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Dr. Samson

Project Homeless Connect

During Project Homeless Connect, I worked from 8:30am-12:00pm in the area of CSS (client support services). During this time, I led one homeless man through the various help stations and listened to his difficult life story. I served as a guide and a listener, and I became a learner over the course of my morning with ~~_____~~.

Project Homeless Connect is a community outreach event designed to aid people with basic needs and to further the goal of ending homelessness in the Denver area in a ten year span. What I witnessed at the Gate's Field House on the University of Denver campus was something like I have never seen before. Hundreds of volunteers of all ages gathered to aid less fortunate people in obtaining vital services and resources that they would not be able to find on the streets or in shelters. I was amazed by the number of people (both young and old) who took the time to volunteer in this event. From my own experience with ~~_____~~, a homeless man of 48, I know that all of these volunteers had an impact on at least one person's life.

I would like to start out with a brief summary of ~~_____~~'s life as he told it to me. ~~_____~~ was born into a family with severe financial and moral issues. At his tenth birthday, his parents gave him his first shot of methamphetamine, hoping to get him hooked so that he could carry on the family tradition ... a tradition of drug-running. ~~_____~~ soon became a fifth-generation drug-runner, and he joined the Mexican mafia for protection and a sense of belonging. He told me gruesome stories of his trade. For example, he was hired to collect money from drug addicts who were in debt ... he collected ^{the debt} by chaining their hands to the ceiling of a van and beating their ribs with a water hose filled with sand. ~~_____~~ has been shot three times and stabbed five times.

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He has eight children, all of whom are now through college (one is a Christian minister). He has been in jail for nine years and has been homeless for the last fourteen. He is a convicted drug trafficker and sex offender, but I could see in ~~_____~~'s eyes that he is now a changed man. Despite all of ~~_____~~'s wrongs, he has turned his life around and is doing his best to stay straight despite his many hardships. Now, in addition to a life of homelessness and past convictions, ~~_____~~ is terminally ill with osteoarthritis, emphysema, diabetes, and blood clots. If anyone needed help on April 20th, 2007 at ~~_____~~ Project Homeless Connect, it was my friend ~~_____~~. Tame!

During the morning hours of Project Homeless Connect, I saw many people cooperate to make things run smoothly and to help as many people as possible. ~~_____~~ was extremely nervous to approach the legal help table, as he has an outstanding warrant for his arrest. As a sex offender, ~~_____~~ is required to register with the state of Colorado. Unfortunately, he cannot register due to the fact that he has no permanent address and no permanent home. ~~_____~~'s decision to take a weight lifted off ~~_____~~'s back as four kind lawyers helped him resolve his situation without so much as a judgmental glance. I also saw cooperation and compassion at the housing table as hundreds of homeless people proceeded through the line to gain at least a temporary place of residence. These volunteers did not just hand ~~_____~~ a sheet of paper with a few names and phone numbers and then wish him luck. They sat down with him, found him a place of permanent care (complete with in-room emergency buttons), and then offered to pay the deposit for his stay. Random acts of kindness filled the Field House on Friday. Perhaps the sight that struck me most was the sight of my friend, Brandon Danko, holding a tiny, sleeping baby to his chest. What started out as a simple

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service project designed to help hurting people, turned into a time when relationships were built, and hope was reestablished.

After participating in this amazing event, I learned a lot about human beings. I learned that many times a hurting man or woman simply needs someone to open up to and feel their pain. I learned that many people genuinely care about one another. I learned that everyone has a story to tell, and they need to tell it to someone. I learned that one can find happiness even in the most desperate and impoverished soul. This was an experience which re-invigorated me, especially at a time when it seems as if the world is just an absolutely evil place. On a college campus, where students many times make the pursuit of money their ultimate goal, it is refreshing to see compassion and kindness in action. Life is not money, possessions, or status; life is found only in faith and in helping others find the same.

Beautiful

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