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[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

Columbia students reach out through Community Impact

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Many students come to Columbia in order to appreciate the excitement of life in New York City. But for many in New York, excitement is much less of a priority than simply finding a warm bed and a decent meal.

In recognition of the less fortunate, many Columbia students have been working for Community Impact, giving a little or a lot of their time to try to make New York a better place to live for everybody.

Community Impact, which has its headquarters in Earl Hall, runs 25 community service programs, such as soup kitchens, tutoring services, and an AIDS support group.

This summer, approximately 30 Columbia faculty and staff are volunteering their time on weekdays, evenings, and weekends. Volunteers can offer as much time as they can, or as little as one to two hours a week.

The organization is always looking for new and enthusiastic volunteers, especially over the summer, to help with the Emergency Service Programs, which include their community lunch program, the Food Pantry, the Clothes Closet, a high school GED program, and the Projects Rights and Opportunities program.

The community lunch program operates out of the Broadway Pre-

sbyterian Church on Broadway and 114th Street. Two hundred homeless and low-income individuals and families are served a three course meal three times a week by volunteers from Community Impact and two other local volunteer organizations. Guests do not have to wait on a "soup line," but are seated at small tables and served by volunteers, who work two-to-seven hour shifts once a week, waiting tables, preparing food, and cleaning.

Angela McKenzie, CC '93, is volunteering her time this summer as a teacher and tutor in the GED program. Although she is an English major, McKenzie spends about

four hours a week teaching biology, physics, chemistry, and earth science, and tutoring math, in addition to her part-time work in the philosophy department.

McKenzie said most of her students, homeless or not, are enthusiastic and eager to learn.

"The students seem motivated. They want to pass this test, they are striving to get their GEDs and move on with their lives. Homeless people are people too, they're going to class to learn. It's like working with other students ready to learn,"

McKenzie said.

The Clothes Closet and Food Pantry, both located at 616 West 114th St., in Ford Hall, need volunteers to assist the people who frequent them. The Clothes Closet provides homeless and low income individuals with clothing and household items donated by the community, and the Food Pantry provides homeless and low-income families with referrals from various agencies a three day supply of groceries.

The Projects Rights and Opportunities program needs volunteers to assist guests at the community lunch program with securing public assistance, Social Security, and veteran's benefits. Guests are also encouraged to enroll in education and training programs and referred to other appropriate agencies when necessary.

The friendly atmosphere at the community lunch program enables volunteers to develop trusting relationships with the otherwise hard to reach population, according to Sandy Helling, assistant director of programs for Community Impact.

Approximately 50,000 homeless individuals and 100,000 homeless families live in New York City, according to Helling, and the Morningside Heights area has been hit especially hard by the conversion of many Single Room Occupancies into condominiums, forcing many people into the streets.

About 200,000 people are doubled-up in the city--they do not have their own home, but live with friends or relatives.

The stereotype of homeless

people as panhandlers, drug addicts, or victims of de-institutionalization does not accurately describe the majority of the homeless, according to Executive Director of Community Impact Sonia Reese.

“Many of the homeless are well-educated people who fell on hard times. The homeless are from a whole range of the population, including children and the elderly,” Reese said.

Helling, who has worked for Community Impact for the past six years, said she was struck by the number of people who are determined to better their living situations.

“Those with chemical dependencies want to get into substance abuse programs, many of the homeless want their GED diplomas, they want a job, they want a home,” Helling said.

The motivation exhibited by the people helped by Community Impact programs prompted the organizers to expand from only offering emergency help to providing more long-term assistance. Several years ago, Project Rights and Opportunities began to help to the homeless with securing benefits, finding low-income public housing, and enrolling in educational and training programs, as well as referring people with chemical dependencies to treatment clinics.

Ann Hoff, CC '94, has been working for the community lunch program and the Food Pantry since the beginning of June. A Big Sister in Community Impact's Big Brother/Big Sister Program for the past year and a half, Hoff also holds a work study position within Community Impact.

“[Volunteers are] the heart and soul of the whole thing, they are

soul of the whole thing, they are really crucial to the programs," Hoff said.

"Volunteering is very interesting, you learn a lot and really understand what's going on in their lives ... Volunteering humanizes the people you see everyday who are asking for help--you understand what they have to deal with," Hoff said.

There are currently six Columbia students working at Community Impact through the Work Study program, and students under this category are often trained to become program coordinators, according to Community Impact leaders.

An AIDS support group and Best Buddies are two new programs that were added to Community Impact's roster this past spring.

Support group volunteers work with other organizations, such as the Upper West Side AIDS Task Force, and work within the groups or work directly with AIDS patients by helping them with household chores, entitlements, housing, and medical programs.

Best Buddies Support Group is part of a national organization that matches undergraduate college students with persons of mild to moderate mental disabilities in order to develop close and lasting relationships.

For more information about volunteering for Community Impact, call 854-1492 or go to 204 Earl Hall.



SPECTATOR/ARTHUR WEISE

Columbia students have shown their dedication to the Morningside Heights area by working on a variety of Community Impact programs, including a local soup kitchen.