

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, established in 1983, originally began as a federal holiday to mark the birthday of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. This day, the third Monday of each January, has since evolved into a national day of service in his honor and encourages all Americans to become engaged in their communities through volunteerism. On January 16, 2012, hundreds of Michigan volunteers were able to serve their community in Dr. King's memory thanks to funding that gave schools and community organizations the means to organize projects to make a difference in their area.

This year, due to a Connect Michigan Alliance Endowment and the Sara Ballard Volunteer Fund, \$15,500 in grant money was allocated to twenty-nine organizations across Michigan. The Michigan Community Service Commission, League Michigan, Michigan Nonprofit Association, Michigan Campus Compact, Sarah Ballard Volunteer Fund and Volunteer Centers of Michigan have all helped to make this possible.

The organizations received grants ranging from \$250 to \$850, allowing them to afford the necessary supplies and resources needed to coordinate service projects in their community. These projects helped to address important community issues such as education, supporting veterans and military families, health, environment, food insecurity, and homelessness.

One of the grant recipients, the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, helped to bring together individuals of different faiths by providing food, clothing, and public health information to the Detroit area homeless. Additionally, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Detroit, another grant recipient, helped to join together many area partners to beautify local schools and community centers, sort donated clothing for distribution to needy families and sorted and distributed donated books to K-12 children. All other benefited communities include Flint, Felch, Grand Rapids, Hamtrac, Hastings, Howard City, Ionia, Kalamazoo, Lansing, Redford, Saginaw, Sault Ste. Marie, Traverse City, and Warren.

The 2012 Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) Collegiate Challenge award, funded in part by the Corporation for National and Community Service, has also given Western Michigan University the opportunity to make a difference in the Kalamazoo area.

The MLK Collegiate Challenge mobilized college students across the country to collaboratively engage with community partners, addressing specific community issues of education, healthy futures, and disaster preparedness. Michigan Campus Compact, in partnership with Campus Compacts in Wisconsin, North Carolina, Oregon and Missouri, awarded mini-grants to 20 higher education institutions, representing twelve states across the Northeast region of the United States, as well as the District of Columbia. Western Michigan University (WMU) is among the mini-grantees and has organized fifteen service projects over the course of the semester. The Semester of Service began with a community-wide day of service on MLK Day, and culminated in a commemorative march to Kalamazoo's MLK Park, where they held a rally to recognize the service efforts of community members and volunteers, while also encouraging them to continue service efforts throughout the year. WMU will partner with the City of Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo Public Schools, Kalamazoo College, Kalamazoo Valley Community College, the Northside Ministerial Alliance and WMU's Young Black Males Support Network to organize the service projects with a focus on education and social justice, in hopes to engage over 250 volunteers. Overall, the MLK Collegiate Challenge will mobilize more than 300 community partners and engage over 12,000 volunteers across the nation.

