

Blessed

I have been a volunteer for HOPE 4 Youth for almost 2.5 years. I have met hundreds of young people experiencing homelessness. Some of the stories they share have broken my heart yet they continue to get up each day and move forward. We have seen MANY changes in the center over the last few years but the one thing that has NEVER changed ... the clients know that we are always there for them.

Most of us are volunteers. We work full-time jobs, we are parents, we are grandparents, we are good listeners and we are compassionate. I see so many BIG HEARTS in our volunteers and it's a blessing to have so many dedicated individuals, especially Paul, Craig, Ron and Laurie. These four individuals have been here since the beginning and have almost NEVER missed a volunteer shift. They have taught me so much over the last couple of years. They have helped clients. They have loved clients. They have talked clients off of a ledge. Literally. They have saved lives.

Some of the volunteers have been through their own hell - maybe with their own children or maybe with themselves and they continue to bring their love, energy and experience to the lives of our young people. I am amazed with the power of experience and prayer! We are all brought together because of our compassion and desire to make a difference.

One of my favorite stories is about a young lady who came to Minnesota with her partner and was rejected by her partner's family, then ditched by her partner and left in an entirely new state - knowing no one. She came to HOPE 4 Youth, looked for jobs, spent time on the computer writing her resume - ate a meal every day - was respectful to EVERYONE and landed two jobs within about two weeks. A couple months later, we moved her into her own apartment. I think she had THREE jobs at that time. She was determined to succeed! I think about her every day. She told me she couldn't have done it without the help of HOPE 4 Youth and the awesome volunteers.

Or how about 'R' who was kicked out as a teenager because his dad found a new girlfriend and she made him choose her or 'R'. He became homeless and lived with knowing his father chose a new girlfriend over his own son. Tragic. Sad. Heartbreaking. But he trudged forward. He used to love scaring me! Drove me nuts because I knew he would try and do it so I was always 'ready'. HA! 'R' had the last laugh because he succeeded in scaring me every Wednesday-my day at the center. He was at the center every single day for a couple of years and then we were able to finally get him into his own place. Blessed!

We have clients that we get to know pretty well and it's amazing to see them react to the time and attention we give them. Not every day is a good day though. Gosh - we have had some pretty rough days with some of the clients but we are ALWAYS helping the clients that need us and we NEVER give up on them. The clients can be moody, depressed and angry but they know that tomorrow is a new day and they will get a fresh start with us. We don't judge - something I was guilty of before I started at HOPE 4 Youth. We don't hold grudges. We will always be there for them. As volunteers, we have amazing support from the case managers and staff. We are constantly learning from them. They are just as dedicated and compassionate as us! It's a TEAM of people who care about young people and ending youth homelessness.

We have a board at the center that we write success stories on! 'B' got a job. "J and E found a place to live". "L got a promotion". "V started a savings account". The list goes on and on! It's extremely rewarding for the volunteers to see the clients become what we KNOW they can become. All they need is an ear, a helping hand, unconditional time and attention and PRAISE!!! We give them that at

HOPE. We give them HOPE and love and understanding. They walk in homeless, depressed, angry and depleted. But SO MANY of them walk out with jobs, a new outlook on life, determination, housing, and a respect for adults who have never given up on them.

At the end of the day - every day - we send them out the door at 7 p.m. We can always SEE independence and goodness in them ... we just do our best every day to make sure THEY can see it in themselves. HOPE 4 Youth has made us all better people. It's a beautiful place to be.

Kim Mellem

HOPE 4 Youth Lead Mentor