

Community Corps students from Madonna learn while helping



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Students at Madonna University have spread out across metro Detroit communities with a mission to take what they have learned in class and apply it in ways that help others. Nicole Ray of Northville, for example, is in the social work program at Madonna University. She and two fellow students are working with Cass Community Social Services downtown Detroit.

“We are involved with helping the homeless get fed, finding churches where the homeless can sleep, locating the homeless under causeway bridges and getting them to shelter, and even assisting with job resources,” Ray said.

Kristen Drabek of Newport, an early childhood education major, and her team are working with First Step, a shelter for women and children who are victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

The student group plans to put on events that will empower the women and their children, while helping to make them feel loved, wanted and respected, Drabek said.

“I absolutely fell in love with the families, atmosphere and mission of First Step. I want to make a difference in their lives as well as make them feel like they are loved and deserve to be loved,” Drabek said.

And the giving goes both ways, because the students get back real-life experience in their fields of study.

“I’ve made mock communication plans before, and even though you work hard to get a good grade, there’s something to be said for the drive you have when you’re helping a real organization,” said Allison Follbaum of Livonia, a journalism and public relations student.

“There are people counting on us and we can get a taste of the expectations that we’ll be held to in the business world,” she added.

These students are doing this work as part of the Ford Community Corps, a network of colleges and universities that are partnering with Ford Motor Co. to create new service-learning initiatives that recognize scholastic achievement while encouraging service to the community. Unlike traditional volunteer programs, Ford Community Corps programs seek to match student know-how with specific nonprofit needs.

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Each team has partnered with a non-profit agency and will inform the design, development, planning, implementation and evaluation of specific projects that address community needs. Six student teams collectively will serve a minimum of 720 hours and faculty mentors will foster community building, monitor progress, and facilitate structured reflection within their respective groups.

“The Community Corps provides our students with a new leadership opportunity to serve as agents of change. This requires them to learn about complex social issues and how non-profits are addressing them and then apply their knowledge, talents and skills

to be a part of the solution,” said Olga Martinez, director of the Office of Service-Learning at Madonna University.

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