



Cristo Rey Students Impact Office Statewide

By Sara McKinniss, Internal Communications Coordinator, Human Resources

After talking to Ty'lee Withers (pictured left), you wouldn't think you were speaking to a high school senior. In fact, you probably wouldn't know you were unless someone told you otherwise.

Ty'lee is mature and professional, and a member of the staff, even though he is a high school student. A senior at Cristo Rey High School in Columbus, he's one of a few Cristo Rey students who help keep the Office running smoothly. In fact, in our Columbus, Cincinnati, and Cleveland offices, you will find a Cristo Rey student working hard Monday through Friday to help keep it that way.

So, how are students like Ty'lee able to do this?

Well, the Cristo Rey Network is the only network of high schools in the country that integrate four years of rigorous college preparatory academics with four years of professional work experience through a Corporate Work Study Program. There are 32 Cristo Rey Network schools in 21 states that have more than 10,000 students participating in this educational experience, which focuses on underserved communities. The Attorney General's Office partners with the Cristo Rey Network to offer the Corporate Work Study Program in select locations throughout the state of Ohio.

Ty'lee has been in the Corporate Work Study Program since he was a freshman in 2013; he's had the opportunity to work at Motorists Insurance Co., Expeditors International, and Ronald McDonald House Charities.

This year, he's been working hard in Workers' Compensation at the Attorney General's Office. A typical workday for Ty'lee includes closing out cases, scanning important documents, interacting with attorneys, and helping with the thousands of pieces of mail that the section receives. While Ty'lee enjoys the work, what he has taken away from the job will surpass his high school education.

"This whole experience has given me the opportunity to work on my professionalism," said Ty'lee. "It's helped me with time management skills, and it's given me an opportunity to understand what life is really like after school."

While Ty'lee graduates in a few weeks, he hasn't let other opportunities pass by him in school. He's played basketball for the high school team, and also is a member of the Attorney General's Teen Ambassador Board. He does all of this while working a second part-time job at Bob Evans.

"It keeps me busy!" said Ty'lee.

After graduation, he has confirmed admission to the University of Cincinnati. Tylee is currently undecided about what he wants to study, but has a special interest in business.

This "can do" attitude is a common thread that links several Cristo Rey students together throughout the state. Sheila Nowacki, Office Manager, Cleveland, explained this is also the mentality with the students she works with as well.

"We've found that the students are competent and responsible," said Sheila. "Our office does very well with students who have outgoing personalities; they need to be ready and willing to work."

For the Cleveland office, the Cristo Rey students also get to occasionally experience life outside the Office, too. When this year's group of students first started, Sheila and other staff members tried to learn about what interests their students most. After talking to them, Sheila and team learned that all four students were interested in healthcare. By simply talking with the students, Michelle Gillcrist, Director of Program Development in Cleveland, was able to partner the local hospital system and set up job shadowing opportunities for the students.

"The students have had such a positive impact on our operations up here," said Sheila. "We want to give the students an *experience*, not just a job."

That same sentiment is also echoed in Cincinnati, where Mary Ellen Blevins, Office Manager, and Stacy Tolbert, Paralegal/Legal Assistant, have had similar experiences working with the students.

"This is our second year in Cincinnati participating in the Cristo Rey Corporate Work Study program," said Stacy. "We think the students like what they do. They're hard workers, polite, and professional. These are important traits to have in the workforce."

For the Cincinnati office, the interaction with the students also provides a new outlook for employees.

"I think by having these students in our office, it really gives you perspective," said Mary Ellen. "My school experience was so different. Many of these students juggle a demanding school schedule, athletics, part-time jobs, and even transportation obstacles, but they always manage to show up and are ready to work."

The students have a significant impact on the day-to-day operations in all locations; they've become a part of the Attorney General's team. Their absence is definitely noticed.

"When they are gone, whether on a holiday break or it's the summer, we miss them, and we notice when they're gone," said Stephanie Anderson, Project Coordinator, Workers' Compensation in Columbus. "For us, the students provide a valuable service, and when they're here, we know we're allocating our staff resources appropriately."

As the end of the 2016-2017 academic year approaches, students will finish up their duties at the Attorney General's office and will break for the summer. While the students will be missed by many staff members, the excitement of a new group of students starting in the fall is something that many employees look forward to experiencing.

"I adore the kids," said Stacy Tolbert. "They give me so much joy, and I think of them highly. I look forward to seeing them everyday, and each year gets better."