



**By Tracy Petruzzello**

"Hi, I'm Tracy Petruzzello and I am here to share some of my experiences with the Spring Break Outreach program throughout the past two years. When I first heard of SBO I was just a freshman who knew of a couple other fellow freshman willing to give up their spring break and dedicate it to service. I thought this was extremely brave of them, and after I learned more about the program I knew I wanted to apply to go on it my sophomore year.

When I applied, I still did not know too much about the program, I just assumed I would be going to the Gulf Coast to build houses. That's even what I told my family I was planning on doing for spring break. Upon applying I learned a little about the other service sites, but still just assumed I would be shipped off to the Gulf Coast to build houses, because that's what SBO was all about, right? When I learned I was selected to go to Ivanhoe, VA I was a little taken aback. Then I just assumed I would be building houses in Appalachia, right? Nope.

Learning more about the site of Ivanhoe helped a little for me to realize what it was we were going to be doing in Appalachia, however I was still under the impression we would go and observe a project from beginning to end and see our miraculous results.

After a couple days in Ivanhoe, I realized we would not be building a house and that the service we were to be doing there was on a whole different level. In the rural community we did a lot of projects that I feel like I would help my own family out with when I was at home. Yet we formed some incredible relationships with the people there. One woman in particular, Marie Doss was just like your average grandmother, yet collected everything under the sun in her small home. We were just there to help her clean up some of her house. I spent all morning scrubbing the oven, then all afternoon baking with her and looking at her pictures. She really just wanted someone to talk to. At first I was a little disheartened when a local man told us that everything we cleaned at Marie's house would just be dirty again the next week. However the time we spent with her was priceless and we made a difference in her life that day.

After my amazing experience with service that was outside the norm of what I initially thought SBO was all about, and applied to be a leader for the next year. This past spring break I led a group down to L'Arche, in Washington DC. Again explaining that I wouldn't be going to the Gulf Coast to build houses was a little

tedious for my family to understand, but I knew my experience would be just as rewarding.

L'Arche is one of many worldwide communities for adults living with developmental disabilities. Similar to Ivanhoe, some of the people we met in L'Arche are unbelievable. The expression of simplicity and love that we found there was overwhelming. There are even three Loyola grads currently working there, and from before we left we were "warned" that they would be recruiting us all to possibly work there after we graduated as well. The big turning point for most of them was what happens every other Tuesday night, Prayer Night. Prayer Night is a very simple gathering of the L'Arche community and a local church to celebrate their faith and come together for a meal. The core members of the community lead the night and all the guests in prayer and song; the entire experience was extremely moving.

I do not think that I only speak for myself when I say that the immersion experiences I have had at Loyola have made me the student I am today. The people I have met within the college community and outside the community have made an impact on my life that will last forever."