

VSC WEST

NEWSLETTER | WINTER 2014

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A year of service makes a lifetime of difference.

WELCOME MESSAGE

California living surely has been different in many ways from the many years of my life on the Navajo Reservation and in the city of Anchorage, Alaska. The defining difference is the ministry that I do for God's people.

Six months into the works of the Vincentian Service Corps, I think I can resonate to *St. Louise de Marillac* our community co-founder's quote, *"I must have great trust in God and believe that His grace will be sufficient to enable me to fulfill His Holy will, however difficult it may*

appear to be, provided the Holy Spirit is truly calling me."

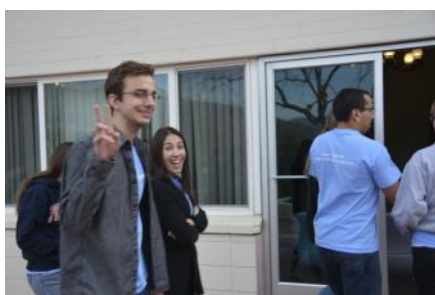
This short amount of time being at VSC has blessed me with vigor, enthusiasm, and fervor in spite of the challenges and its newness because I believe the Holy Spirit has been the guiding hand.

Also in this very short amount of time, I have seen how much our present volunteers have grown and resonated in the same words of St. Louise.

The staff, volunteers, the community support people, supervisors and all those who are trying to make this year

of service for the young people successful seem to be synchronized and in harmony in fulfilling the mission statement of VSC West; which in essence, they are responding to the Spirit of the Gospel and the Vincentian tradition to celebrate life, deepen the faith, work for justice and grow in charity.

-Sr. Frances Vista, DC



Awakening Our Humanity

By Emily Van Ostran

Emily is a Teaching Assistant at Mother of Sorrows School.

I work at Mother of Sorrows K-8 School in South Central Los Angeles. In spite of the rough area our students live in, they are well-behaved and good-natured kids. Still, most of our students' families require heavy financial assistance in order to keep their kids at Mother of Sorrows. Therefore, I was surprised when I was told each class goes on a service trip in the spring. For goodness sakes, they need volunteers of their own to keep the school running on a daily basis. I could not comprehend sending these disadvantaged children to an even worse neighborhood to do service.

Last week I accompanied the sixth grade class on their annual service trip to Midnight Mission in Skid Row. They were to serve lunch to the homeless men and women who were coming off the streets that afternoon. Before getting off the bus, I reminded the kids they were ambassadors of our school and that they should be polite and kind to each person they met that day. I was concerned because I know this class and, well, they are in middle school.



In addition, I have been to Midnight Mission before, the people are rough, to say the least. But the most amazing thing happened; once people started filing in to receive their meal those kids were angels. They did their assignments with diligence and humility. One young man I worked with closely stood out to me in particular. He's a kind-hearted boy, but I know he tends to slack off in class and he rarely does his homework or studies for tests. That day he kept up with me. We walked around the tables delivering trays of food to the disabled and picking up empty trays

that had been left. I never heard him complain and I never saw him try to sneak a break.

Service awakens a part of our humanity. It reminds us that we can make a difference in the lives of others. That day I learned that this applies to all of us, no matter our age or our economic status. Now I recognize how wonderful it is for the kids to have an opportunity to feel the joy of knowing they have contributed to something larger than themselves. I wish more schools did annual service trips; I wish my school had.



Being Blessed By The Unexpected

By Kansas Simmons

Kansas is a Caseworker at the St. Vincent de Paul Society of San Francisco Riley Center

Six months into my year of service, I am still in awe of what I get to do each day as a Case Manager at the Riley Center in San

Francisco. Each day I learn more and more not only about the seven women I am privileged to work with, but also about myself. We work together on finding permanent housing, stable employment, as well as numerous other resources.

When initially starting my work as a case manager I was afraid of saying the wrong thing, or doing the wrong thing. What if they didn't take me seriously? After all, I am recent college graduate, 23 years old, and I am assigned to somehow help these strong and admirable women become more self-sufficient. It seemed like a daunting and arduous task. However, my very first client changed all of that for me.

"How old are you, anyway?" Was one of the first questions she asked me. My biggest fear was becoming reality. As time moved forward, she proved to be one of my most trying clients to work with. She asked the tough questions, challenged me, and challenged everything I thought I knew thus far. "Do you understand what it means to be homeless?" She was right, I didn't understand, so how could I possibly try to help her stand on her own two feet?

As the weeks passed, our rapport with one another transformed. We began to engage in moments of genuine laughter, and most importantly, this woman who had challenged me from the beginning slowly began to trust me.

Time moved forward, we continued working together, and the day before my Christmas vacation there was a card on my desk from her. It stated, "Kansas, you will never truly know how much I look forward to meeting with you each week. I hope you know how much I appreciate you and I hope you know how much of a difference you have made in my life. You are one of a kind, darling. God has sent me a blessing, and it is you." As tears streamed down my face, I rejoiced in the sheer fact that it is I who has been blessed beyond measure.



Letting God Do The Work

By Hannah Petcovic

Hannah is a Caseworker at the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Los Angeles Cardinal Manning Center

In January 2014, using the search word “homeless” in the LA Times website, produced 101 results for the past month- or 3 to 4 stories per day. Using the same method with the Morning Journal, my hometown’s newspaper, produced 58 results (a significant number considering Rogers is home to only 237 Ohioans.) Even Brunei- a Southeast Asian country 8,000 miles away from California- prints stories

like “Homeless people receive financial aid”.

Across the map, homelessness is a part of society. Being a Case Manager at St Vincent’s Cardinal Manning Center (CMC)- a transitional housing program for adult men located in LA’s infamous Skid Row- I observe and participate in this cause through service.

While I could fill this entire newsletter with the insights I’ve gained, my most impactful lesson is that the paths to homelessness are innumerable. In four months, I have listened to testimonies of prison, gangs, relocation from across the country and across the world, undiagnosed mental illness, job loss, loss of a family member, cocaine, alcohol, methamphetamine, child abuse, intellectual disabilities, and one gentleman who wanted to “try out the hobo thing”.

The path to permanent housing can be a difficult one, and for every barrier the case manager must be prepared to provide support. At the Cardinal Manning Center, you may be the first person to teach a client about saving money. You may be called to help as someone plinks out the first email they’ve ever written in their life. One client may need immigration-related legal

services, and another, some time to play Ping-Pong.

And sometimes, you may stop all of this and let God do the work. I once met with a resident for months to work on housing applications. The final process was a random room number assignment. “Miss Hannah” he told me “I’ve been praying for a room on the top floor, facing the back.” Today, he watches the sunrise from this precise location every morning.

Other clients come to the Center in less stable positions. Early in my experience, a woman using a wheelchair shuffled to the front desk. Her words were hoarse and muffled. Trying to listen, I knelt and placed my hands on the armrest. “Clothes...” she wiped her eyes “my...bags.” Her speech was compromised and I stood to seek help. She reached for my hand “It’s humiliating.”

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” Hebrews 13:2

Healing Through Community

By Hope Cornelis

Hope is a Caseworker at the St. Vincent de Paul Society of San Francisco Riley Center

My service site is a transitional shelter for survivors of domestic violence and their children. There, I have the privilege of helping to plan and facilitate a weekly educational support group for teens. We explore healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviors and discuss different forms of abuse.

One week, there were only two teens in the group; an older teen resident and a newer, younger resident. They hardly knew one another before that night. We were discussing ways in which children can be used to abuse a romantic partner, and I was writing down the examples we came up with. When I’d finished writing, the younger resident raised his hand and quietly said, “I’ve experienced everything on that list.” I knew the topic resonated strongly with both of the teens that night, but hearing it out loud was very powerful.



A few moments later, the older teen reached over and patted the younger one on the back and said, “If you ever need to talk, I’m here for you. My room is just down the hall. Knock any time.” Nothing I could have said in that moment would have been more profound than that.

During my time with the Riley Center, I’ve learned countless bits of knowledge about the effects of domestic violence on survivors, on children, about mental health, poverty, and homelessness. For all of this, I’m incredibly grateful. But nothing compares to what I’ve learned from the people I work with.

I’ve heard many stories of suffering,

pain, and hopelessness. I’ve witnessed the devastating effects of domestic violence, but I’ve also witnessed the healing power of those I serve.

The interaction I observed between these teens taught me a valuable lesson about community. Humans are equipped to handle an incredible amount of suffering, and when we come together in support of one another, our capacity to heal is strengthened immensely. The loving words of the older teen have stuck with me. He inspired me to strive for a similar attitude of openness to all I encounter who need support and to personify the message, “Knock any time.”

ALUMNI UPDATES!



KATIE ABEL (*far left*) has been a wonderful support person for the Los Angeles community. She is seen here making others laugh.

You can find **LORI and CARLOS ALVAREZ** keeping the Vincentian spirit alive making home visits with the St. Vincent de Paul Society San Carlos, CA conference.

KRISTLE BULLEMAN is in Tanzania as a Maryknoll missionary. Please keep her in your prayers as she begins her service at a local wellness center. When asked what surprised her the most, Kristle said, "The way the animals roam freely; They don't do that at the San Diego Zoo!"

Congratulations to **ERIN AND STEVE MOORE** for the safe arrival of their newest family member, James!

Congratulations to **MARIANNE AND RJ TOLEDO** who married January 4, 2014, on the Feast of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton!

THANK YOU to all of our alumni who serve as party planners and our best recruiters. Thank you to our placement sites who give our members the opportunity to see Christ. **YOU ARE AMAZING!**

Do you have any cool news you would like to share with the rest of the "formers" or greater VSC family? Interested in getting involved? Know a good joke? Please let us know. We love hearing from you!

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