



DC social work students have numerous opportunities during their college education to be involved in real-world experiences through local social service agencies. But, there is one activity that is probably the most rewarding in terms of lessons learned.

Pay it FORWARD

Defiance's Social Work Macro Practice with Communities and Organizations course taught by Prof. Alesia Yakos-Brown, MSW/LISW, is a semester-long course that directly impacts community needs by awarding financial assistance.

Since 2008, the class has awarded more than \$14,500 to address needs of transportation, hunger, unemployment, youth mentorship and cultural understanding in northwest Ohio. With steps embedded in the curriculum, students conduct a five-county community assessment, prepare a request for grant proposals, send RFPs to approximately 50 non-profit social service agencies, and award grants to applicants that best address the identified community need.

In December, the class awarded two \$1,000 grants to area organizations to support their efforts to address hunger in northwest Ohio. The Temple of Praise Assembly of God in Defiance operates a multi-county food pantry. It served approximately 3,000 persons in 2013. The Open Hands Caring Hearts food pantry is part of the New Life Worship Center in Bryan. In 2013, it served 6,897 families.

"Being a part of this project allowed us to gain a deeper respect and understanding for what social service agencies experience on a regular basis," said social work senior Lindsay

Kasmer, Medina, Ohio. "Raising money on our own and then assessing the local communities forced us to choose which pressing need we thought we could impact the most. By raising the money, choosing a need, and then picking agencies to receive the funds, this experience was both educational and empowering, showing us that even our small class of college students could genuinely impact our community."

The project began in 2008 with funding through the Pay It Forward student-led philanthropy program led by Ohio and Kentucky Campus Compacts. Eventually, outside funding sources were depleted, but the DC professor and students believed so much in the project that it now raises its own funds through a number of events such as raffles, bake sales, and donation solicitation.

In December, the class met with representatives of the two winning proposals and presented their grants. According to Yakos-Brown, since 2008 a total of 69 social work students and eight social service agencies have benefited from the student-led philanthropy project.

The project provides opportunity for seniors in the program to demonstrate core competency skills toward the program's accreditation with the Council of Social Work Education.