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'TODAY WE CELEBRATE SERVICE'

FRESHMEN HEAD OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | August 26, 2025*Read time: about 2 min*

The Class of 2029 may have just arrived on campus, but its members are already making a huge impact in the community.

Almost 400 first-year students, armed with shovels, staplers, wheelbarrows, and a powerful commitment to do good, fanned out across the Peninsula to help local organizations and schools as part of Day One of Service, a Christopher Newport tradition now in its 18th year.

"Today we celebrate service," President William G. Kelly told the students gathered at Ferguson Center for the Arts before they boarded buses and embarked on their volunteer missions. "This is what you do as a Captain."

The day is designed to both introduce CNU's freshmen to their new community and to drive home the integral role service will play during their time at Christopher Newport. The University prioritizes service, as it is one of the [Four Pillars of a CNU education](#).

"We hope you will walk away with a better understanding of how you can make a difference," said Lacey Grey Hunter, director of the [President's Leadership Program](#). "We hope this inspires you to continue to serve."



"What separates you as a leader is that you go in with an open mind and know that you are someone's answer to a need," Hunter said. "You are helping to meet a need in the community, and that is incredible."

That message resonated strongly with the freshmen, as they embraced the opportunity with positive attitudes and contagious energy.

"I love giving back. Throughout my life, people have supported me. Now it's my turn to help others," said freshman Emmett Cummings. "What better way to get to know my new community?"



Cummings was in a group of students assigned to NATASHA House, a transitional shelter for women and children in nearby York County. They spent their day weeding, helping to beautify the property, and do whatever else needed to be done.

The NATASHA House team was one of 68 Day One of Service teams assigned to 47 sites. The teams were led by 77 faculty, staff and student leaders. Their tasks were all different, but their purpose was the same: to lend a hand and spread goodwill.

"It's very fulfilling to be able to help other people," said freshman Rachel Miura, who was at Saunders Elementary School in Newport News assembling emergency bags for teachers.

Freshman Reece Jordan agreed, saying "I really like volunteering and this is really important work.

"I am very much enjoying it," she said. "It feels really good."

At the Virginia Living Museum (VLM), students were outside helping to get a new enclosure ready for a bald eagle that will soon move into it.

"Making a difference in the community means a lot to me," said freshman T.J. Brown. "People gave me so much as a kid, now I'm ready to help others in the same way."

At each location, students brought compassion and a strong work ethic to fuel their efforts. They set out to accomplish tasks and projects that were key to the organizations.

"This has been incredibly helpful," said Matt Oliver of the VLM. "What they did today would have taken me weeks to do and they just knocked it out. We are very appreciative."

Day One of Service introduces students to the diverse community that surrounds CNU and shows them the potential for being part of it. The goal is to inspire the freshmen to pay it forward and embark on many more meaningful service projects.



“This tradition allows students to explore more than just the CNU campus,” said Jessie Deal, assistant director of Christopher Newport’s [Center For Community Engagement](#). “It encourages students to go out into their new community, learn how to get involved and give back, and work alongside the people and organizations who work so diligently in caring for our community. Our goal is always for this to be Day One of many days of service, as we empower our students to ‘Chart their Course’ toward being civically minded and engaged individuals.”