

UWO students help Oshkosh warming shelter thrive

by Mandy Potts - Tuesday, December 20, 2011

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Angela Bergman always knew there were homeless people in Oshkosh, but she never saw them.

In October, Bergman, a University of Wisconsin Oshkosh junior studying social work, began an internship at the Day By Day Warming Shelter in Oshkosh, which provides temporary emergency shelter for adults who have no place to spend the night. Bergman now deals with Oshkosh's homeless during every shift she works at the shelter.

"Because Oshkosh is a smaller city, you don't really see these people. You don't interact with them," Bergman said. "To see all these people come through the door that don't have a home, it's sad to see."

The shelter, located on High Avenue, has the capacity to sleep 20 people, said Angela McCarthy, executive director at the Day By Day Warming Shelter. The mission of the shelter is to provide night-to-night temporary emergency shelter and a warm meal in Oshkosh for adult men and women who do not qualify for other types of short-term shelter or housing. The shelter is open every night at 8 p.m. from the end of October until mid-April.

"The shelter is vitally important to Oshkosh. There has been a gap for many, many years and I'm glad we finally have recognition that a need exists," McCarthy said.

Like the shelter is important to Oshkosh, the volunteers and interns that work at Day By Day are vital to its success, said McCarthy, who benefits from UW Oshkosh students as interns.

"These students are amazing. They are here at 2 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights and they are dealing with the most high-risk population in the most respectful and dignified way," McCarthy said. "For being so young, they get it. I am so proud of each and every one of them."

The internship connections, which help students build necessary skills related to their career choice, were made through UW Oshkosh's Business Success Center. The Business Success Center is a UW Oshkosh consulting firm that unites local businesses with University resources, such as faculty experts, student interns, research facilities, a survey center and more.

"Part of our role is to look out for students and make sure they are getting a good, safe experience," said Meredith Jaeger, development officer at the Business Success Center.

Jaeger said the student partnerships with the Day By Day Warming Shelter are especially significant.

"It's cool for social work students to get some real world experience that's paid and before their senior year of college," she said. "It helps these students confirm their passions."

For Bergman, her passions and ideas about what she'll do in the future with a social work degree are confirmed with each and every shift at the shelter. Bergman works over night shifts and helps in the intake process of new guests, as well as with monitoring guests in the mornings as they do chores and head on their way, back to the streets of Oshkosh.

"Originally I was thinking this would be great work experience and a great thing for a resume," Bergman said. "Now, I'm thinking that I will want to work with people with mental illnesses, so I'm getting experience in that area. This will really help me in my future."

Kenny Newman, a freshman at UW Oshkosh studying social work, believes the time he is spending at the shelter will also help him in his future. A first-year college student, Newman is using the experience to be exposed to social work as a major and career choice.

"It's very eye-opening," said Newman, who believes his experience as a foster care child has helped develop his empathy.

"I feel I know what these people are going through, in some ways," said Newman. "I feel like they should have someone who has the same perspective."

McCarthy said since the shelter opened in October, about 12- to 14 residents make a bed and settle in nightly. Each is expected to do chores before leaving in the morning and each is sent on their way with a bag lunch.

"These people are considered unsheltered and have no other options," McCarthy said. "If we were not here, they'd be out in the cold or they'd be picked up by the police."

While the work at the shelter isn't always easy, both McCarthy and the UW Oshkosh students who work there agree they are doing a good thing and helping a population much in need.

"I feel like because I was lucky and blessed enough to have such a great life and have the advantages and skills I have, I feel like I need to help others who are less fortunate than me," Bergman said.

Learn more:

- [Business Success Center](#)
- [UW Oshkosh Department of Social Work](#)