

Outreach experience has lasting impact on NDP grads



Meghan Stewart, Maura Kelly, Jane Lorenzi and Mary Tipton are among Notre Dame Preparatory School students who have been influenced by working with the Refugee Youth Project through Baltimore City Community College.

(Tom McCarthy Jr. | CR Staff)

By Elizabeth Lowe

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TOWSON - For the past three years, Maura Kelly, Jane Lorenzi and Mary Tipton have spent hours after school with refugee children.

The experience was so meaningful, it influenced what the young women plan to major in at college.

Kelly, Lorenzi and Tipton, who graduated from Notre Dame Preparatory School May 28, are among about a dozen students from the Towson school who volunteered semiweekly, October through May, with Refugee Youth Project, one of Baltimore City Community College's programs for refugees.

In Baltimore, RYP provides after-school programming for refugee youths in prekindergarten through 12th grade.

For the past four years, NDP students have worked with children through RYP at Moravia Park Elementary School in East Baltimore. They build relationships with children in kindergarten through fifth grade, help them learn English and with their homework and, time permitting, play.

The children and their families come from countries such as Bhutan, Eritrea, Iraq and Nepal.

"I didn't even know what a refugee was (in my) sophomore year," said Lorenzi, 18, a parishioner of St. Joseph, Cockeysville. "I don't think I realized how many other countries exist.

"I've always been fascinated by other cultures. We're all connected, a part of something."

She is headed to Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wis., this fall, with plans to double major in languages and international business or international affairs.

While Lorenzi said she learned about the resiliency of the human spirit through RYP, Kelly found that the children taught her to be optimistic and keep things in perspective, particularly if she's had a bad day.

"It's nothing compared to what they've gone through," said Kelly, 18, who plans to major in nursing at La Salle University in Philadelphia and pursue a career as a pediatric nurse.

Tipton talked of the attachment that developed between the NDP students and the children they encountered.

"They never want you to leave," she said.

The 17-year-old parishioner of Church of the Immaculate Conception in Towson plans to major in psychology at the University of Maryland, College Park. She hopes to pursue a career as a therapist, working with children, and said the youths she has helped have given her insight.

"You learn how important patience and a soft voice are," said Meghan Stewart, another member of the Class of 2014 who also volunteered with RYP for three years. "It makes me want to be a more positive person. When I leave RYP, I have a smile on my face."

Stewart, another Immaculate Conception parishioner, plans to major in veterinary medicine at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. The 18-year-old credits RYP with her desire to tutor students at a local elementary school in Blacksburg.

Steven Pomplon, NDP's director of social service, accompanies students to Moravia Park Elementary and volunteers alongside of them. He describes the experience as "humbling" and "eye-opening."

"It's all about connecting, it's all about community," said Pomplon, a 2002 graduate of Loyola Blakefield in Towson and a 2006 graduate of Loyola University Maryland in Baltimore. "RYP makes you think twice about the food you eat, the language you speak."

He said that the program helps broaden the world view of NDP students.

"It makes them think about how can we accommodate people and help them succeed," Pomplon said. "We all are brothers and sisters in this big, global environment. It's the commonalities that shine through more than anything else."

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