

CSU Student Volunteers at Catholic Charities

By Hailey Misheff
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Volunteering is more than improving and helping the lives of others. It's about building strong relationships within the community, bettering yourself and opening your eyes to those around you, according to a CSU student who has given her time to a local nonprofit.

"I am impacting the people that I am working with," Melanie Schow said. The Colorado State University student said she feels that through her volunteer experiences, she has been able to gain a deeper understanding of the struggles other people face within the community. Schow has been volunteering at Catholic Charities of Larimer County, <http://www.catholiccharitiesdenver.org/Services/Catholic-Charities-Northern-Op.aspx>, for more than three years. She works with the clients, plans activities for the children and lends an ear when clients need to talk.

"Catholic Charities Mission, where I volunteer, is an overnight shelter for the homeless population in Fort Collins," Schow said. "Beyond that, it provides case managers for clients to use as a resource for job searching and saving money."

CCLC annually serves 513 people with emergency shelter, provides 2,754 households with food and serves 89,000 meals to shelter residences and community members.

A variety of programs are offered to help clients re-establish their lives. "(Stepwise) is a series of steps that our clients at the mission go through with their case manager," Schow said. "It starts with things like completing chores and builds up to attending certain skill-building courses we offer. It's mainly a way for case managers to keep track of the client's progress and to help the clients reach goals that will ultimately get them back on their feet."

CCLC provides help in a variety of ways, including legal services, temporary and emergency housing, family counseling, and family and child services. Not only does the organization change the lives of its clients, but also the lives of its volunteers.

Schow, who is pursuing pre-medical studies, originally became involved with volunteering in high school.

When Hurricane Katrina destroyed the majority of New Orleans, Schow's high school planned mission trips to the area. Seeing people that she could help prompted her to participate. "I wanted to get involved in volunteering," Schow said.

Schow says she will continue to volunteer at CCLC and would like to build awareness and knowledge about volunteering. "There is not a lot of awareness around CSU about homelessness," Schow said. "It's not just a random person standing on the corner; it's someone with a history."

For Schow, volunteering is more than helping those in need. "It gives me the opportunity get outside of myself and care about others without my own needs competing. I benefit from the experience because serving others is rewarding in itself, and I just find pleasure in being able to reach out to others," Schow said.

For Schow, volunteering has broadened her awareness. “I have realized that the individuals who make up the homeless population in Fort Collins are people with names and stories, and they truly appreciate whatever support they can get,” she said.

She shared an experience she had while working with a client on an art project. “I had painted a picture with the word „hope”” Schow said with a smile. “I had a client write a beautiful poem to match my painting.”

Schow admits that CCLC cannot provide everything their clients need. “Without (CCLC), there would be a considerably greater number of people sleeping on the streets every night in our community,” she said. She said, “I don't know if people realize this but there is a large homeless community in Fort Collins. I am just very grateful to be part of an organization that cares about this demographic and which is truly making a difference in the Fort Collins community.”

Hailey Misheff is a Colorado State University student who wrote this story on behalf of the Northern Colorado Empty Stocking Fund.

NORTHERN COLORADO EMPTY STOCKING FUND

Since its founding in 2007, the Northern Colorado Empty Stocking Fund has raised over \$333,000 to support health and human service agencies in Larimer and Weld County. With matching funds provided by El Pomar Foundation, every dollar grows by 33 percent. United Ways of Larimer and Weld County cover all administrative costs for the campaign, meaning every dollar donated goes directly to the recipient organizations. This year's recipient agencies include: Catholic Charities of Larimer County, Catholic Charities of Weld County, Connections for Independent Living, Crossroads Ministry of Estes Park, Food Bank of Larimer County, Greeley Transitional House, House of Neighborly Service, and Weld Food Bank. For more information, please visit www.nocoemptystocking.org