

Beyond the Bell: Social Justice Coalition makes a difference at Maryvale

By Melody Simmons

Special to the Review

LUTHERVILLE – Sophia Rampolla learned firsthand about community service from her older siblings, who reached out to help others while attending Calvert Hall College High School in Towson and Maryvale Preparatory School in Luutherville.

Now 15 and a sophomore at Maryvale, Rampolla is blazing her own trail while keeping that family tradition going.

“Helping others and seeing someone else’s smile because of that really makes me happy,” Rampolla said of her work with the Social Justice Coalition, or SoJuCo, at Maryvale.

In its seventh year, the group has sponsored dozens of community outreach programs for the Lutherville school’s young women to participate in and direct.

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Among them: tutoring at Camp Stevenson, a summer camp for local children who are homeless; making hundreds of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the Helping Up Mission near Fells Point; and visiting with adults with intellectual disabilities from the Gallagher Center.

The coalition has also taken summer service trips to El Salvador, Honduras and the Dominican Republic.

“It’s a very student-led, student-initiated program,” said Michael Vogrin, the Christian Service Coordinator at Maryvale, who also teaches a course there in social justice and morality.

The work of the SoJuCo has taken root among the 370 teens enrolled in middle and high school at Maryvale, Vogrin said. Their efforts are getting wider recognition, too. This fall, the Baltimore Ravens and M&T Bank named SoJuCo an “Honor Rows” award-winner in recognition of its community service.

The high school students at Maryvale have a mandated 75 hours of community service as a graduation requirement, but many exceed that through SoJuCo - with one senior logging 425 hours. Last year, seniors logged a total of 8,637 hours, school officials said in an application for the Honor Rows award.

Vogrin said many graduates have taken that mission beyond Maryvale to college campuses such as the University of Maryland at Baltimore and the Maryland Institute College of Art.

"It's about being one with others," Vogrin said. "I try to take the helping out of it and make it more personal - people connecting. It goes well beyond the (graduation requirement). It's something they are called to as part of their faith."

Senior Caroline Phillips, 17, has recorded 425 hours of community service. Her focus has included Stevenson Children's Camp, working as a counselor for 8- and 9-year-old underprivileged children.

"They are always so happy," Phillips said. "We do math, I read to them and we play games. The service teaches you lessons that you can't take anything for granted. You might have a lot, but other people don't."

Olivia Taupyen, 17, and Rachel Jarboe, 17, also Maryvale seniors, have each clocked 200 hours of community service. Much of their work centers on making sandwiches for those in need in the city through a program called Lunch Bunch and supporting the Special Olympics.

"I have grown to love service," Jarboe said. "It has definitely opened my eyes to a lot of things."

Taupyen, who said she hopes to study dentistry, said that her SoJuCo work has helped her to better interact with people.

Jackie Blair, 14, agreed. She began working community service projects as a Girl Scout and is now continuing that mission in her sophomore year. Recently, she met with participants of Gallagher Services in Timonium to play games and make crafts.

"They always smile," Blair said. "The outcome of that is knowing you are helping others."

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