Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

My name is Emma Barry and I am a part of Xavier’s summer service internship (SSI) 2018. I have been interning with Catholic Charities’ refugee resettlement office in southwestern Ohio. In addition, I have been living in an intentional community with twenty other interns.

This summer has exceeded my expectations. Firstly, working for my agency has given me the opportunity to work with a population that, especially today, is in need of help, support and love. Being an international student, the refugee crisis is something that I care deeply about. I wouldn’t have been able to contribute to work that has such an international impact without the SSI program and for that I am deeply grateful.

Every day that I leave work, I am reminded to be grateful for all of my privilege. It is only due to circumstance that I am not one of the refugees being assisted today. It is only by chance that I haven’t had to flee my home, live in a refugee camp and only if your lucky, move to a completely different country with completely different customs.

When a refugee arrives in the U.S., they are given around $1075 to help them get on their feet and are expected to be fully independent within three months. When I first heard that, I was astonished. How would they be able to become fully self-reliant with all the barriers they face - language and cultural alike. The work I’ve been doing involves looking for potential housing, moving furniture, picking up clients from the airport, helping with cultural orientation, teaching them how to ride the bus, helping them apply for public benefits or taking them to different appointments. Granted, more often than not, it does end up taking much longer than three months until they don’t need us anymore, but I was equally humbled by the effort and will put in by our refugee clients as well as my co-workers. Our clients work for every slice of bread they get. Working here has shown me the true meaning of working with and not for others. It has shown me the strength, resilience and compassion that people who seemingly have nothing possess. Ultimately, it has served to make even clearer that this refugee crisis is a social justice issue that must be at the forefront of our minds. There is so much to do and so many ways in which we can do them. I have seen how infinitely small acts can make a difference. Even if it only helps one person, that one human being still matters. What I have been given this summer is the motivation to act, to fight for what matters and to not give up. If I were to sit down and cross my arms, I would only be reducing that one person, that I could have helped, to nothing.

As previously mentioned, another part of this summer has involved living in an intentional community with the other interns. Our Monday and Wednesday nights were reserved for more education on social justice. Some of the topics we delved into include white privilege, racism and what it means to be an ally. My mind has grown full with all that I have learnt and everyday it hungers for more. I can only liken it to seeing the world in black and white and then suddenly being bombarded with all the colors of the rainbow. I’ve learned about gentrification, specifically in Cincinnati and I have a better understanding of the true facets of racism and poverty. These are just a few examples but they have all served to show me the injustices breeding in our everyday lives.

Our discussions on social justice issues went beyond Monday and Wednesday nights and seeped into our everyday conversations. After everything we’ve learnt so far, it has been impossible to go the whole day without having at least one meaningful conversation. That has led to the building of relationships which I am positive will last long after SSI is over.
Therefore, I wish to thank you all so much for this experience that you helped make possible. It was truly life changing and it would not have happened without your support. Rest assured that I will continue to act. I must.

Yours Sincerely,

Emma Barry
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

I wanted to thank you for allowing me to experience one of the best things I’ve ever felt: the weight of my own impact on others. I have had the pleasurable fortune of interning with Project Connect, a program that focuses on enriching the lives of youth within the city of Cincinnati who are plagued with homelessness.

My main responsibility this summer was to be one of their teachers, in hopes that I might benefit them in one way or another. But the truth is I feel as though those kids have given me a larger gift than I can repay them for. The 120 children that I’ve been involved with have given me their love, trust, and instilled within me a hope for the future that was not previously present. From these children I learned to be a better friend, which made me a better listener. They opened my eyes to the unfortunate way that their circumstances have forced them to see the world; they have been trained more for survival than a happy-go-lucky childhood. For me to have been able to be involved with bringing them just a little joy this summer was life changing to me. Their smiling faces have been engraved on my heart, and I think of those kids every day, even now that camp is over.

I was blessed to have this SSI experience, because now I see things in a different light. I am now more knowledgeable about Cincinnati and how this city is very different from my own hometown in Michigan. I am also now aware that homelessness is a wide spectrum, and that at any given time, even those of us who are considered more fortunate could fall from that and enter the homelessness spectrum. It is through the education and research side of SSI that I have been able to understand that there are systemic things in place that for some, force those things to happen, while for others those harsh life realities are avoidable, while there are others who are able to maintain and skate by. Without this program, I think it would’ve taken me more of a life journey to realize some of these things and I am indebted to Angela, Sequoia, and the rest of the Cohort for being with me along this journey. But more importantly, without the funding, they wouldn’t have the tools to change lives and perspectives of Xavier students, while learning from and impacting the culture of those in and around Cincinnati for the sake of the greater-good.

Thank you,

[Signature]

Jamie Carter
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

To encompass the entirety of my experience throughout the Summer Service Internship (SSI) in this letter would be near impossible. There are things that I have learned, discussions I have been apart of, and personal moments of growth that are beyond the power of words. However, I wish to provide you a glimpse of what this summer has been like for me.

Coming into SSI, I had absolutely no idea what to expect: all I knew was that people had only amazing things to say about it. I was nervous throughout the interview process, however, was completely surprised and relieved when I found out I got offered a position at St. Vincent de Paul's Ozanam Center for Service Learning. At my internship, I primarily lead immersion retreats for high school students. On these retreats, throughout the week, we discuss various social justice issues that affect our very neighbors of Cincinnati: poverty, racism, homelessness, gentrification, incarceration, and food insecurity. In order to better and more deeply learn and engage with these issues, we go around to the different neighborhoods of Cincinnati and visit several agencies. The agencies that we visit shed light to various social justice issues that affect our neighbors of Cincinnati and shed light on the severity of those issues. Ultimately, it is without a doubt I have grown immensely throughout my time at St. Vincent de Paul. However, not only have I witnessed my growth, I have also been blessed enough to watch others grow as well. It is extremely rewarding to witness the students at the beginning of the week, often not very knowledgeable of issues related to social justice, to the end of the week, full of passion, anger, but most importantly, a desire for action and change. Now, I cannot truly imagine my life without my experience at St. Vincent de Paul's Ozanam Center, and will not only cherish the rest of my time there, but take my knowledge and growth with me into the future.

In addition to my actual internship at St. Vincent de Paul, the Summer Service Internship program itself has had a profound effect on me. Although I could list many great things about SSI, the most impactful thing throughout my time at SSI is the intentional community. Coming into SSI, I was not entirely sure of what intentional community was. The more I learned about it, the more nervous I was to live with 19 other people all summer long. However, my hesitations and doubts now seem rather foolish, because it is the community that makes SSI what it truly is. Because I was living in community, I learned a lot about myself. Originally, I came into SSI thinking that I knew a decent amount about social justice, and was rather used to being the more outspoken one in most groups I was involved in. However, immediately when I entered into my cohort, I realized this was not going to be the case, and had to adjust. I had to step back and accept that I did not know many things. I had to listen. This may
sound like a sad and disappointing thing, but I could not be more grateful. Because of this, I have taken
the position of truly listening and learning throughout this experience, and have grown immensely from
this approach. In addition to learning about myself, I have learned about others. All the members of my
cohort are from extremely different walks of life. We all have a lot of different experiences, a lot to say,
and varying scope of knowledge. But this is what makes SSI so beautiful: you have the opportunity to
not only learn and grow from others and their experience, but learn and grow with others. It is the
programming, community, and internship that make SSI the incredible and truly unspeakable experience
that it is.

I hope this letter has shed some light on the impact SSI can have on an individual. Without you, I
would not have grown and developed into who I am right this second. You have allowed me to further
my knowledge and passion for social justice, and ignite the fire to learn more, fight more, and do more. I
am forever thankful for your gracious support that allows an experience like this to be possible.

Sincerely,

Izzy Childs

[Signature]
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

Being a part of the 2018 Summer Service Internship (SSI) cohort has fundamentally changed my life for the better. Being more than halfway done with SSI I have learned valuable information, life lessons, and aspects about myself. The valuable knowledge that I have gained consists of learning more about gentrification, racism, voluntary simplicity, allyship, sustaining the soul and much more. Not only did I learn valuable information but I also “experienced” the information being taught. For example, we walked through Over the Rhine and discussed gentrification. I know that I would not have had that experience and vulnerable conversations in any other setting. SSI has truly allowed me connect with those that directly experience the topics we discuss while also being able to discern my own thoughts and allowing my voice to be heard at the same time. Also, with my experience I have never felt more emotional and aware of not only my surroundings but also myself. Essentially, hearing my cohort’s life experiences combined with my own has broadened my scope of reality while also help me learn new viewpoints. Overall, my experience with SSI has allowed me to feel more vulnerable, open, and connected with my cohort than I ever thought was possible.

Consequently, SSI has critically impacted me as well. Working at Stepping Stones Camp Given has directly impacted my confidence. I have never worked with kids with disabilities before SSI, and I was initially terrified that I was not fit for the job. But now I know that I can take on any obstacle that comes my way and be able to efficiently execute it. SSI has not only impacted my confidence but also my self-awareness. Living in intentional community has made me learn my weaknesses and strengths. Living with 20 different people, personalities, and experiences has made me learn how to connect and interact with those different from me. These are lifelong learnings that I can take with me through my career, friendships, and family. Even
though our summer is winding down, I still have more to experience and learn. Without your continuous support I would never have this once in a lifetime experience.

Thank you for your continuous support,

Tristen Flowers

[Signature]
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

This summer I interned with the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center (IJP) through the Xavier University Summer Service Internship Program. My specific internship as well as the program in general have greatly expanded my learning regarding social justice issues and have allowed me to become much more educated on the issues that my agency addresses.

The Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center (IJP) focuses on public education and advocacy surrounding immigration reform, abolition of the death penalty, ending human trafficking, and peace and nonviolence initiatives. All of these issues have been areas of interest for me prior to my internship, however my reasons for opposing them have been strictly based off of moral beliefs. Although recognizing the moral issues within social injustices, these moral arguments are not particularly useful when advocating for the cause. Rather, it is important to have more academic arguments to use when discussing the injustices within society. IJP has given me the opportunity to learn and understand more academic arguments regarding IJP’s focus issues.

The staff at IJP has also emphasized that it is crucial to use personal stories when advocating for a cause, rather than simply data and academic arguments. My experiences at IJP have given me personal connections and narratives to use when supporting my view on one of these issues. IJP gave me the opportunity to attend the Annual Fast & Vigil to End the Death Penalty in Washington D.C where the other interns and I held signs and passed out information to people passing by the Supreme Court. Along with our public witness, we were also able to connect with individuals who had been directly affected by the death penalty in many ways- those who have been wrongfully put on death row, jurors who have put people on death row, executioners, murder victim families, and families of those on death row. Having the experience of speaking with those that had personal stories for the arguments to oppose the death penalty made the importance of stories clear to me and gave me a greater passion for ending the death penalty.

The Summer Service Internship has given me a passion for issues that I have just started to learn about as well as education and advocacy skills to pair with that passion. I hope to take these skills and use them throughout my career as social worker, making my impact on improving society. Your generous giving to the Summer Service Internship allows for me and others to discover passions and skills that will help us make our own small impact on society and the issues that we face in our futures. Thank you for allowing us to grow and work towards the goal of improving our society.

Best,

Donald Foley
Summer Service Intern 2018
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

In my time at Xavier I have learned so much about social justice and solidarity. I’ve been a part of the X-change service program, mentoring at local schools, acted as a coach for Girls on the Run, taught soccer, and even taken a class called “From Service to Solidarity.” From each of these I learned a lot but by far this Summer Service Internship (SSI) program has taught me more than all of those experiences combined. I’ve not only learned about social justice this summer, I’ve been able to live it as well.

We tend to call the campus of Xavier “The Xavier Bubble.” Despite (as is the Jesuit tradition) being located in a low-income neighborhood, there is a clear distinction between Xavier University and the surrounding neighborhoods of Evanston, Avondale, and Norwood. Although I had left that bubble many times to serve and volunteer locally it wasn’t until this summer that I was finally able to pop that bubble. During the school year, I would leave campus to volunteer for a few hours and then return to school where I went back to my studies and forgot all about the people I served until the next week. This was a continuing cycle of using service to distract myself from school, then being overwhelmed by school and losing sight of who I had built relationships with. School is important and a balance must be created between building community outside of school and getting an education. This summer I was able to fully invest in building community with the people I served in the surrounding neighborhoods.

A very clear example of this was when we were volunteering at World Refugee Day and I ran into one of the students I had worked with in an afterschool program at Academy of World Languages (AWL). I was able to talk to her one on one and meet some of her family members. As we talked, and she shared more of her life story I finally felt I was in community. I was no longer this figure that had made a guest appearance in the life of a child, I was a fellow community member and friend. She shared with me about how her brother had died in Syria and how her parents worked odd hours to provide for their family. I met her brothers and sisters who were preparing to attend college soon. It felt like a moment of true solidarity and oneness with people I had only seen for an hour each week. Another example was when I went to AWL for an Imago camp and I ran into more of the students I had worked with during the school year. Seeing them in a context outside of school allowed for a new sense of community to be built. One specific boy who I remember being terribly behaved in a soccer program I ran, was the biggest helper and kindest kid at our camp. He opened up to me about hearing gunshots every night outside his grandmother’s house. He also told me I was the best soccer coach (which I had to try really hard not to laugh at). But it was in this moment as well I realized a bridge had been cross and unity had been formed.

Through this program, I finally put solidarity into action. It was no longer this buzzword thrown out in a Theology class. Instead, it became the conversation I had with a Syrian refugee and seeing the other side of a boy I had assumed was a troublemaker. I lived solidarity by truly being present in the lives of those I stood beside instead of going to a place fulfilling a service requirement. Now I understand that solidarity isn’t just about physically being in a certain space, it’s about your engagement with others in that space as well. Because of the essence of this program, my intentional community expanded beyond just our floor of Brockman Hall and this campus but to the whole of Cincinnati.

Sincerely,

Hannah Frey
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

I have had the pleasure of spending the summer between my sophomore and junior year in the 2018 Summer Service Internship (SSI) community, and I think that there would never have been a better place for me to spend my summer. I came into this experience nervous and wary of what might come of my time with SSI. However, after almost completing the program I have no doubt that this program changed the way I view the world. This program is something that I will spend the rest of my life reflecting on and pulling experiences from.

I am working at Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired and I have enjoyed just about every moment here. I am working with the Adult Day Program where participants come and spend their day with staff who plan activities and community outings for the group as well as individuals to participate in. I have been tasked with planning and implementing new outings for the group and individuals -- this consists of creating monthly calendars which then get approved and distributed throughout Clovernook and to our clients. Some of the activities I have been a part of making happen include: mall walking, a salon day, a trip to Smale Riverfront Park, make your own lunch day and many more. I have spent the summer learning and growing as a person while also getting to interact with some of the most amazing individuals.

I feel as though my time here at Clovernook has benefited me in so many ways that I would have never anticipated. I have created strong bonds with not just my co-workers but also the clients that I interact with on a daily basis. My time here has also opened my eyes to issues of accessibility in our communities, and has given me a new passion in life -- how we as a community can do a better job of making the world accessible for everyone. I have learned that we live in a world where people who cannot see start the race after everyone else and in some situations are prohibited from even finishing. So I have made it my summer's mission to ensure that the activities and outings that I plan and organize are inclusive and that everyone can choose to participate rather than being told they do not have the ability.
I am asking questions that never before even crossed my mind, I am pushing for independence and self-sufficiency because those are two things I have learned are more than possible for people who are blind and visually impaired. I can honestly say that I have grown more in this summer than I believe I have in the past two years at Xavier.

Thank you for this opportunity, without your support this would not have been possible for me and it would have been likely that I spent my summer working in a job that meant very little to me and had very little long-term impact on my life. Because of SSI I am starting to see what I would love to be doing with the rest of my life -- I am finding a career. I believe that SSI 2018 will be a summer I continue to talk about even after my time at Xavier. This internship has revolutionized the way I look at the world. I can see, know, and learn more without being able to see at all.

Thank you,

Sara Higby  
Xavier University Class of 2020  
Psychology and Criminal Justice Major  
Deaf Studies Minor  
Criminalistics Concentration  
Xavier University Admissions Office Student Recruitment Director
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

Hello, my name is Hyehyun Hwang and I am a rising 2nd year international student from South Korea currently studying Theatre, philosophy, and peace and justice. I am working at Stepping Stones (UCP Campus) this summer. When I applied to be a summer service intern, I was eager to explore what I could contribute to the community I live in and was excited to know more about the social justice issues within the city of Cincinnati as well as making connections with peers who have similar interests as me. The description on the application form mentioning that SSI was not just a summer job or learning experience, but a life changing experience also caught my attention. I didn’t fully trust the phrase but decided to trust the words of the job description and to make it life changing by fully committing to the program.

I have been working at Stepping Stones for about a month and there are so many things I want to share with you. First of all, there is not a day when I feel like not going into work. Every day is so different and vibrant. I am in charge of leading the walking group which is one of the daily activities during the morning and the afternoon and every time I get someone new who had been reluctant to join the activity, I experience a proud mother moment. Stepping Stones is an agency like no other because of the fact that I am required to work with people every second I am there. From the beginning I knew that I wanted to make deeper connections with people at my agency than just being their assistant or summer intern.

The energy that I receive and put out during the work day is immense, and it has taught me so much about life and about myself that I hadn’t expected to learn. Assisting people with daily tasks is humbling, fulfilling, and exciting. I didn’t expect this summer program to help me rethink my entire life, but it has redirected me to be so much more conscious of my life than I used to be. Although I believed myself to be relatively humble and hardworking person, SSI has taught me so many things I had been overlooking and has taken my personal growth and awareness of my community to the next level. The people I’ve met in the program and the discussions we have are things I didn’t think I could experience in college.

So, thank you for supporting this amazing program that is offering college students the opportunity to reexamine their purpose of life, passion, and lifestyle. I really cannot put into words the internal revolutions happening inside of me since I’ve started SSI. One thing I am sure of is the fact that SSI has led me to be more humble, loving, and passionate about my community, the future generations, and myself. As for the rest of my college life, I have made
goals such as engage in a deep conversation with a stranger or someone drastically different than me every day, act with intention, and always remember love. With these goals in mind and the connections I have made in SSI, I hope to expose and engage more people on campus to what I have had the opportunity to learn with not just personal connections but also through programs I will be holding as a student leader whether it be as a club president or as an RA and making creative content to share with the public.

I wish every student on Xavier’s campus could go through this experience and will work hard and intentionally throughout my time at Xavier so that they can. I also hope to continue my relationship with my agency and start a theater-based expression activity not just during the summer but also throughout the school year. I am more than thankful, humbled, and lucky to have been given this opportunity and want to be part of anything that can help deepen the experiences of future interns. Thank you for giving me an opportunity to experience God’s power, love within humanity, and hope for the future.

Sincerely,

Hyehyun Hwang
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

My name is Aaron King. I am a rising Junior studying History with a minor in Gender and Diversity Studies, I am an RA, and I am a part of the Summer Service Internship. I want to thank you with the deepest sincerity for donating to this experience for myself and the 19 other fabulous interns that have partaken in this whirlwind of an experience.

I have been spending my summer working with the Civic Garden Center and I have loved every second of the work that I have had the opportunity to do. I have enjoyed learning more about the environment around me and how important it is not only for the earth but for the soul. Mother Nature is incredible and this job now has me wishing that I had this realization years ago. The feeling of nurturing a plant until it bears fruit, or learning about all of the different types of plant species there are even just in the Greater Cincinnati area has been an excellent learning experience for me. But this is not the only, or the best, aspect of the work that I have done. The connection - the really real, human connection - that I have been fortunate enough to develop through conversation with the people we serve has been life altering. Learning from others' experiences and their stories has been an invaluable asset to me growing and developing into the individual that I still aspire to be. Learning about the injustice that individuals face on a daily basis has been life-altering and eye-opening. It proves to me that this world - no matter how unfair, or evil it may seem at times - still has a wealth of beauty within it.

The Garden Center isn't the only place where I have had positive experiences, as the community that has been fostered and developed within our cohort is unlike any other that I have been a part of. This program has created a unique space that has been filled with 20 college-aged men and women who are unapologetically themselves. No question is too stupid, or ignorant, or shallow to not be asked and to not be answered. The other 19 people that I have been lucky enough to travel this journey with have been the primary source of knowledge over this summer. The conversations that we have carried on after Wednesday night reflections, in the lounge, or just while we're out having fun have been some of the most meaningful and influential conversations that I have had on Xavier's campus to date. This program, the facilitators, and the people experiencing all of this alongside me have contributed such a significant portion to my experience over this summer and to my life personally.

I cannot thank you enough for making this experience possible for myself and for the rest of the individuals involved. This program has been life-changing and I hope that it can continue to be life changing for other students at Xavier well into the future. The contributions that you make are changing the lives of several individuals and also changing the many communities that make up our wonderfully diverse city for the better. Thank you for making this summer possible for me.

Aaron King
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

My experience this summer feels difficult to put into words. I have learned and grown so much in such a short period of time, so I am grateful for opportunities like these where I am able to reflect on all of my experiences.

I’ve spent the summer working at the Cincinnati Union Co-op Initiative (CUCI), which I was initially hesitant about. As a social work major, I didn’t exactly see how I would fit in to a non-profit that was so business-minded, but since working there, my perspective has completely shifted. Every day, I come into work with the chance to learn something new about business modeling or community organizing that I never would have before. I feel so grateful to be able to create relationships with my co-workers and people involved with our co-ops to better understand others life experiences and gifts. If I’ve learned anything, it’s that every person has a unique gift or perspective that they bring to the table. I’ve seen that in our co-ops with worker-owners who are considered difficult to employ but also in myself being able to provide my thoughts in areas I would have considered myself completely unqualified. While I’ve learned so much about co-op businesses and policy and organizing, the opportunity to empower people through work and utilizing their skills has been the greatest thing I have learned.

The easiest way to describe my experience with SSI is challenging, but there is so much more to it than that. Each and every day after a discussion with anyone about their day’s work or their comment in group meetings, I have found my perspective wider than it was before. Most of the time I’ve grown through these moments, I have felt some level of discomfort and challenge in letting go of what I previous thought to be true or questioning my own beliefs and
understandings. This comes at work and in community. This challenge has proven to be invaluable to my growth as a someone striving for social justice, but also as a person. The lessons I’ve learned this summer will last a lifetime. While that sounds cliché, I have heard from so many great people this summer that opportunities similar to SSI shaped the course of their entire vocations and lives. I am confident it will do the same for me.

Thank you for making this opportunity possible for all of us in this cohort. The chance to work in a paid internship has brought us all together this summer. The connections I’ve made and the lessons I’ve learned will follow me for the rest of my life, and they would not be possible without your generous financial support.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Kraft
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

The Summer Service Internship program has been an experience that I will never forget. I have grown so much as an individual and in my social justice journey. As an intern at the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Cincinnati at Sheakley, I have seen the impact that I have made on the children I work with. More importantly, I have seen the impact that they have had on me.

This internship has pushed me to analyze my privileges like never before. I look at the kids I work with and see so much of myself in them. I think about how we are so similar, yet our lives are totally different. At 20 years old, I have not had to deal with nearly as much trauma, stress, or misfortune as many of the young kids I work with. They go through so much on a daily basis, yet they are so loving and happy. I have learned that I should be more conscious of when I complain, or when I feel stressed and reevaluate my problems to focus on what is really important.

Along with my personal reflection, I have raised questions pertaining to the education system in this country, and how unequally distributed the resources seem to be in public schools. I work with kids of various grade levels. For kids in the same grade, there are wide gaps among their reading, writing, and mathematical capabilities. They experience great frustration when I pass out worksheets, and some can do more than others at the same age. How is it that most of these kids are from the same city, and even the same neighborhood, but are at such different places on the academic spectrum? I have concluded that this could be due to various factors such as home environment, parent involvement, school funding, access to tutors or other resources, self-motivation, and many other things. I have become extremely passionate for restoring their motivation to learn, and increasing their academic work ethic.

My biggest takeaway from this summer is the relationships I have formed with the kids. I am a role model, mentor, and friend to them. They trust me, and confide in me about many things that go on in their personal lives. I am confident that our bonds will continue beyond my time here. Thank you so much for all you do to help make this experience possible. Your support helps me to spread positivity and hope to the youth of Price Hill. I deeply appreciate the resources you provide to this program, and your dedication to empowering myself and the other interns to make the world a more equitable place.

Sincerely,

Blair McKee '20
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

When I found out I was accepted into the Summer Service Internship (SSI), I did not know exactly what my summer would be like besides an opportunity for me to dive deeper into my passion for social justice through service and learn about intentional community. Growing up, serving others and being intentional with our actions and words were values my parents worked hard to instill in me and my siblings. As a result, I spend time volunteering in a variety of ways and chose to pursue a career path in education where I will serve children and my community. I saw SSI as the perfect opportunity to bring all my passions together into an experience that inspires, teaches, and challenges me every day.

Being a shyer person around people I am unfamiliar with, I was apprehensive about having to spend so much time in a limited amount of space with 19 other people. It became a seemingly impossible challenge when I met the group full of extroverts each with their own personality, perspectives, and passions. It was easy for me to be talked over or just keep my thoughts to myself because everyone felt they had meaningful comments in our group discussions. Normally, this is acceptable, but to be part of the cohort and build community, my voice needed and deserved to be heard. I struggled to command attention and interject in discussions like everyone else, but I discovered that people genuinely appreciate my thoughts and that what I have to say is an important contribution to the group.

The agency I matched with is called Communities United for Action (CUFA). At CUFA, they work as community organizers to empower marginalized racial groups and people of low to moderate socioeconomic status to advocate for themselves against unjust systems and political officials that take advantage of their communities. The campaign I focused on during the internship centered on environmental justice regarding the subpar sewer system of Cincinnati. During heavy rains, the sewers overflow into people’s yards and basements, which ruin their property and endanger their health. I helped recruit members for the organization and research about the people and policies in place that continue to oppress people of color and lower socioeconomic status in Cincinnati.

Before I started at the agency, I had no experience with environmental justice and could not see how this work would relate to issues I am most vocal about, such as racism and poverty. It was not until three weeks into my internship with CUFA that I realized my work focused on an environmental issue, but intersected with the social justice issues I care about the most. Areas where people of color and/or people in poverty live are the same areas that are most affected by the sewer flooding, but receive the least amount of assistance from the public utility, assistance programs, and government officials in place to help them. This is not a coincidence! I spent my summer knocking on doors and attending hearings and meetings to learn about this injustice in depth. Then, I made phone calls to and followed up with citizens I met in these targeted communities within Cincinnati to inform them about this issue happening and encourage them to stand up for themselves by demanding action from the government who is grossly responsible for this environmental negligence.
Because of this experience, I realize how impactful I am with my voice and actions. I am recognizing the power that my parents, mentors, and Angela see in me, but also learning how to use it. I witnessed myself actually forming intentional relationships with a cohort of diverse extroverts and coming out of my shell enough to do so. Both of which I did not believe myself capable of accomplishing. By working at CUFA, I influenced citizens in Cincinnati to advocate for themselves in the injustices committed against them. Simultaneously, I learned how to advocate for myself when it comes to injustices I experience as a Black woman in America while being an ally/ in solidarity with marginalized groups of people. Because of generous funders like you, I and other future leaders in this program, discover our potential and act upon it. We seize opportunities and enact change. For that, I am eternally grateful and thank you for your continuous support of the Summer Service Internship.

Sincerely a Sparkle,

Jasmine Miller
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

I am just an intern in the SSI cohort of 2018. A person who (just two months ago) thought of themselves a "just a" young adult, someone who wants to help but really cannot. My experiences through working at my site and speaking with Angela and the numerous other facilitators has helped change my perspective. I struggled with figuring out how I could use my new dream job to help with the fight for social justice, but I have learned that every action is important, every person that is willing to help is a necessity, and not everyone needs to be on the front lines at all times, for every injustice.

Even doing something as simple as my job at my site: I usually do intake, fill out paperwork, and answer questions. Now don't get me wrong, the paperwork helps the clients either receive food, housing, jobs (transportation to jobs), and even clothing and fans. But, I felt like I could be doing more. Until one client sat down and talked to me for 45 minutes one day, telling me their story and how they planned to change the direction of their life, even asked me my opinion and for help. As the conversation was coming to an end, they said to me "Thank you for listening, people usually ignore me. I've been wanting to talk this out for weeks. Without having someone else agree with me and help me actually plan it out, I probably wouldn't have done anything." As simple as that was, it made me realize that being kind and talking to these people (people that are homeless, suffering from poverty, suffering from addiction or mental health issues) had some sort of affect. Me being willing to listen and help guide them meant something. Smiling at them, returning the humanity that society had abruptly stolen from them, made a difference. Even though the difference was small, it was a difference nonetheless.

I'm not sure if you decide to fund this program for reasons like this, but whatever reasons that keep you funding it, please continue. I will never forget the people, the moments, the quotes, etc. that I have heard and experienced here at SSI. I truly appreciate how carefully planned and thought out it was, how we as interns were challenged, how we were made to feel comfortable with each other in the first week (shockingly it worked!). I am leaving SSI with dozens of new friends, networks, and opinions that I did not come in with. I would recommend this internship to so many people that I know who are passionate about social justice. I can't wait to begin this
upcoming semester with my new friends and more importantly my new attitude (*Queue "New Attitude" by Patti LaBelle*). Once again, thank you for helping make this opportunity possible and for helping make a small difference in not only our lives, but the lives all of the interns have positively affected this summer.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Deshayla Mitchem
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

I hope your summer is wrapping up beautifully! My name is Anjali Nelson, and I am a member of the 2018 Summer Service Internship Cohort. I cannot express how grateful I am for your altruism and support of this experience. You truly make this program run effectively, and, for that, we appreciate your donations. Because we might not get a chance to meet, I want to use this space to discuss how this summer internship and community have shaped my values and vocation.

My summer agency is Healthy Moms and Babes (HMB), an organization which aims to assist with prenatal and primary care for medically underserved women and children in the Cincinnati area. Every day, I travel with their van staff to a Cincinnati neighborhood. Our van services include checking blood pressure and sugar, administering pregnancy and STD tests, and giving education about pregnancy. From this opportunity, I have learned about the social injustices plaguing the Cincinnati community, seeing the stress and health issues caused by lack of access to resources. However, most importantly, I also have built relationships with various communities vulnerable to these injustices. The population of clients seen the most are immigrant women from Spanish-speaking countries. As a Spanish minor, I’ve learned to speak Spanish more fluently. It always brightens my day when I meet a woman who expresses her delight that I can communicate with her. Some of these women are undocumented and personally seeing their struggles to provide for their family is heart wrenching. Because of the clients I’ve served, I’m even more passionate about fighting for justice for affordable health care and immigration rights. I’m a pre-med student, who has toyed with the idea of working with
undocumented immigrants or even opening my own clinic. I have many years to go, but I am sure that I can use my education and my relationships to serve others.

Being a member of an intentional campus community has helped me while wrestling through the difficult times working at HMB. Every Wednesday night, our community has reflections where we discuss topics related to self-growth and social justice. I am not always the loudest person in the room, but the group has gently encouraged me to be more vulnerable and vocal in sharing my experiences and beliefs. They’ve urged me to believe that I have a place in the community and that my voice matters. The community comes together even with unstructured, non-required events. I have fond memories of playing sand volleyball and late night laughter in the Brockman hallways. My heart is filled with gratitude for the countless hugs, brunch dates, and kindness of the cohort.

From what you might gather, I had an unforgettable summer filled with laughter, friendship, thought, and action. This experience could not have happened without your support. I hope you know that this internship has inspired countless other college students passionate about service, justice, and social change. Thank you so much for embodying the Jesuit values of generosity and solidarity with us during this summer.

Love and joy,

Anjali Ruth Nelson

Anjali Ruth Nelson
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

I was to start off by saying Thank you. I cannot express how thankful I am for having the opportunity to do something so life changing and rewarding that other summer internships don’t come close to. This past summer has been the best summer out of all my years here at Xavier and from high school and it wouldn’t have been possible without you.

This program has been life changing to say the least on how I and the other interns view the world. You hear so many negative connotations from the media and are meant to feel that there’s little hope of changing society for the better. The Summer Service Internship (SSI) digs deep into these systemic issues and shows how to fix them on a personal level. They do so by providing personal stories from ourselves and from outside community members and showing that it’s the little steps in life that will make the biggest difference in our communities.

We are the future generation that are about to go into the workforce. A few years later, we will soon have business power to create and provide an equal opportunity for everyone. It’s so easy to get caught in the media on how to label people and downgrade them. SSI has taught us to listen more and educate ourselves on each other’s differences so that we don’t keep falling into these trends. After this summer, my life mission now is to try to make my non-profit go out of business. This sounds bad but I promise it’s not. My summer internship dealt with wage theft cases especially in the immigrant community. Wouldn’t be awesome to live in a world where there’s no need to help the oppressed anymore? When people stop taking advantage of others and stealing their money? This is the society I want to dream about and make into reality. This is the society I would’ve never dreamed about and now look forward to fixing it, all because of your help.

Peace & Blessings,

-Zac Ortiz SSI ‘18
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

My name is Rob and I work with the Agents of Change program at the Peaslee Neighborhood Center. In summary, the Agents of Change is a summer and school year program that teaches kids about creative expression. We introduce the kids to forms of expression through materials that also teach them about social justice. For example, for part of the summer, we focused on storytelling and graphic novels. In order to introduce them to both forms of expression, we bought them well received graphic novels to read. The novels vary in the issues that they address from the holocaust to police brutality to lynching to life on a reservation. Then, we let the kids make their own comic strip. Some were political; some were comical; some were epic. However, they all told a story. I think that is the biggest impact that my organization has intentionally. We help kids understand their story/background, and we give them the chance to tell their story.

From the time that I started here, I have loved it. When I see a kid make progress, it melts my heart. The kids have made me more passionate about social justice because the issues that I’m fighting have a huge effect on them. Moreover, I’ve learned how much work is involved in justice work. It isn’t easy. There are so many moving parts that contribute to change. So, thank you. Everyone plays a part in either upholding systems of oppression or tearing them down. Your financial support is important in enabling people to fight injustice. I really feel blessed for getting this opportunity, and I only hope to give as much as I have already received.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Robert Richards
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

Before introducing myself or talking about my agency, I just wanted to say thank you. This amazing summer would not be possible without your help. I am so beyond blessed to be a part of the XU Summer Service Internship (SSI) this summer, and I would not be here without your help. This summer, I was lucky enough to be placed at Su Casa’s summer camp program Vacaciones Útiles as the Kindergarten Teacher. Vacaciones Útiles is an educational summer camp for Hispanic/Latino children in the Cincinnati area. We work with preschool to second grade and help prepare the kids to enter in an English school system. We work on math, English, and social-emotional skills. Before starting, I was really nervous. I had no idea what I was doing or what I was planning for. I am not an education major. My majors are social work and Spanish. I planned for about four weeks before starting SSI, but I did not have a clue of what I was supposed to be prepping for. My first day with kids was a disaster. I was a nervous wreck, my lesson for the day did not work, and I had many homesick kids. I walked out on day one feeling like a failure and that it was a mistake that I was a part of SSI. But with the help of my cohort and the SSI program, I have learned that I am exactly where I need to be. It has been over a month since that first day, and I am absolutely in love with my job. My kids are the sweetest and brightest kids ever. I could write a book on how amazing they are. They have made me love my job so much. Their toothless smiles and hugs never fail to make my day. I am nowhere near perfect at this job, but each mistake I make helps me grow. Both the Xavier internship and my work at Vacaciones Útiles have taught me that it is okay to not be perfect at every aspect of my life, and that I will make mistakes. The mistakes are needed and help you learn. I struggled for a long time with trying to be perfect at everything. I am so happy that my
path of life had SSI on it because I have grown so much as a person. The knowledge I have
gained from this internship is one of a kind. I have discovered issues, like immigration, that I am
beyond passionate about. I have also learned about topics that I do not know a lot about, like
racial justice, being an ally, gentrification, and more that I want to keep learning about. SSI has
taught me that it's okay to not know a lot about certain issues, but I should not stay ignorant to
them. I have a job to stay as educated as I can. I do not have to be an ally in every issue of social
justice, but I need to try and stand in solidarity with people facing oppression and who are
struggling. I know this is only the beginning of my journey in social justice, but it was the right
place to start. SSI has opened my eyes, and has made me more conscious about myself and the
world than I have ever been. I am not the same person I was in May, and I am happy about
that. I love the person that SSI has shaped me into. It has made me passionate about making
change in the world and has given my life such meaning. I know I am going to be on a long path
in the service I want to provide to this world, but I am blessed that SSI was the start of my path.
The lessons and knowledge that I have gained from SSI are something I will carry with me for
the rest of my life.

Sincerely,

Megan Scharrer

Megan Scharrer
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

This summer has been filled with mental and spiritual growth. I work with 5-7 year-old students at Project Connect. Project Connect provides a summer camp for children who are experiencing homelessness. The children that I work with are filled with potential that will allow them to do great things. I have one student who does not have a stable home because his mother is a recovering drug addict. Even though he has struggles at home, he is a brilliant child. He’s fascinated with science. He can tell you why two chemicals will cause an explosion. He teaches me to see the science in life. He says, “everything contains a form of science” and he proves it true every day. Also, I had one student impact my summer tremendously. Since the first day it was like baby chick attracted to mother chick. She made me love her. Her personality is warm, and her smile is even warmer. You’d never know that she doesn’t get to eat often at home. I wish to give her the world, but I can only give her good memories. She’s strong, compassionate and even a little stubborn. She’s taught me patience without measure. She’s taught me how to laugh at the wrong times. She’s taught me how to explain things with love. She’s taught me how to forgive because even the biggest mistakes are still just mistakes. She’s the definition of a rose growing out of concrete. This summer has given me the spark I needed to be sure of my passion.

Without your gift, I would not have been able to meet such wonderful people. I would not have been able to learn from my children and grow with them. I would not have been able to make a small ripple in so many lives. Thank you all for believing in a better future. Thank you for knowing that the future lies with the youth. Thank you for having faith that your ripple will help the wave. Thank you for believing in me, in us, to continue the fight to have a better world. Your efforts and faith in us will not be useless. The faith you have put into this program I will carry and pass on to every soul I may touch. Thank you for being a ripple in my wave.

With gratitude,

Tyeshia Smith
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

My name is Felicia White, and I am a rising junior in the Philosophy, Politics, and the Public program here at Xavier. As I have discerned and learned more throughout my college experience I have come to find that my passions lie in social justice. Specifically, in the dismantling of oppressive social systems, and even more specifically using policy to do so. I have a passion for people, justice, critical thinking, organizing and leading communities, and problem solving. This summer I have had the opportunity to intern for the Ohio Justice and Policy Center. We work with folks who have somehow been touched by the criminal justice system. Those who society writes off, we take in. We help them to gain a second chance at life, and to get back on their feet. We help to ensure that they have their human rights maintained within the system. We also fight the injustices that plague our justice system everyday. This is grueling work. It takes a toll on you emotionally, mentally, and even physically. This summer I found myself asking myself, “How will I continue to do this work all of my life without completely burning out?” Well, SSI has helped me to start to discern this important question. I have a hard time taking care of myself. In SSI however, I was placed in a small group focusing on sustaining the soul. I needed this more than I ever knew. This topic was my next step in furthering my path into fighting this good fight. I am so grateful to SSI for providing me with something I didn’t even know I needed, something I had never considered was important to my journey. It has forced me to do so much self-reflection I otherwise would have ignored. This would not have been possible without your financial support. I am truly grateful for your generosity.

Sincerely,

Felicia White
Dear Women of Excellence Giving Circle,

First and foremost, I’d like to thank you for supporting this program and making a social justice program possible. Never in a million years did I believe that I would have the opportunity to spend the summer living intentionally, discussing hard topics, and doing something I love.

My name is Mallory and I am the summer service intern at the Kennedy Heights Arts Center (KHAC). My placement here and my summer couldn’t be more perfect. I’ve had the chance to engage with a population that is striving for a great community as well as creating an outlet for local kids to express themselves. My position at KHAC is to help out during the 10 week summer camp program. I supervise children during their camp as well as run the aftercare program. In aftercare, I create daily crafts and activities to enjoy with the kids after camp. This part of my job is why I love working at KHAC. Every day I get to delve into Pinterest and my creativity to come up with activities that the kids will find engaging and love. We’ve done everything from DIY slime to creating our own pinwheels, from decorating rocks to playing lots of outdoor games. Every day I get to see these children push their boundaries and fully embrace their creativity.

I’ve learned many valuable lessons through my time at KHAC and my interaction with the kids. I’ve learned that kids are going to cry and throw tantrums, they want to cover themselves in Band-Aid at the slightest injury, and they also just want someone to listen to them. Many kids in our camp program utilize our financial service here at KHAC. This means that kids who wouldn’t typically get to do programming like this get a chance to, thanks to lovely donors. Many of these kids receiving financial services are children of adults who have a lot going on. Whether that’s multiple children, financial problems, family illness or many other possibilities, these children that come to camp don’t always get the most attention or time. At camp, I love the opportunity that I have to just listen to the kids and let them know that they are heard and cared about. There is nothing like getting a big hug from a five year-old on a Monday morning.

My community with the other members of the cohort has also been a beautiful part of the Summer Service Internship (SSI). Coming into the program, I knew a couple of faces here and there but no one deeply. I was very scared because most interns were social work majors and were studying about many of topics we would discuss and I had only ever dipped my toe into social justice. However, this community has been one of the most beautiful and life giving groups I’ve had a chance to be a part of on Xavier’s campus. From the endless noise in the hall, the late night fast-food runs and movie nights, SSI has helped introduce me to many individuals that with confidence I can say will change the world someday. I’m blessed to have had hard conversations, weekly reflections and many laughs with this group.

In the midst of SSI, I don’t know what the after impact will be; all I know is there will be one. SSI is a program that gives those who dream of mending the world a way to spend your summer living intentionally and with purpose. I have been so blessed to take part in this community and to now be associated with the SSI program. I fully plan on using the impact of this summer to shape my life and the way I interact with the world around me. Thank you for making SSI possible and the hopes of many young dreamers possible through your support.

-Mallory Williams