

Students enhance school activities by serving the homeless at Trinity House

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Going beyond classroom instruction and the usual mix of extracurricular activities, student volunteers from three local private schools have been serving a higher purpose throughout the school year.

Once a month, students from Buckhead's Westminster school travel to the Trinity Community Ministries (TCM) in Atlanta to serve dinner and talk with shelter residents, many of whom are not only homeless, but often times overcoming a drug addiction. The shelter provides a number of transitional services for homeless individuals.

Westminster's Community Outreach Coordinator Stan Moor said the school began volunteering at TCM in 1995 through a connection to the shelter from a Westminster parent. Now, students serve dinner at TCM's residential facility, Trinity House-Big Bethel, on the second Tuesday of every month. During the dinner, the students also sit with the shelter residents for one-on-one conversation. Many times, residents talk about the personal struggles that brought them to TCM.

"It's a great program for students to hear that," Moor said. "It's very, very powerful."

The students from Westminster are not the only local private schools helping out at the Trinity House. Pace Academy and the Lovett School, both located in Buckhead, send a similar contingent to volunteer.

While Westminster does not require students to complete community service hours, Moor said the visits to Trinity House - Big Bethel, located on Bell Street in Atlanta, are

one of the most popular of Westminster's community outreach programs.

"Trinity ranks up there in the top three or four of the things students want to do," he said. "It's really one of our top activities."

Westminster students also have periodic service days at TCM in which volunteers help clean the grounds and facilities. Similarly, students also make visits to the Sunday-only soup kitchen, the Trinity Table.

Westminster parents are also involved with the school's efforts. David Smith has two daughters in the eighth and eleventh grades at Westminster and is also on TCM's board of directors. His involvement with the shelter started more than 12 years ago when he began serving dinner there with other volunteers from Northside United Methodist Church.

As chairman of TCM's Development Committee, the Westminster father said both students and staff have bonded with the men from the Trinity House-Big Bethel. Smith said when the school's basketball team visited the house in January to serve dinner, the family of a team member anonymously provided for Coach Johnny Graham to join TCM's Honorary Board, a donation that requires a minimum commitment of \$1,000 for three years.

Pace Academy parent and Trinity board member John Shingler came to know the shelter through his church, Peachtree Road United Methodist. About eight years ago, Shingler was asked to be the church's advocate for the shelter. That roll has since led him to his board position. Shingler's three children also attended Pace for a total of 29 years.

Shingler said students from Pace have likewise been visiting Trinity House for more than



Residents of the Trinity House - Big Bethel, an Atlanta homeless shelter, sit down to dinner monthly with student volunteers from several local private schools.

a decade. With service hours at several nonprofit charities, the Pace students perform many of the same duties as the Westminster students.

"They dine with the men, share their day or something about themselves and the men do the same, although usually addressing their drug addiction," Shingler said. "It lets the guys know that there are outsiders who love and care for them."

Pace's volunteers, comprised primarily of high school students, help serve dinner on the first and third Sunday of every month at the ministry's soup kitchen.

TCM focuses on three main efforts to transition homeless individuals into an independent lifestyle. The Trinity House-Big Bethel,

for example, caters specifically to homeless men, many of whom have a drug dependency and possible criminal records.

The Trinity Table is the ministry's large-scale soup kitchen. On any Sunday, the only day the kitchen is open, Trinity will serve soup, bread, butter, crackers and beverages to more than 400 people.

Finally, the Trinity Lodge caters to graduates of the Trinity House who are not yet ready for completely independent living. The structured, affordable-rent alternative charges no more than 30 percent of an individual's adjusted gross monthly income. The low cost covers rent, utilities and building maintenance.

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