Student Reflections on Service Learning

Below are some reflections that students have made on their Service Learning. Students are required to initiate, plan, and reflect on projects. They will follow this cycle throughout the school year.

Raphael Center

Raphael Centre is now, and has been for some years, a welcoming home for any who seeks its need. It serves meals, gives out groceries, provides a roof for many who are homeless and simply just functions as a welcoming community for all. It helps integrate many in numerous ways, from typical Brazilian dance classes to language lessons. It's a meeting place for the young and safe haven for the older.

11th Grade Student

I participated in the September 16th Serve the City Day/ISB service day and discovered the Raphael centre. Not only was it a fun experience but fulfilling too since my group and I managed to lend a good hand to this community. I helped in the kitchen where master chef Gertrude had us mopping and drying the vast floor, peeling a variety of fruits and vegetables, cooking a great quantity of pasta “al dente” and chopping herbs. Moreover we helped clear a pile of debris and left over branches in the centre’s courtyard. It was remarkable to see people’s faces when they realized that we were students who had purposely come to help-out for the day, to think that they were overjoyed, when we only took care of some minor chores. Obviously, I’m glad they were thankful but I have to admit they’re reaction bothered me a little; we had really done nothing special. I for one felt I didn’t deserve so much welcome or gratitude. In other words, I felt as though I took more from the community than I gave and I had to fix this in some way. Perhaps, with the help of my advisory, we could give the Raphael Centre something that they really do need and something that would really “make a difference” as we say, to the community…but what? Well, mopping the kitchen floor gave me plenty of time to note the awful conditions that the tiling is in, not only are tiles broken and overused but in some areas lacking completely. Small black cement holes are scattered all around the kitchen and not only is this dangerous but also – as Gertrude informed me - a health hazard! I more than agreed with the gentle Gertrude when she sighed and remarked that the Raphael centre’s kitchen needs a new floor. So guess what? My advisory is embarking on this mission: some new, modern and practical tiles for the Raphael centre! An “Extreme Makeover Home Edition” but on a smaller scale.

At the moment we are at the very beginning of this mission and have yet to produce any fruits. I have personally met with the director of the centre and was pleased to hear that he liked the idea very much. Hopefully, the renovations will be approved by the centre’s council, which will give us the green light for starting our search on contractors. Many overviews of the location, planning and funding research will have to take place. The easy part will be the job itself, smashing and taking apart the old floor to put in the replacement; luckily we have many enthusiastic hands for that! The endeavor is already begging to overwhelm us and we
will gladly tick perseverance and commitment as one of its learning outcomes but we will persevere and commit not because we want to tick a box on our CAS page but because we think it is very worth doing so. We want the Raphael Centre community to benefit and be grateful for something that is really worth it.

The Anker

The Anker is a social restaurant for the elderly and asylum seekers in the St Catherine area of Brussels. They regularly need help for kitchen for cooking, renovations and talking with people or they can do some activities with them.

12th Grade Student

ISB found out about Anker Center through Serve the City. The Anker center is an organization based in the center of Brussels aimed to help out asylum seekers as well as elderly people. It is a welcoming shelter for immigrants who have a difficult time integrating into Belgium, finding a job and a home. The center provides personal help, food, the use of computer and most importantly company to each individual in need.

Anker Center is also based around the elderly. Elderly men and women come on a weekly basis to the center and benefit from organized activities and a good meal for a small price. When I volunteered at the Anker Center I was in charge of planning an activity for the elderly. My classmates and I organized an afternoon of manicures and hand massages for both elderly men and women. It was a truly enriching experience. While we were massaging their hands with creams and oils and painting their nails we got an interesting insight on their lives and on their past. They really enjoyed the way we took care of them and adored having some young folks to talk to!

Some other volunteers at the Anker Center helped out with painting, cleaning, cooking and giving computer lessons. It is a different environment we are not necessarily used to but I only felt ill at ease for several minutes until I realized these people were warm and welcoming. After a day at the Anker Center I felt completely integrated and accepted, it is a nice place to go to and work at.

Gare du Nord: Helping the homeless

Another project involves working together with Serve the City an organization that regularly provides food and other essentials to the homeless living in and around Gare du Nord.

12th Grade Student

On September 16th, My friends and I from ISB and one of the Serve the City’s organizers named Nino, went to Gare du Nord to serve the homeless people, children in need and the Refugees.
We arrived at the station and we were in a group. Suddenly, there was a man who himself is a homeless person, gave us 50 Euros to buy foods and serve him as well as the other people. We were so surprised about it and wondered why he gave us the money. It was interesting!

What did we do there?
We provided people with lunchboxes, bathroom products and made conversation. Nino and the two of our group went to Delhaize to get more breads and salad sauces. After that we were all at a small place in the station to prepare the lunchboxes and the hygiene packages. It was full of homeless people, children and refugees at lunch time. We served the foods, water and the hygiene packages. Some of the people wanted more of what they had received from us, so they kept on asking the same products, although we told them that they already got it.

We also asked them some general questions. Like how is it going? Has anything changed? How long have you been here? Since all of us were there for the first time, we were a bit nervous and we were not sure if we supposed to ask anything that could affect their feelings. In fact, they are nice people, they make jokes and some of them helped us cleaning up the place. Even though we know exactly that these people need help, but they also need to communicate. It is not all about serving meals. The best thing to do during that time is to build up relationships, whether it is a long or a short time relationship. No matter how much we could give them, or what we are doing for them, as long as it comes from your heart, I am sure they will be appreciated for it.

“It was a great experience and I want to go back again”.

12th Grade Student
“This became something more than just CAS, this was turning into a life lesson, a lesson about the world and it’s evils. And eventually I realized that this was what the project was about. Talking to these people, hearing these stories from them, and learning from them,. This became something that we would carry with us the rest of our lives.

Something else we also learned is a sense of greed and the best way of dealing with it. Throughout the day there would be people that would pretend they didn’t receive their package yet and would accumulate multiple in the end. But then you start to understand it because these people have so little to begin with. If these packages, would improve their quality of life and hygiene somewhat. Would I have taken multiple at the expense of others if I would be in the same situation?”
**Pensionnat Jules Le Jeune.**

Jules Lejeune is a home for teenage boys who have been harmed in some way by their parents. About 30 boys live there and are learning skills that will help them successfully relate to their parents and start a new independent life when they turn 18. Jules Le Jeune has a large facility with many practical needs, including painting and gardening.

**12th Grade Student**

This project started out stressful and to be honest, I really wasn’t looking forward to doing something like this when I had so many other things going on with full IB. However, it turned out that the project was a lot of fun and really paid off. There was a lot of planning involved, and I was able to get in touch with the main director of Jules le Jeune who helped us set up a time to come to the organization’s facilities. We decided on the tenth of November, a Thursday which we had off from 1 to 5 in the afternoon. This was our first renovation day and involved raking leaves. This may sound simple, but there were a huge amount of leaves on a huge property, and we had to move the piles of leaves to a certain place on the property (the compost pile). After the first day, we had made a difference in what the grounds were looking like. However, we weren’t sure the job was done. So, the advisory group was nice enough to give up their Friday off and we came back to finish the job from 1 to around 3. I thought we made a huge difference and it was nice to bond with the kids inside the organization. They are truly great kids, and I wish we could do more to help with their situations. Many of the kids there even gave us a helping hand and raked along with us! I thought this was very touching as they could have been doing other things--Friday was their day off, too. I hope that because the leaves are gone, more renovation days can take place (with other advisories too). Even if more leaves do fall, we got rid of a lot of them! This project was so special to me because I felt a connection with the kids staying in the facilities and the experience helped me further realize that I do want to become a social worker and help people that are now my age.