

Hi everyone, my name is Rachel Winkler and I am a Senior Social Work Major from St. Louis MO. Today I get to talk to you all a little bit about my Valpo journey and the role that the Social Action Leadership Team or SALT played as well as the work we are doing for the World Relief Campaign this semester.

When I started college I had absolutely no direction, no major, not even an idea of a major or path. What I did know was that I wanted to find a community that would help support me in becoming a better advocate and better able to engage in social action. So with that, I went to the chapel fair and found SALT.

Before joining I never would have ever described myself as a leader but somehow I was talked into being a co-leader for a passions group which is what we do during the fall semester. A couple of the seniors in SALT saw something in me that I could not see myself. They put time, effort, and energy into me and helped me to see and to act like I was worthy of being heard and capable of good things.

Worthy, capable, and community are all words I am drawn to when thinking about this campaign.

For SALT's 2021 World Relief Campaign entitled A Haven for Hope: Restorative Housing we are partnering with Community Change Center: We are One Inc. This organization was founded last year by a passionate 2020 VU Social Work Grad...which is pretty cool.

We are working to raise \$25,000 to rehabilitate two houses in Gary, IN. These houses will provide a safe space for formerly incarcerated individuals. Many of our people who are incarcerated and then released face a very harsh reality. Lack of housing availability, lack of job opportunity, disenfranchisement, obstacles to education, and so many other negative interactions within the community they return to....and they do return, 95% of those released return back to their home community. They are often not met with a community or with systems who tell them they are worthy who tell them they are capable of good things

Some may say they made a choice as if that excuses our communities and our country for leaving them behind but often times the choice was made for them. Too often people are incarcerated because their needs are not being met. They are hungry, unhoused, have unaddressed mental health issues or addictions, they don't have access to gainful or meaningful employment or education. Most of us here had many choices... I know I did. I have options and I still mess up yet... I am still met with a community who time and time again will tell me I am worthy and capable.

Not only will these properties serve as a space safe for these individuals, they will also provide opportunities for residents to successfully reintegrate into society. They will receive access to case management which will allow them to obtain meaningful employment, education, insurance, and other necessities to assist them in becoming productive, contributing members of society. In this space, they will be told they are worthy and capable. This space is a small community where they can get back some of the opportunities the criminal justice system takes away. This space is a small start to what restorative justice looks like and I would like to invite

all of you to join SALT in being part of this change because everyone deserves a community where they are told they are worthy and they are capable.

This campaign and SALT in general as well as working in the social service arena has also changed and grown my understanding of who God may be. I am definitely still working on that one. I am learning, thinking, and my faith is evolving in ways I do not always understand.

Another reason I was drawn to SALT was the mixture of faith and being socially and civically active. That was something I always missed in my home church and the way my family talked about faith it almost seemed like it was bad to get involved. In some ways, I used to hold God or at least Christianity in the role of oppressor, and in some ways, I still do because Christianity and the Bible are still being used as reasoning to oppress and ostracize people from the church.

Leaving them without community and with feelings of being unworthy and incapable of receiving grace. But God, God is on the side of the oppressed and I believe that my God is fueling my fire and passion for social change and ultimately liberation. My God would want all people, all creation to be treated with equity, worth, and respect. So that is what I will continue to work on. Thank you.

If you have any questions about the WRC I will hang out in the back for a little bit.