



Public Allies Maryland
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service
January 18, 2010

I stand on a shaky ladder emblazoned in safety orange. A white paintbrush in my right hand drips viscous white globs down the side of a tired grey wall, the paint raining onto my bare toes and onward to the plastic covered floor below. I paint in long, lazy strokes while discussing politics and current events with another Public Ally, Gary Williams, who has mirrored my Tom Sawyer-esque approach, his feet bare and splotted with paint, pants rolled halfway up the calf. Gary, Shane, and Wayne massage the frangible grey paint of decades past with a vivid white coat that brightens the room with every stroke. Lines of children periodically march proudly by, cheerfully oblivious to the hailstorm of white paint, supervised by two other Allies. Above our heads, we hear the dulled thuds of the daycare center's raucous activities, led by another pair of Allies. My ladder neatly straddles a door leading to a family changing room, that is also being painted by - surprise! - three more Allies. Occasionally, Allies who have been tasked with the unpleasant mission of cleaning the athletic offices visit, their dust-speckled faces smiling despite their tedious duties.

I realize with a smile that, atop this ladder, for perhaps the first time, I am literally surrounded by allies on every cardinal point of the compass, both above and below.

An obvious analogy is the beehive; a densely packed colony of workers, all working diligently to complete a task of communal importance (in our case, a day of renovation and service at the Y of Central Maryland).



Yet, this analogy falls short. Bees are mindless creatures, working to accomplish strictly what genetics and their societal structure has programmed them to do - nothing less and certainly nothing more. Furthermore, a beehive is the antithesis of diversity; not only is every bee nearly identical in appearance, they all share the exact same lineage.

Public Allies breathes some much needed fresh air into our modern definition of diversity. The diversity exemplified by our group is an argument for a renewed vision of the term, one that is informed not simply by color, but by religion, education, nationality, family and socioeconomic status; you get the point. And just as an ecosystem grows stronger with its biodiversity, so are we bolstered by the wealth of ideas, opinions, and perspectives that this diversity cultivates.

Contrary to pursuing programmed ideals, the hopes, dreams, and current reality of each Ally are sharp rebukes to notion that work should be mindless and selfish; instead, they



are actively trailblazing a career path towards a life of actively and creatively serving others.

Our tasks complete, we take our seats to watch a video explaining how the Y is more than what most people expect. The video demands viewers who believe the Y is simply a pool to 'look deeper,' and I'm delighted at the symmetry of the message as I sit alongside 18 other young men and women who defy the assumptions cast upon our generation.

And so, if you believe we're just another Americorps program; if you believe that young people are dispassionate and misguided; if you think there's no hope for our world, I urge you to look deeper. It won't take you much searching to resolutely demolish such misconceptions.