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# RWU Lends a Helping Hand

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# RWU Lends a Helping Hand

Ninth Annual Community Connections engages incoming students with a day of service



August 26, 2013 | Jill Rodrigues '05

**BRISTOL, R.I.** – Like a friendly swarm of worker bees, the students in the yellow t-shirts descended on 30 local communities Monday to dedicate a full day of service to community organizations in need.

Aboard buses bound for Bristol, Providence, Fall River and beyond, nearly 1,200 students, faculty and staff departed campus to participate in the 9th Annual Community Connections Day – a daylong introduction to service in which teams of volunteers staff more than 50 sites across Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts.

In what's become one of the largest single-day service programs in the region – and the only of its kind among colleges in Rhode Island, according to KC Ferrara – incoming students partner with scores of community organizations to support their efforts clearing nature trails, preparing food for the homeless, creating art projects with developmentally disabled adults and myriad other activities.

Launched in 2005, Community Connections is a cornerstone of RWU's orientation program for new students, almost immediately encouraging them to become engaged members of what will be their new home for the next four years.

“Community Connections shows the students how important and committed we are to the value of community service,” says KC Ferrara, director of the University’s Feinstein Center for Service Learning and Community Engagement. “It’s a foundational experience that underlies their whole experience here at the University and in the local community. For some of them it’s a way to serve in their new home and for others its an introduction to service they’ve never done before.”

As he headed out with his group for a day of cleaning parks with Bristol’s Parks and Recreation Department, Elias AlHur was motivated to connect with new friends and explore his new community.

“I’m going to take this experience with me for the whole year,” says AlHur, an engineering major. “That’s a good way to start the semester.”

Having a close relationship with her grandmother spurred Amie Evans, a criminal justice major, to volunteer at East Providence’s senior center, where she felt she could make the most meaningful impact: “It’s not only a bonding experience with the community but the satisfaction of knowing we’re here to help,” she says.

For some, the Community Connections experience extends beyond freshman year. Though her day of service was a year ago, the lasting impression inspired Claudia Rightmire to assist in organizing this year’s effort. She says that her experience sorting donations of food and clothes at a local food pantry humbled her when she compared it to the abundant offerings of the RWU Commons. But what was most rewarding to Rightmire, a dance and journalism double major, was the thank you she received at the end of the day – and the feeling that she helped others in need.

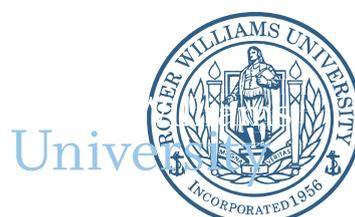
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