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My commitment to working for justice began with my time at Loyola University Maryland, where it was nurtured and informed, but of course, it did not end there. In my experience, service at Loyola is not seen as simply another box of involvement to tick. Rather, it is part of who we are as students of a Jesuit university and active members of our community. I explored many areas of social injustice during my time at Loyola: urban poverty, education, immigration, and racial justice. I found a passion, though, when I led ten students on a Spring Break Outreach trip through our Center for Community Service and Justice my sophomore year.

Our week was focused on issues surrounding prison reform in Baltimore, and began with a weekend-long workshop in a Maryland prison with Alternatives to Violence Project. We spent Friday evening, all day Saturday, and all day Sunday with the participants of the workshop, half of whom were from “the inside” and half of whom were from “the outside,” but all of whom had a commitment to the goals of the weekend: learning to live a nonviolent lifestyle and build community, even in the most unlikely of places.

After the weekend, we spent the week serving with various reentry organizations in Baltimore, learning about the challenges faced by returning citizens who are looking for housing and jobs as they leave prison. I had become obsessed

with the data and the facts during the months leading up to our trip, unaware that such a grave injustice was being perpetrated in *the land of the free*. Over two million people are currently incarcerated in the United States, a number that has skyrocketed since the beginning of the War on Drugs in the 1980s. Average Americans are supposed to ignore this epidemic, believe that it does not affect them, and the system continues to function exactly as it was designed.

During that week, though, I became more engaged by the people I met and the stories we heard than I had ever been by the facts and data. This, I realized, was the type of work I was called to do, and I have been doing it ever since. I became a facilitator for those workshops, and I will be attending the University of Maryland School of Law beginning this fall. Loyola taught me that the most important part of working for justice is not just understanding the facts and working for measurable change, but connecting with the people whose lives are affected on a daily basis. And for that, I am grateful.