



TRANSFORMING LIVES

THE POWER OF UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

AMY (KALINA) MAJEWSKI, LV 08-10

Serving at The San Miguel School of Providence has been one of the most powerful and eye-opening experiences of my life. Growing up in rural Minnesota, I had been sheltered from the realities of urban living. Poverty was something I only heard about in church. Immigration reform was something I read about in the newspaper. The only gang violence I witnessed was in movies. **When I decided to become a Lasallian Volunteer,**

I wanted to serve in order to make a difference in someone else's life; little did I know that these boys from diverse and challenging backgrounds would make such a big difference in my mine.

San Miguel serves boys from all cultures and faiths in grades five through eight. One hundred percent of students receive financial aid in order to attend the school, and more than 90 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch. With its small class sizes—16 per grade—students receive one-on-one attention from faculty and staff members who care about the whole child. Students are not only nurtured academically, but are empowered to be respectful, responsible young men equipped with the tools necessary to overcome the negative peer pressure and violence in



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their neighborhoods. By creating a warm, caring learning environment and helping each child discover himself, his goals and his own potential, we see success. One hundred percent of graduating eighth graders go on to high school, attending some of the top secondary schools in Rhode Island.

During my two years of service I witnessed many miracles. I saw new fifth graders enter San Miguel with behavioral issues and negative attitudes,

holding little respect for the school, their peers or their teachers. By the end of the year, the changes I saw in these same fifth graders were incredible. They were respectful; they were responsible; they sought to do the right thing. They weren't perfect, of course; they were still children, after all. However, they were different. Something inside of them had been awakened. Their hearts had been touched and their temperaments softened. I saw these fifth graders sing and perform sign language to a song for their eighth-grade mentors on the last day of school, tearfully expressing how much they will miss their "older brothers." I received hugs from boys on the last day of school, the same boys who wouldn't even look me in the eye nine months earlier. I know that San Miguel has changed them, molding them into young men. It's easy to

wonder how these transformations are possible.

I developed a relationship with Chris early on. He would come downstairs in the morning to help me in the library, and we would strike up conversations on how he was doing academically.

I noticed quickly that he was signing up for every extracurricular program he could be involved in, staying after school every day of the week. "I'm scared to be home alone," he told me once. One afternoon, as I was moderating the after school Art Club, Chris began to misbehave and I had to take him aside to talk to him about his behavior. My reprimanding was met with tears as he sputtered, "You don't care about me anymore." My eyes immediately teared up as well as I gently answered: "No matter what you do, or how many times I need to take you aside, I will never stop caring about you." He seemed surprised by my response, and my heart ached for this sweet little boy. He has little supervision or support at home, and he had trouble early on in the school year respecting



adults. But this time, I think I got through to him. I never had to take him aside again.

Each child I interacted with at San Miguel impacted me and touched my soul. They helped to change the way I view the world around me. The realities of poverty and the threat

of gang violence were so close that I could nearly touch them. My prior beliefs and stereotypes about these types of families and children faded into new convictions as I realized that, in reality, all children are the same inside; they all want the same things. If I could sum up my experience and all that I have learned at San Miguel, it would be this: **I have learned the power of unconditional love.** All children—regardless of race or religion, socio-economic status or parental background—have a deep, innate desire to be loved unconditionally. By giving them this love and not withdrawing it or your acceptance in the face of misbehavior or failures, caring and trusting relationships are built, and children are free to grow and succeed.

Amy (Kalina) Majewski, LV 08-10, served as a development assistant, after-school coordinator and co-taught the fifth grade literacy class at The San Miguel School of Providence in Rhode Island. She currently is a corporate communications manager for Endeavor Air. Amy is married to Denny Majewski, LV 09-11. As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of Lasallian Volunteers, this story is one in a series of reflections by LV alums on how the LV experience has impacted their lives. Additional reflections can be found at www.LasallianVolunteers.org.

