get married, have a family, or even live on their own since they have a visual impairment. We show them not only that their lack of vision should not hinder them, but that they can thrive by adapting the things they do.

I have a family friend who has been blind since he was young. At my request, he came to Clovernook and talked to the kids about being blind, having a blind wife, raising sighted children, and having a successful career building computers at Kroger. The biggest lesson we all learned was that many sighted people are handicapped, too. We depend so much on our eyesight that we lose our real vision on the world around us. Personally, I have learned that vision loss is not necessarily the problem. We can do much to prevent vision loss but it may always be present in society. Rather, the problem is society’s views of the blind and visually impaired. We need to remember that people are so much more than the handicap which they have. As I was reminded by a young camper, “things are only impossible when you stop trying.”
As I’ve said, I have also greatly benefitted from living with others who are so passionate about their worksites. I only work at Clovernook, yet I hear about the issues faced by organizations working to help solve homelessness, hunger, environmental issues, immigration, and policy reform. We all have a unique viewpoint and learning about all of these issues has forced me to see the bigger picture. I have realized just how connected everything is. While my organization focuses on the visually impaired, the participants in the camp also face a lot of poverty issues. Learning from other interns in this program has helped me not only to be a more informed staff member at Clovernook, but it has helped me to become a more sensitive and well-rounded person.

I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for funding this program. It has and will continue to change the lives of the interns as well as those with which we work. I have been challenged to work for a better world and I cannot help but to passionately respond to that calling. This internship has changed my life in more ways than I can express and I will be forever grateful. Thank you!

Most Sincerely,

Kathy Kathmann

Kathy Kathmann
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

My name is Renée Betance. I am the Summer Service Intern who was placed at Su Casa Hispanic Center of Cincinnati. This summer has given me various opportunities that have been firsts for me. A first time experience offers a very important challenge in your life – leaving your comfort zone. SSI has helped me expand my comfort zone while also giving me the best summer of my relatively short life.

One of the interesting parts of my life is that I have never actually had an official paying job. This was a summer of firsts because this really was my first job. I was given the position of head of physical education at Su Casa’s summer camp, Vacaciones Utiles. In addition to this position, I also supervise the high school volunteers and help out around the office any way I can. I had to be at work before 8 AM, preferably at 7:30 AM. So my day started off early and fast. I arrived to help set up for breakfast and supervised both the children and the other volunteers. The children are certainly active at 8 AM – they want to play with you whether you had a full night’s sleep or not. After that I would delegate jobs for the volunteers and help out around the office, which entails answering phones making copies, coffee and helping manage traffic of the clients that come into the office. But once 10:30 AM comes around, it is my time to shine. At this point the when the students come to the gym to have physical education. Specifically, at 10:30 I have the pre-k students come in. Before the program started I had created a very structured plan to try and keep the kids entertained and incorporate fitness. This plan, however, was quickly deemed futile. The students were not really at a stage of their development to actually understand and follow instructions. This means that I had to call an audible. So, I decided to turn physical education into recess for the time being. This meant that with the supplies that I had – three basketballs – I had to come up with a new plan on how to approach the physical education classes that I had with the pre-k, kindergarten, first, and second grade classes. My plan eventually ended up looking like a mixture of chaos and fun. One would think that only a villain would equate those two words together, but nonetheless it’s a part of our program. I have the kindergarten, first, and second grade students do physical education for half an hour, which consists of playing games like Duck Duck Goose, Sharks and Minnows, Cornhole, and Musical Chairs while also stretching and running laps. Once that half hour is over I have them play with the supplies that the staff and I have purchased outside in our parking lot for recess.

In my interview for Su Casa I was asked “what are three qualities that an elementary school teacher must have?” I gave three answers: flexibility, patience, and the ability to communicate love. The first two are clearly an evolving part of my job. I have had to adapt to circumstances quickly and be patient with the children. I usually have to do things little by little so that they can understand them. But, by far, the most important thing that I do in my job is try to give the students the much needed fun time, attention, and love that EVERY child needs. For example, we have a child that makes me watch her as she throws a hula hoop in the air waiting for my confirmation, and every time I look at her smile and joyously say “¡Muy bien, Julie!” That is all I can really try to do, give the students an escape from work, try to have fun with them, and lastly show through my actions and my words that they are loved, cared for, and appreciated. So in a
In a nutshell, what I really do in my job is not physical education but rather attempt to find new ways to communicate love to children.

For me, this summer has been about the children. I give my heart to them, something I am only able to do because SSI has enabled me to do it. Otherwise I would be spending my summer stuck in a cubicle looking at a computer and typing information all day. Instead I have the opportunity to impact the lives of children each and every day. It is not just me, but the Vacaciones Utiles program at Su Casa as a whole that does this. I can also say that I have been able to strengthen my friendships and create new ones. This has been the best summer of my life for reasons other than that. Last summer I had the unfortunate situation that I was unemployed and I was not taking classes. I sat around my house and watched TV, read books, mowed the lawn, and sleep. But finally I was able to feel like I had utility, like my time meant something. I feel appreciated through my site, I feel that people care about my opinion though the community, but must importantly, that I have a taste for this type of joy and will never stop searching for it.

Sincerely,

René Betance

René Betance

P.S. If you really want to know more about what I did, I would prefer to talk to you in person. My phone number is (915) 525-0225.
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

This summer has truly been a great experience and I owe it all to the Summer Service Internship and my work at the Boys and Girls Club. During this summer I have been exposed to many different ideas and perspectives from diverse individuals that have allowed me to grow and expand my horizon of thinking. Some of these ideas and concepts that I have been exposed to have challenged my beliefs in ways that made me uncomfortable at first, but now am beginning to see the good in these challenges. This internship has given me the opportunity to connect with people that I otherwise would not have developed a relationship with. Not only has this internship introduced me to new people, but it has made me rethink my career choice as well. This experience is one that I am truly blessed to be a part of and I cannot wait to see what else it has to bring.

As a result of your gracious funding, I’ve had one of the best summers in my life. This is my first time actually being out on my own during the summer as well as holding my very first job. The experiences that I have had with the kids at my club and within my community at Xavier have been life changing. Up until this point in my life I’ve always thought I knew what I want in life and how I was going to get it. But doing this internship has made me question just exactly what I want to do with my life and what I am truly passionate about. In the course of SSI, I have changed my major from political science to sociology. Ever since I was in eighth grade I just knew that I wanted to study law, but now I am not so certain. Working at the Boys and Girls Club has shown me that I have a larger passion for working with kids than with the law, hence why I recently decided to change my major to sociology. With this major I can be more involved with children but still work with the law.
Furthermore, I grew up in a very structured and religious home life. When we first began having these challenging conversations, I felt uncomfortable because a lot of the ideas that were presented went against what I have been taught. I was unsure of how to handle the situation at first, and I began to question my own values and beliefs. Then I realized that my thoughts over the years were not truly my thoughts but were concepts that were instilled in me as a kid. These ideas had helped mold me into the person that I am today, but they were not my thoughts. This internship has presented me with the opportunity to develop my own thoughts and ideas. Although I’m still learning, I’m a lot further than where I was. I have SSI to thank for that.

Lastly, this summer has been a very fun experience from days at the lake, to doing karaoke, to Wednesday night reflections. I’ve learned so much from the people in my community, the kids at my job, and my working experience in general. I want to say a special thank you to you, the funders, because without your support SSI would not be the program it is today. I hope you continue your great works with this program in the future so that someone else will have the same experience or better!

Sincerely,

Antronette Black
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

When I first heard of the Summer Service Internship program at Xavier, I was in complete awe. It seemed too incredible to pass up. Little did I know that the description of the program is only a small portion of this summer journey, which has turned out to be one of the best experiences of my life.

I am the type of person who likes to challenge myself. I enjoy pushing my limits because it is then that I can truly discover myself. When I found out that I had been selected to participate in the Summer Service Internship program, I could not believe it. I could only imagine what was ahead, but I knew it would guide me toward growth. When selected in the program, I also found out that my work site would be Communities United For Action (CUFA). The idea of working in community organizing made me nervous, but I do not think I could have been placed anywhere more fitting for my time as a Summer Service Intern. As my first "real" job, CUFA, my supervisor, and co-worker, have taught me the responsibilities of office work, organization, and asking questions.

Almost everyday I would door knock in local neighborhoods and communities and ask the members of those areas about any concerns they have regarding the city's high sewage bills. Door knocking is not really an ideal job, but I grew to appreciate it. Even though this summer was one of high heat and humidity, it was the community members who wanted to help take action that made my days of door knocking completely worth it. I learned a lot about city issues and the concerns of many people through my conversations. We all struggle with similar issues, so why not come together and make change? From what I have learned about community organizing, I can honestly say that it is much harder than it seems. Projects can take years to complete and goals are difficult to reach, however, with passion and persistence we can get things done! I have been impacted to truly believe that you should not do something for someone that they can do for themselves and that life, just like organizing, takes time. I need to slow down and pay more attention to the process of things in my life, instead of the end result. Organizing contains so many intricate pieces that are so important to forming the puzzle. You need to appreciate the pieces in order to complete the puzzle.

Working at CUFA has challenged me everyday, but I would not want it any other way. I have seen and experienced so much more than I ever imagined. Also, I have taken so much away from this job. I appreciate the hard work of community organizers and all of the skills and determination that they have.

My experiences in the Summer Service Intern community have also been a huge part of my summer. I have been twisted, turned, and looped in many different directions regarding social justice issues, some of which I had much knowledge, some general, and some none at all. Even when I was not expecting to be impacted, our conversations would take me for a turn. My eyes have been opened to so many
questions that I may never answer, but I am glad to be asking the questions. Other interns in the group have challenged my ideas on day-to-day social justice issues and I love them for that. Perspective is such an important aspect of social justice and I thank them for giving me perspective and for being amazing individuals. They have empowered me to be more aware in my life and to ask these intense questions.

Along with thanking my supervisor, co-worker, and other interns, I must also thank all those who have provided something toward my experience in this program. Whether it may be time, resources, support, or opportunities, this program would not be the same without you. This experience has been an amazing opportunity that I am thankful to have been given. I have truly been impacted through my experiences during Summer Service Internship. This time has been a gift and I have learned and immersed myself in new things. I cannot wait to see where I will be led next in my journey toward social justice. Thank you to everyone who has made this awe-inspiring program a reality and a piece of my life’s puzzle.

Sincerely,

Olivia Daley
Summer Service Intern 2014
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

My name is Sarah Dean and I will be a junior at Xavier University this upcoming fall. This summer I have had the pleasure of working at Stepping Stones’ United Cerebral Palsy campus with the adult program due to your generosity. From the start, I was drawn to this program because of my passion for people with disabilities and my interest in social justice issues. At Xavier I am pursuing a degree in Occupational Therapy with a minor in gender and diversity studies. Last summer, I spent my weeks working at a summer camp for children with disabilities in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. This summer, however, as a member of Xavier’s Summer Service Internship Program, I was able to grow and learn here in my own community of Cincinnati. Working with adults has been both a challenge and a blessing as I have been able to learn about this new population within the realm of people with disabilities. I am so thankful for the experiences I have had this summer as a part of Xavier’s Summer Service Internship Program. This summer has opened my eyes to so many social justice issues, has allowed me to reflect on these issues in my current life, and has prepared me for the professional world. As an Occupational Therapy major, this summer has given me a breadth of new knowledge that I know I will carry with me into my professional life. I have made lasting relationships with the staff and participants at Stepping Stones and have grown to be a part of a community with my Xavier peers and staff.

Although I have worked at Stepping Stones for the past 9 weeks, each day brings new surprises. There is never a dull moment at Stepping Stones! Each morning we begin our time together with coffee and conversation. Here, the staff and participants share conversations about our lives and prepare for our day ahead together. We then transition to our first activity where our participants and staff are split up into areas including recreation, continuing knowledge, art, technology, or community outings. Then we eat lunch and transition to the second activity. We conclude our day with a wellness activity where we get active in the kitchen or gym and have a discussion on how to stay healthy. In recreation we do a wide variety of activities such as cooking, crafting, board games and yoga. Continuing knowledge consists of using the Tap It to play interactive games, creating their own recycled crafts and making treats. In art the participants are able to explore all mediums including clay, paint, glass, metal, chalk, marker, and pencil. The technology lab offers a variety of activities for our participants. Some learn reading, spelling, and typing while others research jobs and information for the monthly newsletter. On the community outings the participants travel all over the area volunteering at the Butterfly House, seeing movies, going to coffee shops, swimming, and exploring downtown. Each week I am assigned one area where I stay for the duration of the week. Throughout my internship I have gone swimming, to the Eastgate Mall, to Starbucks, to Meijer, and to Xavier with the participants. With another staff member, I lead the planned activity and help the participants out when needed.

As an intern, every day I am learning something new. Until this summer I have never worked with individuals with intellectual disabilities. I have learned so much about the autism spectrum, adaptive equipment, and age-appropriate activities. Having never worked with adults with disabilities prior to this summer, at first I was challenged by the task in treating the participants age-appropriately. I never wanted to offend the participants or demean them as I wrestled with the power dynamic presented. This was an obstacle because I was the youngest person in the facility, yet my able-bodiedness gave me an unearned authority over the participants. Building relationships has helped me to dissolve this barrier and I now feel that
both the participants and I are benefitting. I have had the opportunity to learn sign language from one woman. Another woman has taught me about her own business where she rents out adaptive bicycles. A man shared his story of advocacy where he has made his mark in the legal system working for the rights of individuals with disabilities. Each day as I may merely cut up an individual’s lunch, or set up their place in the art studio, they inspire me with their passion, their dedication, and their resilience. From what was a disability, there is now possibility in each one of the participants at Stepping Stones. Another big takeaway I have gained from this summer is the power of going out of your comfort zone. Working with these adults and disabilities is something I have never done before. From what was once uncertainty and insecurity, I now find comfort, friendship, and laughter. I have learned that I can make friends anywhere if only I open my eyes. Seeing these people for who they are, I now often forget their disability. I find myself continuing my daily life with this same perspective as I talk with other individuals apart from marginalized communities here in Cincinnati.

Another important part of this internship is living in the Summer Service Intern community in Brockman Hall here at Xavier. What were once twenty individuals anxious to start the summer at our agencies have now become a family. I have never lived in an environment where I felt such a shared common interest and passion. Our time together after work, on the weekends, and during reflection has been spent by both hanging out and also delving deeper into our social justice issues. Never before have I felt so comfortable talking about the uncomfortable. Challenging conversations are welcomed as we all grow from each other. Each member of the community has a unique story and throughout my summer here I have caught a glimpse of that. The intern community is important because it allows us to outwardly reflect upon our experiences and the social justice issues presented each week. Before this summer I had not been exposed to the concept of white privilege or voluntary simplicity. I have also learned further on topics such as racial injustice and solidarity. After further reading and reflection in the community, I now see how these themes are present in my daily life and how I can use my place in society to positively impact others. We all deal with challenging issues on a daily basis but coming home to the support of 20 other individuals allows us to process these experiences and find meaning from them. The community adds meaningful substance to my experience in the Summer Service Internship Program.

From the bottom of my heart I want to thank you for your generosity. Your contribution has made not only an impact on me, but on my Xavier peers and the participants at Stepping Stones that I have had the honor of spending my summer with. I am truly grateful for this once in a lifetime experience. I have grown both intellectually and emotionally thanks to your support. I have a deeper understanding and relationship with my neighbors here in Cincinnati. This program has truly changed my life for the better and has broadened my perspective on many issues I encounter in my daily life. Thank you for your support. I am truly grateful.

Sincerely,

Sarah Dean
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

My name is Binta Diallo. I'm a fourth year student at Xavier University and I am one of the lucky students that participated in the Summer Service Internship this summer. I cannot express how much this internship has impacted my life and helped me to see the world differently. I am a firm believer in the saying that “everything happens for a reason” and this internship has proven that statement to be true.

Since I was a child, I was taught to work hard and become someone that helps people, to become a person that makes a difference in other people’s lives. Growing up, I was convinced that being a medical doctor was the only way to this and make a difference. No one could tell me otherwise; since elementary school, all I wanted to be when I got older was a doctor (an Orthopedic Surgeon, to be specific). So when college came, I declared myself a biology major. During my first year at Xavier, I found myself struggling in my science classes, but that did not stop me from pursuing my dreams of becoming a doctor. I continued to push through and completed my classes. Even-though I was able to get through my classes, I wasn’t happy. I dreaded studying for my exams, but only for science classes; I was perfectly content studying for any other class, but science.

My TRiO (Student Support Services) Counselor noticed this and kept telling me that I should look into a different major because it seemed as though science wasn't what I truly wanted. I would ignore her because all I could think about was becoming a doctor and being that somebody that everybody needs. It wasn’t until the fall semester of my junior year when I was really struggling with my science classes that my TRiO Counselor told me something that I would never forget: she told me that it seems as though I wanted to be a doctor because I wanted to be noticed. All my life I was never heard and I believed that the only way to be heard was to become a doctor that society values and listens to. As much as I didn’t want to admit it, it was true. Being a doctor, in my opinion, was the only way to assure everyone’s respect. I was pushing for something that wasn’t compatible with me, so when spring semester came around, I stepped away from the sciences to see if I had a passion for something else, and I found it in sociology! After switching my major, I found that I LOVED what I was learning and studying, and I was really happy studying it.

Although I found my passion in sociology, I was so worried about what careers I could pursue after graduating from Xavier. That’s when the Summer Service Internship came in! I had a little knowledge on what to expect, but I still didn’t know what was to come during this internship. When we had our first reflection dinner and discussion, I knew that I was involved in something so special. I felt special being there with all the other interns and engaging in such meaningful discussions. I was also able to incorporate what I learned in sociology into these discussions, which made being in this program even more meaningful to me. The community built between all the interns during the discussion was undeniable, and the passion for social justice was contagious during our discussions. The amount of knowledge and education we interns had received during this program left me eager for more.

Working at Healthy Moms and Babes this summer has let me see social injustices firsthand. Not from television or reading it out of a book, but in real life. I’ve met so many
wonderful people at Healthy Moms and Babes whom I will never forget because the work that they do is just as good as a medical doctor and touches the lives of so many in need. This let me know that I do have a calling after college!

I’ve gained so much knowledge on women’s and babies’ health, as well as on the causes of the issues that require services from Healthy Moms and Babes. I obtained all this information from speaking to my fellow co-workers at Healthy Moms and Babes and interacting with clients.

I am blessed to have been a part of Summer Service Internship, and I cannot say that enough! Throughout this whole journey, I have never wanted it to end. It has truly been God-sent because we learn about social justice in way that can otherwise never be taught in the way that this program does it.

I want to say thank you with all my heart for funding this program! It was because of you that I was able to have one of the best learning experiences of my life! Your support has truly changed the lives of others for the better! I hope that you will continue to support this program far into the future.

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

Binta Diallo
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

My name is Yudith Escobar Leon and I am originally from Santa Cruz, Bolivia. As an international graduate student at Xavier University, I am very grateful for the opportunity to experience living on campus with a community of students that have the commitment to develop a better understanding of social justice.

I would like to tell you that the first time I heard about the SSI program was through a handout on a blackboard, which I saw in the main entrance of the Gallagher Student Center. At first, I was not sure what kind of internship it was. Then I went to the web page link provided in the handout, and I understood the process a little bit better. During the process of selection of the non-profit organizations, I realized that there were many of them that had an interesting mission, but I had the chance to select five of them as possible options for the internship. Being matched with the Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education (CHHE) is one of the most wonderful opportunities I could have to learn about the Holocaust history, the Second World War, the victims, and the survivors.

Working at CHHE has opened the door of learning and understanding about the meaning of being Jewish in a Nazi Germany. Meeting with Holocaust Survivors, learning about their personal stories about their life before the Holocaust, during the Holocaust, and how they struggled every day to have a life post World War II is simply overwhelming, but overwhelming in a positive way. Hearing about the concentration camps, the gas chambers, the ghettos, and the discrimination that Jewish people suffered during this awful period of time made me realize that human beings are able to do the most horrifying atrocities against their own kind. But there are also human beings that seek to promote the best of humanity and are able to risk their own lives to help other human beings. People like Raoul Wallenberg, Oskar Schindler, and Chiune Sugihara are great examples that if we want to, we can fight back and improve the world.

If we are vigilant, and if we do not let that hate and racism escalate, then we can affirm that we learn from our mistakes from the past. As Anne Frank Said: “Despite everything, I believe that people are really good at heart”.

During the time that the Summer Service Interns have spent as a community, we engage everyone in a deep process of reflection about social justice and learn how each one of us is contributing to reach or mislead social justice.
Finally, I deeply believe that my experience in SSI and working in CHHE will be a very important part of my life and I will always think about who will be affected by my actions or inactions.

Thank you for this great opportunity. This wonderful program would not be possible without generous people like you and I hope it continues for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Yudith Escobar Leon.
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

I hope this letter finds you well. First and foremost I would like to thank you for allowing this amazing experience to manifest within my life. I am aware that your contributions are one of the main foundations of this program and without them it wouldn’t be possible. Therefore, thank you again because people like you are the ones that make room for people like me.

I heard about the Summer Service Internship from a few different sources and they all gave me good reviews. When I started the program all I could think about was how great of an experience this would be for ME and how much I would gain from this experience. Well, that mindset didn’t last long at all and to my surprise I received a rude awakening my first day at work at the Ohio Justice and Policy Center (OJPC). If there is anything that this internship has taught me, it is that when dealing with these types of issues, one of the last factors that mattered was me. I was not excited about the experience that I would gain because I saw myself as “a helping hand” – in fact it was the opposite. The reason I was excited was because I grew up seeing my loved ones get chewed up by the justice system and I wanted to go back home and share my experience so that we could tackle the issues together. I knew that I was going to gain the skills and connections that they couldn’t and that was okay because I had planned on returning and sharing it with them. I did gain those skills and connections, but not in the way I had imagined.

It wasn’t until I started meeting with clients and hearing their stories, that I realized the value of this internship. It wasn’t until I had sleepless nights thinking about what could be done that I found the role I played in this equation. I knew that I would have an emotional appeal to the cases I heard, because I always have, but I didn’t think it was going to affect me in the way that it did – that it was going to empower me to be the change that I wanted to see.

I remember my first prison visit to see Gerald Moore. He is a 35 year old man who got convicted when he was 15 years old for participating in the robbery of a drug dealer who ended up being killed. Gerald didn’t commit the murder himself but he did provide the weapon and went along for the ride. Gerald lived in a dysfunctional household and never had anyone to look up to. He volunteered his older brother’s gun because he finally saw a group of older kids who were willing to put him under their wings. His weapon offering was a sign of his commitment to the group because all he wanted was someone to make him feel accepted and understood.

Gerald pled guilty and got sentenced to serve 15 years in prison. Today it is over 20 years since the crime and Gerald is approaching his third parole hearing because they don’t want to let him out. I don’t necessarily condone what Gerald did because at the end of the day someone’s life was taken away. However, I would say that it would have been avoided had society intervened in his dysfunctional household before, and that applies for most of the cases that result in crime. It was heartbreaking to see Gerald look at us as we walked away. I had never seen this man before but I would say that he is one of the most beautiful people I have EVER
seen! He was not beautiful in the physical sense, but in a spiritual one. As I spoke to him I could see right through his soul and his drive and determination was truly admirable. I know that Gerald is going to get out this November, I could just feel it! But I would not be so sure if he didn’t have an organization like OJPC on his team to back him up.

I am an International Studies major and had thought about law school before but wasn’t too sure about it until this internship. Today I have no doubt that I AM going to be one of the best attorneys that this country has ever seen. I have no doubts because I wouldn’t allow it to be any other way. This internship inspired me to go back to Camden, New Jersey and start my own organization like OJPC. Throughout my sleepless nights I have even thought about opening one in every state because everyone should be entitled to those resources, but for one reason or another they are not. No one is born with evil intent. No one wants to die, no one wants to kill, no one wants to lie, and no one wants to steal. However, those are the things that we do to make it through. We are all shaped by our experiences and those experiences either make us or break us and too many of my people are broken. I want them all to know that I am here for them and that they don’t have to face these issues alone, we will overcome this!

This program could be life transforming if we simply allow it to be and I have decided to let it transform mine. This is only the beginning and you were the oil that got it started. So thank you for everything that you do and please continue transforming lives!

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Gregoria M. Lora
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

Words cannot express how thankful I am for your support with the Summer Service Internship (SSI). I have experienced more than I could have ever begun to imagine 9 weeks ago. My life has truly been changed after my experience this summer, through the way I think and the different things that I am going to hopefully continue to practice and work within the next years of my life. Working at the Civic Garden Center, I have grown a bountiful network that will hopefully continue long after my internship.

I am going to be a senior in the fall majoring in Business Sustainability. I will be the first graduate of this degree. With that being said, I am always asked, firstly, “what am I going to do after graduation?” followed by, “what will I do with my major?” I haven’t had a definitive answer to those questions. I have not known exactly what I could do or even would want to do. I have always loved working with food and getting people to experience food. With that being said, I have developed a passion over the past few years in working in the realm of food justice and food security after graduation. The only problem is that I was not sure how I could get involved with that with a business degree.

When I first found out I was going to be working at the Civic Garden Center, I was ecstatic but mainly because I knew I would be working outside all summer. Little did I know the things that I would get involved with in just a few weeks. I had mentioned to my Executive Director, in one of our first conversations, that I had a passion for food justice and security. She then invited me to be a part of the monthly meeting of the Local Food Action Team (LFAT) under the Green Umbrella, and this opened my eyes to the amazing organizations that work in Cincinnati to work to have a strong local food economy and security. After that first meeting, my conversations grew with my Director, Vickie, and she asked me to work on a project for the LFAT to develop a Local Food Action Plan to implement a local food movement for the greater Cincinnati community and its small businesses. The end goal of this action plan would be to eventually change the face of the Local Food Economy in the greater Cincinnati area through different programs and a centralized institution of sorts. We are not yet sure what this needs to look like exactly, and it will take longer than about 8 weeks to work this out.

This all leads to where I am at the end of my summer. I have finally found how my passions can be turned into something, how I can finally attempt to answer the questions of “what am I going to do after I graduate?” I have started with saying, I still have no idea. I do not know where I am going to end up or how I will end up there. One thing that I do know is that I am going to be working in the continuous fight to help make local food be more accessible to every community. I am going to work in the progress of food justice and how we can find a way for all peoples to have fresh and healthy food. Do I know what that kind of job is going to look like? No, but after this summer I know that there are people out there who are as passionate as, if not more passionate than I am, who want to work to help the greater community.

So how has this summer affected me? This summer has truly changed me. With my work in the youth programming I have been able to see the faces of children who have never been in a garden. I have been able to show children that you can eat things in the garden and they do not have to be
cooked or canned. I have learned more about sustainable practices and good gardening practices than I could even begin to write out. This summer has been a magical experience to grow mentally, physically, and emotionally. I have begun to focus my passions; I have begun to see where I will be in 9 months from now after graduation.

I truly don't think the words “thank you” can fully express my gratitude to the financial support of this program. Besides the work I have done and the challenges I have face, the community we have grown among all of the interns is a community of lifelong connections that will not dissipate soon. I had a conversation with a few of the other interns the other night and we were all talking about how it was nearly destiny that we have all been placed at the agencies that we are working with this summer. Without your gracious and generous funding to our program, we would have never had the chance to prove who we are, fall in love, and be ruined for life.

So finally I truly say, thank you so very much for your continuous support!

Joe McGrath
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

I can’t thank you enough for your support of this program. I can easily say it has changed my life. This experience has caused me to think critically about what direction my life and career is going and reevaluate them. I can honestly say that the Summer Service Internship has caused me to end up with more questions than I began with.

I’ve been very fortunate in that I was placed at my top choice at the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center (IJPC). Traditionally, interns have contributed to IJPC’s work by splitting their time in all three of IJPC’s programs: removal of the death penalty, peace and non-violence, and immigration reform. However, because of transitions happening within the organization, I had the opportunity to take on the primary responsibilities of the immigration program. While I was initially nervous about taking on this seemingly daunting task, the experience has been immensely rewarding. I spent the better part of my first two weeks at work researching and reaching out to activists so I could better understand immigration reform. Not only have I become very passionate about the issue of immigration reform, I have made impactful relationships with undocumented individuals.

In this letter thanking you for graciously funding our program, I thought it might be appropriate to share some of what I have learned over the past two months. Like mentioned earlier, I have spent a lot of my time researching a lot of the hot topic issues pertaining to immigration as they have been happening.

Something that hasn’t been reported enough is the necessity to treat the unaccompanied minors that are flooding southern borders as an issue separate from immigration policy. It is important that we consider the unaccompanied minors issue to be a humanitarian crises rather than a policy flaw. Honduras has the highest murder rate in the world with El Salvador and Guatemala also in the top 5. Reasons for the hike in violence in these countries can also be attributed to the war on drugs in Mexico that pushed many of the cartels into the surrounding countries. Many of the children coming from those areas could qualify for refugee status because of the situation of their home county. It should also be noted that it isn't just America that they are fleeing to. Asylum requests by people from these countries to neighboring countries such as Mexico, Panama, and Nicaragua have gone up 712% since 2009, so this should have been a problem that the United States saw coming. The problem is finding a solution, which nobody really seems to have a good grasp on. Sending the children back could mean sending them to their deaths, while allowing floods of people into our country without a great system to process them isn't really viable either. IJPC’s stance is pretty clear in that we need to fix the problem at the source. Children and families will continue to come here unless the violence in their home countries is addressed. The anti-immigrant protests that have been cropping up across the country have been very disturbing to me. It seems unfathomable that we, as Americans, could treat children in such a manner, politics aside.

The immigration policy debate is a whole other beast. The DREAM Act, which failed to pass in Congress, was a bill in which the "Dreamers", who were brought to the United States as children, could have a pathway to citizenship. Because that failed to pass, President Obama passed an executive order called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). In order for
individuals to qualify for DACA they must have come to the US before they were 16 and before 6/15/07. So DACA would not apply to any of the newly arriving immigrants crossing the border, in spite of what many people are saying. The problem with DACA, and any other executive action that Obama may take is that they are temporary. Obama, or any other President after him, can revoke executive actions whenever they please. This is especially problematic with many of the kids that I work with at IJPC. DACA recipients are able to work legally, have a driver’s license, and also go to college. However, if DACA gets revoked, they lose all of this and are again at risk for deportation, even though they had no say in coming to the US. IJPC was also very supportive of the bipartisan "Gang of 8" bill that passed in the Senate last year. The bill had components of the DREAM Act, but also included measures for immigrants to pay a fine, and to allocate more funding to secure the border. However, it was declared "dead-on-arrival" in the House, and Speaker John Boehner (and Xavier graduate) had repeatedly said that the House would put their own version of immigration reform up for debate. I had a lobbyist in DC tell me that the House was days away from drafting a reform bill when Eric Cantor lost his primary race to an anti-immigrant candidate. This caused other House members to back off of the issue, as they too had primaries coming up.

Our organization supports a "pathway to citizenship", which isn't really possible for most people here in the US. People often say that immigrants should "get in line", but the problem is that with the policies that we currently have there is no line for them to get in. Reform would establish a line that would better fit the immigration realities of today's world. Through doing research, having dialogue, and attending rallies, I can confidently say that I fully support the need for comprehensive immigration reform. I also believe that if the opposition would simply sit down and take the time and listen to many of the immigrant's stories, they would support them too. I again thank you for your support of the Summer Service Internship, and can't express how blessed I feel to have been a part of it.

In Solidarity,

Ryan Murphy
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

The Summer Service internship has been a time of growth for me. It has been an intense but exciting journey for me, from writing application essays to writing appreciation letters. Having ten weeks of summer dedicated to living in the ground floor of Brockman, eating pasta and rice (because I am such an amateur cook), and waking up every day to work a 9-5 job was not exactly what I expected my summer to be. But I am glad that it was, and I will tell you why.

This summer has gone by tremendously fast. And why would it not, when I have been learning and growing amongst wonderful other interns and great coordinators? My expectations at the beginning of the year for an internship came in a completely different package through the Summer Service Internship. Originally, the aspect of getting paid drew my attention to this program more than the learning part, but now I can confidently say that this program has had such a positive impact on me through EVERY part of the reflection, working, and learning. As an International Student here at Xavier, getting a paid internship, having somewhere to live for free during the summer, and learning a tremendous amount in exchange for my interest, excitement, and willingness to be positively impacted, is pretty much like winning the lottery. And this has been fully possible because of you.

The social justice issues have really gotten me thinking about many things that were close enough to my heart for me to think about from time to time, but far enough for me not to be too bothered about the greater impact they have. Clearly, I was more knowledgeable in certain topics than other topics, but even then, the vast amount of wisdom, knowledge, information, and motivation I have been exposed to this summer have put these issues close enough for them to have a grip on my heart, prompting me to see and find ways that I can join the “good fight”. From White Privilege (which we started with) to Sustaining the Soul (where we are presently), I can say we have had meaningful times growing, conversing, discussing and learning. Not only are we learning, we are working and being productive in agencies whose missions tie directly to all these critical issues.

My agency, Kennedy Heights Arts Center, has simply been a blessing to me this summer, and I hope they can say the same about me. I have found joy there assisting the kids as they express their God-given talents and creative abilities which come in so many different and interesting forms. I have played and swayed with the kids. I have taught them and I have learnt from them. I have and continue to give myself in assistance to the agency, my supervisor, and everyone there I come in contact with, while at the same time receiving training from my superiors and the chance to grow personally. The funny thing about working in Kennedy Heights is that it allows me to have as much fun as the kids because I am able to express myself through art, writing, and simply playing with the kids and other volunteers. It has been a good time that I am grateful for. The fellow community of interns have been a blessing as well. Having people to interact with, laugh with, and make plans with during the summer has been a great way to unwind, reflect, be challenged, learn and explore Cincinnati more. It really was like winning the lottery!

And so, like I said earlier, having ten weeks of summer dedicated to living in the ground floor of Brockman, eating pasta and rice, and waking up to every day to work a 9-5 job was not exactly what I expected my summer to be. It has been tiring and exhausting at times, but that it has been good,
because I have been challenged to finally learn how to be independent in terms of cooking for myself and managing money effectively and I have finally gotten a taste of what it is like to be a working adult. All these would not have been completely possible, or at least not as worthwhile without your generosity and your passion and belief in us, the youth of today. As you have seen, I will finish up Summer Service Internship with a summer that I am proud of, by God’s grace.

G.B Stern once said: “Silent gratitude isn’t much use to anyone”. I am grateful, so I am saying thank you.

Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Muyiwa Oyatogun

Muyiwa Oyatogun

2014 Xavier Summer Service Intern
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

My name is Jessica Nekl and I am a rising senior at Xavier University. I am working towards my Bachelors degree in Social Work and minors in Theology and Gender and Diversity Studies. I have had a wonderful experience at Xavier and am continuously blessed by the opportunities and experiences available to me as a Xavier student. The Summer Service Internship, in particular, is an experience that has meant so much to me and will continue to impact my life and future long after the summer is over. For that, I thank you immensely for the commitment you have made as funders to ensure that this opportunity is available year after year.

The first time I heard about SSI was during my Manresa orientation at Xavier. My small group leader was an SSI participant that summer and raved about her experiences. She told me a little about what the program was like, peaking my interest in SSI. Throughout my first two years at Xavier, I kept SSI in my mind as something I would have liked to do, but at the end of both my first and second years at Xavier, I went home for the summer to be with my family and work near home in the Cleveland area. At the start of my third year I knew I wanted to do something different, so I decided to apply for SSI. I was excited by the possibility of having a job in a non-profit agency that would provide great experience for my career in Social Work and be paid for it, too. In early 2014, I sent in my application, made it through the interview nights, and was selected to be the Summer Service intern placed at the Freestore Foodbank! I was thrilled. Out of the sites I interviewed with, I felt that the Freestore Foodbank would be challenging for me, but a major reason I was attracted to SSI was the challenge. I saw the challenges of working in a new environment, facing difficult issues, reflecting on and discussing social justice, and living in community with new people. I wanted to be challenged which would help me to learn and grow.

Going into the summer, I was nervous about some things but knew that SSI, at the very least, would be a great learning experience and benefit me professionally. I was nervous about working at the Freestore Foodbank and doubted if I had what it took to work there. I also had doubts about living in the SSI community, wondering if I would connect with others. Regardless of how I felt before starting the program, my anxieties were put to rest quickly once the program began. I have had a fantastic experience, one that has far exceeded my expectations.

Working as an intern at the Freestore Foodbank has been fantastic and taught me so much. For starters, I have found that I enjoy working in a fast-paced environment. There is always a lot going on at Freestore and I like being a part of what they do. I spend the majority of my time doing intake and engagement with customers in the Social Services department. I have spoken with many people experiencing poverty, homelessness, and hunger. Although I have no personal experience with these issues, I have been able to connect with clients. Showing clients that I care by listening and treating them with respect is effective, and I think a lot of people really appreciate the chance to tell their story. Although there are similarities in people’s stories, each person is unique. Additionally, even though some of the hardships clients have encountered are extremely difficult, people are still grateful, joyful, hopeful, and filled with purpose. Meeting people who face countless barriers but are working hard and desire to improve their situations is not only inspiring, but dispels the myth that people who are poor are lazy and want to live off of the public benefits system.

At the Freestore Foodbank I have also spent a lot of time helping people apply for out-of-state birth certificates. I have really enjoyed and grown from doing this process with clients. I
would never have known the requirements that certain states have, along with the great need that there is for this service. I have shared in my clients’ frustration when they cannot obtain their birth certificate because they lack the proper identification or documents. This is one example of the many systemic barriers that prevent people living in poverty from advancing. Proper identification is needed to obtain housing and employment, and it is striking to me that seemingly small advantages like having a birth certificate and ID are so important and necessary in order to progress to self-sufficiency. Not being aware of obstacles like these is a side effect of having privilege. By growing up in the upper middle class, I have been free from requirements to know how to get my birth certificate and apply for public benefits, for example. In my life I have taken for granted the many blessings and advantages I have and working at the Freestore Foodbank has made me more aware of the far reaches of poverty, touching people from every race, age, and level of educational achievement. I have spent a lot of time thinking and talking about systemic barriers and policies such as SNAP and Medicaid, and many other topics around social justice and change. I have many questions, much more than I had before I started my work.

Working at the Freestore Foodbank has been more than I expected and I could say the same thing about living in the SSI community. From the first week of training at Camp Kern, to staying up late having conversations, to spending time getting to know people one-on-one, to Wednesday night dinners and reflections, the community aspect of SSI has been amazing. I am blown away by the people in the SSI community. The group is diverse, accepting, supportive, and challenging. We encourage each other to go outside of our comfort zones. I have greatly valued being asked difficult questions and the genuine interest others have displayed in getting to know me. Also, since we all have different interests and experiences, the insights that others have shared with me about their perspectives is appreciated. Though we are all working at different locations doing a vast variety of tasks, we have been able to relate through our experiences and thoughts. I am grateful for the SSI program in that it attracts many different students and enables us to live in the intentional community. I have made many new friendships and feel blessed to know so many wonderful people. I am inspired by them and so proud to be in the 2014 SSI community.

I have learned so much about myself this summer and my thanks go to you, the funders of SSI, for your generosity and dedication to this fantastic program. I have learned that I do have what it takes to work in challenging environments with people who are different from me. Working at the Freestore Foodbank is something I will never forget. As my first social work related job, I will build my skills and techniques from here on out. Additionally, I have developed an interest in administration and social policy, realizing that I would like to do more than direct practice in my career. As a person who likes to have a plan, SSI has caused me to question my plans and consider more ambitious options to pursue. I am considering pursuing a dual Masters degree in Social Work and Public Administration, something that I would have been very intimidated by before this summer. I have asked questions, and found many more questions. I have learned, listened, observed, and realized that I have a lot more to learn. Last but certainly not least, I have learned a lot about Cincinnati! I am ashamed to say that up until recently I have not fully appreciated this unique city. During the school year I am busy with classes and other activities and I have not had the time to adequately explore neighborhoods and new areas. I have greatly enjoyed spending my summer here, and it has made me realize that I would like to get to know other new places too. I am considering new possibilities with graduate
schools and adventures to take, and SSI has helped me see the value in adventure and being outside of my comfort zone.

I must admit that the aspect of a service internship being paid is part of what caught my attention for SSI. College is expensive and I honestly probably would not have considered SSI if it did not have the financial incentives. The wages I have earned along with the food stipend and living in Brockman Hall have been very helpful and allowed me to not have to worry about making money and instead allowed me to focus on challenging myself and growing. However, the intangible benefits of this summer have been the most invaluable and I will benefit from the gift of SSI far into the future. I thank you all again for this experience. I will look back on my time at Xavier and the Summer Service Internship will stand out as one of my fondest memories.

With many thanks,

Jessica Nekl
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

My name is Becky Griesmer and I am a rising senior at Xavier University majoring in Sport Management with minors in Business, Communication Arts, and Gender and Diversity Studies. I had the privilege of being chosen to participate in Xavier's Summer Service Internship program throughout these past few months. I was matched with Project Connect, whose mission is to "provide advocacy paired with specialized educational services and lifestyle enrichment opportunities for children who have neither a voice, nor a choice, in being homeless."

With Project Connect, I worked at their daily summer camp for children ages five through twelve experiencing homelessness. I was quickly placed in the classroom with the oldest students, where we had a daily average of about 27 students, ages ten through twelve years old. I worked with these students on an individual level, as well as helped to foster a team atmosphere in and out of the classroom. A typical day for me would be to arrive at the Fairview German Language School at 8:30am to prepare for the students to arrive at 9:00am. I would help lead "Moving in the Morning," where the interns taught a dance that we had choreographed to a new song each week; in order to get the students active for about 10 minutes each morning. We would head inside and monitor as the students ate the federal breakfast that was provided for them each morning. Next, we would head upstairs to the classroom and work on academics, where we would focus on Reading and Math for an hour each. For academics, I worked with small groups of children and helped them with whatever they needed. We would read in groups, do worksheets, do math problems or play games on the white board, etc. The children would head to lunch and I would meet back up with them at recess. In the afternoon, we did various activities such as swimming, playing at the park, doing arts and crafts, watching movies, and more. I would help monitor the children as they ate snack before they departed from camp at 3:30pm. Many times throughout the summer, this schedule would change because of field trips to places like Kings Island, The Beach Waterpark, a Reds Game, Coney Island, or weekly programs such as Girl Scouts, MORE, Children's Theater, and community lunches.

This was such an incredible summer for me, and I would not have had this opportunity without your funding and continuous support. I always knew that I loved children and wanted to work with them after graduation in some capacity, but working with Project Connect has really made me focus more on wanting to find a way to help with the education and life skills portions of helping children succeed. From teaching Paris multiplication this summer, to showing LaDaesha an easier way to do long division, I really enjoyed getting to make a difference in these children's lives. I learned to be more patient and understanding with children and how to best adapt my teaching style for each student that I worked with. I was able
to positively influence and interact with these children experiencing homelessness. The other adult staff members joked with me at the beginning of the summer and said that after this experience I may want to change my major to Education. I doubted this because I have always been so passionate about Sport Management, but through reflection towards the end of the summer, I have now not entirely put teaching out of the question for the future.

This program is unique in the sense that each of the twenty interns were matched with different non profits throughout the Cincinnati area. I have loved living together as an intern community in Brockman and getting to learn more about each organization, as well as my fellow interns. We have all been able to share our experiences with one another on a daily basis and explore Cincinnati on a much deeper level. We have been able spend time in the many unique neighborhoods in the area, have visited cultural landmarks, and simply bonded when we watched a movie or just talked for hours in the residence hall. I never would have thought that I would learn how to play racquetball this summer or see a movie at the Esquire Theater, a 101 year old movie theater in Clifton. These opportunities were abundant and I am so thankful that I got to experience so many new things.

Thanks to your generous support, we were able to continue these meaningful conversations outside of reflection time through living together on campus. This program would not be the same if we did not share the same kitchen, bathroom, lounges, and rooms in the basement of Brockman. Some of the best laughs, jokes, moments, and conversations were shared in this building and I am thankful that I was able to participate in these moments.

I work as a campus tour guide during the school year and constantly say that community is my favorite part about the Xavier experience. This belief has shone through this summer as I have grown so close to my 19 other classmates. Part of this closeness was developed during our weekly reflection sessions each Wednesday night. While these conversations and topics often challenged me, I know that they were worthwhile in helping to guide me to become more knowledgeable about many justice topics facing our world today. My perspective has been changed entirely because of conversations sparked during reflections each week.

When the application process began for SSI this past spring, I was told to consider the program from friends who had participated in the past. I normally found discussion of social justice issues to be provocative and intriguing, but a whole summer doing that? Little did I know that this program was so much more than just that. I learned to step out of my shoes and be okay with silence that comes with this type of discussion. I know that I have a lot to contribute to conversations, but through discussions and my trust in the community, I learned to be comfortable
with asking the uncomfortable questions. I am now able to have educated conversations with other people about issues facing Cincinnati and the resources available to help.

I am beyond grateful for this opportunity and could not thank you enough for helping to fund such a worthwhile, life changing, and enjoyable program. Thank you for all that you have done and know that the interns appreciate it more than you could imagine.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Griesmer (Becky)
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

Across the street from Caracole, there is a bench. Through chatting with colleagues and people in the Northside community, I have come to know it as the Giving Bench. With no written rules or regulations, it has become a meaningful, hidden gem in the neighborhood. Though it is a simple bench, it is often piled with an assortment of left possessions. If one has something they no longer use they can put it on the bench and others are free to take it. Once you give, you can begin to take as you need. I was fascinated by the bench from the very first time I heard about it. One morning, I contributed to the bench by putting a painting on it I had done. By the end of that day, the painting was no longer on the bench and I had an odd sense of pride. Now, when I walk into work in the morning I glance across the street to see if anything on the bench catches my eye. Though I have not found anything yet to take for myself, I hold a tender reverence toward being a part of the unspoken community of the Giving Bench.

The Summer Service Internship holds many parallels to the Giving Bench in my eyes. The internship is comprised of many people with a wide variety of things to give. Whether it is at my agency, in the community of interns, or in individual relationships, I have come across giving in many ways this summer. I have also come across the value of taking what others are willing to give. This wonderful system of giving and taking, I believe, is the core of human interaction. This summer has made me realize on a deeper level, the interconnectedness of all beings.

I chose to participate in the Summer Service Internship because I wanted to work with a population that I had not yet encountered in my community outreach in Cincinnati. I saw the internship as an opportunity to be exposed to a group that I knew little about. Being placed with Caracole was exactly what I was looking for. Before my internship, I knew very little about HIV/AIDS. My ignorance initially saw it as something that affected people mostly in Africa, or places far away. I did not know about treatments. I did not know about the other burdens that come along with the disease. I did not know how many people in Cincinnati even have the virus. Reflecting on what I knew then, I am able to realize my growth. In taking what others have given, I have been able to learn of the medical history of HIV/AIDS, the personal experiences of those facing the virus, and the hope my agency holds for a better future for our clients.

I have never loved a job as much as I love my internship with Caracole. As a marketing major going into my junior year at Xavier, the question of what I want to do when I graduate has been looming over my head. I have always been social justice oriented and have not quite found where that fits into the business world. This internship has exposed me to the type of position in which a marketing major would thrive and be of value to an agency. Without this internship, I am not sure where I would have been able to find this assurance which I unquestionably needed.

I would like to thank you for a great summer, which has provided a space for me to both give and take and to understand myself and others more fully.

Sincerely,

Allie Weiss
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

I would like to sincerely express my gratitude for giving me, and the 19 other students, this life changing opportunity. Through your generous gifts I have been able to grow as a person and become much more self-aware. While this time is short, I know that SSI’s impact on me will be life-long.

One of the main ways I was changed through this program was with my introduction to the concept of voluntary simplicity. This way of living centered on experience and people rather than possessions is something that really struck a chord with me. As I go forth, I believe this will stick with me and allow me to lead a much richer and fuller life for myself and others.

Additionally, your funding has allowed me to gain a multitude of career skills that will undoubtedly help me find work doing something that I’m not only good at, but passionate about as well.

In summation I would like to once again thank you for your generous donation. If my site has taught me anything about fundraising it would be just how crucial donations and grants are. The more I have fundraised at my site, the more I am thankful for every dollar donated to the program.

SSI certainly has been a great experience and I hope future classes can experience this great program. Thank you again for this experience I certainly became a better person because of SSI.

Thank you,

Chris Due
Meredith Beamer  
5580 Ciderberry Dr.  
Brighton, MI 48116  
July 15, 2014

Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

My name is Meredith Beamer, and I am fortunate enough to be one of the Summer Service interns for 2014 at Xavier University. This summer I have been interning at the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Through this experience I have learned a lot about the city of Cincinnati, have strengthened my resolve to become a social worker, and have been challenged in my previous misconceptions and ways of thinking. Due to your extreme generosity, I have been blessed with this eye-opening opportunity.

At St. Vincent de Paul, I encounter new people every day, and every one of them offers me a challenge and a chance to learn and grow. Through this internship I have developed relationships with inspiring people, including both the St. Vincent de Paul staff and clients alike. My supervisor, Nick, has pushed me to take leadership roles and speak my mind, when otherwise I might have stayed quiet. The high school retreat students that I have worked alongside have challenged me to reevaluate my values and beliefs through reflections, conversations, and debates. The many clients of St. Vincent de Paul have inspired me with their unwavering faith, and I have learned that many of the materialistically impoverished people that I encountered are truly rich in spirit and faith.

I want to thank you for choosing to support and fund the Summer Service Internship program as it has been eye-opening, challenging, and life changing for me. Without your generosity, I would never have been able to live in community with twenty other Xavier students that have a passion for justice, learning, and service. I might also never have been forced to rethink my stereotypes, prejudices, and pre-concepts. I know I will carry my time and experience at St. Vincent de Paul with me for the rest of my life, and I hope that many others are afforded the same Summer Service opportunity as I had.

Your generosity and support is greatly appreciated. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Meredith Beamer