

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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Community Impact opens house

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Community Impact's open house, held last night in Earl Hall, introduced about 250 students to the program's 25 student-staffed community service projects, which range from tutoring underprivileged students to visiting AIDS patients.

Community Impact was first organized 13 years ago to address the housing, education, shelter and friendship needs of Morningside Heights and Harlem residents.

Anne Labowitz, CC '95, a member of Community Impact's student executive committee, said the open house allowed students to "see what community service at Columbia is all about."

"What's really exciting is that people will sign up for everything from a soup kitchen to student help for the aging," she said.

According to Labowitz, the number of students involved in the program increased from 650 to 750 last year. She projected that 800 students will volunteer this year.

Students attending the event cited various reasons for joining Community Impact. Peter Rodriguez, CC '96, said, "After two years of filling in the Core and doing pre-med work, I have some

time. There's no better way to spend it, so I signed up."

Tracy Kaplowitz, BC '98/JTS '98, agreed. "We're living in the middle of New York City," she said. "There are a lot of opportunities to help out those around us. By being students we are privileged, and we need to use what we have to benefit the community."

The program's student coordinators said volunteering during their first year helped them decide to make a more lasting commitment to the program.

"I was a volunteer in this program last year. I enjoyed interacting with homeless people in a more regular setting than on the street," said Aaron Levy, GS '97/JTS '97, a coordinator for the Jewish project for the homeless.

Tali Field, BC '97, a coordinator for the big brother/big sister program, explained, "College can be a real self-absorbing atmosphere. It's a good opportunity to see what's around you. It's great to help when you have the time and energy."

Student coordinators were enthusiastic about the turnout at the event. Linda Pistolessi, CC '96, said that over 60 students had expressed interest in joining the Barnard-Columbia Earth Coalition.

Community Impact has also begun a new program designed to help its volunteers after graduation. Beginning this academic year, alumni will serve as resources for graduating students who are looking for jobs in human services, while also helping with the group's fundraising efforts.

Sue Weller, CC '92, who has worked as an advocate for the homeless since graduation, said working for Community Impact encouraged her to pursue a career in human services.

In addition, Community Impact Executive Director Sonia Reese noted that University faculty members and administrators have become more involved with the program, often serving as contacts or volunteers themselves.

Community Impact leaders also stressed that they hoped to refer clients to other programs the group sponsors, allowing Community Impact to serve their child care, educational and housing needs.

Reese admitted that her 5-year tenure has often been difficult, but definitely rewarding.

"When I am about to run out of steam, a first year asks an interesting question, or I see a client who is doing well," she said.