

# Trust, Allyship, and The Power of Our Voice

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When I think about empowering and connecting communities for racial justice, I look no further than to one of our greatest civil liberties in our country, the power of voting. We are fortunate to live in a country where voting is an inherent right we are born with, an undisputed fact written into law. Voting, to me, signifies a couple of different actions seldom talked about. The act of voting is participatory. By handing in a ballot, you are voicing your opinion on whom you believe is equipped to lead our county, city, state, country. Furthermore, you are sharing that you care. It does not matter if you can recite every policy (or any policy, for that matter) your candidate campaigned on, or what exactly they plan to do, but you prove to yourself and those around you that you care about who will be the decision maker, and I think that is more important than any single policy or bill signed into law.

We are very fortunate to have this democracy in place, and when our citizens are behind it, it can be a very powerful vehicle for change. In the beginning of 2020, I knew I would be able to vote for the first time that November, but I was almost ambivalent about the whole idea. I was unsure if my vote truly mattered and questioned whether the candidates even cared about us as individuals. It wasn't until I started reading about our governor purging voting sites in marginalized communities that I started to take note. I began questioning everything. Researching and doing my due diligence before taking to social media to express my objections. When I found that this had been going on for quite some time, I quickly became angry and felt powerless. It was then that I realized that I needed to find a way to help and circled the Election Season of 2020 to assist in any way possible.

Election Day 2020, although stressful, remains a very special memory for me more than a year later. I woke up early that

morning, headed to a polling place down in South Georgia, and worked as a Poll Watcher for the remainder of the day. I was fortunate enough to work in a district that was not mine, so I got to meet a lot of new people, the majority of whom shared similar interests with me. I was working alongside a lady named Verlean, and we spoke at-length about the prospects of racial justice in our country. She shared one important quote that I frequent nowadays, that as a society we should be pushing towards progress, not perfection. She shared that it would be our generation's mission to strive to make progress towards a racially just society, and that it starts at the ballot boxes. I took that advice to heart, encouraging as many peers as possible to get to the ballot boxes. Out of all of Georgia's votes, 21% came from the youth, up four points from the national average.

When I think of racial justice today, I think a lot about allyship. On the surface, it may seem that we all want something from one another. Every person has something to offer the next. We endure this cycle-like, transactional behavior that can, in some instances, display the worst character traits of humanity. But if we can trust each other, and connect on that very simple, very human emotion, then the idea that together we can do so much more than we can do alone rings true. Trust has a distinct, at times redemptive power. It paves way for people to build deeper relationships and paves the way for healing processes to begin. At RISE, we learn that sport has the ability to build bridges across communities, across continents, across society. If we can emphasize trust in our day-to-day lives, then true allyship can become a reality.

