

Ryan Tressler – St. Jude – Elder High School

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How I have made a difference in the lives of people around me.

I feel I have made a difference in the lives of people around me in 2 ways:

- 1) Participating in as many Christian and Community Service projects as I can to help the less fortunate in my community.
- 2) Actively and consciously reaching out to these individuals I am serving to get to know them a little bit, interact and talk with them and try to treat them like I would any other person I know.

In the past 3-4 years there have been three particular service projects that I have spent time participating with:

- Tender Mercies Dinner Program
- City Gospel Mission Breakfast Program
- Jimmy Heath House Lunch Program

Taken from their web site, the purpose of the Tender Mercies organization is to provide housing and supportive services for homeless adults with histories of severe mental illness. Their permanent supportive housing model addresses the root causes of homelessness, thereby preventing a return to the streets for our region's most vulnerable persons. Tender Mercies owns & manages 134 units of permanent supportive housing and 16 units of transitional housing in 6 buildings in Over-the-Rhine. Tender Mercies believes that by addressing the root causes of homelessness, they can help an individual break the cycle of homelessness once he or she leaves Tender Mercies. They accomplish their goals by providing an array of supportive services coupled with housing. Tender Mercies transforms the lives of homeless adults with mental illness by providing security, dignity, and community in a place they call home. Security means a housing environment where residents' personal safety is a priority. Dignity means a housing environment that allows residents to develop personal, social, and economic strengths. And community is a regular, predictable housing environment that offers a sense of family, while affirming the individual. St. Jude School has a program where each student involved plans a dish, buys the food, cooks it at home and serves dinner to the residents of 2 Tender Mercies buildings (with a group of my classmates and parents). I usually plan the meal with my Mom; go to Kroger to buy the ingredients; help her cook it in our kitchen; and go serve the meal with my Dad. We do it every month and groups rotate turns throughout the year. I have also volunteered here a few times over the years with my Dad and the Notre Dame Club.

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Taken from their web site, the City Gospel Mission exists as a Christian-centered, safe and structured place to assist the poor, homeless & drug/alcohol addicted individuals in changing their lives for the better by offering them shelter, food, resources, job training/placement & hope. They seek to engage, equip & empower those in need with the spiritual, mental, emotional & physical skills & resources to achieve long-term life transformation and self-sufficiency. The Mission has designed programs to break the cycle of substance dependency. These proven programs and services are centered on caring, personal relationships focused in four key service areas: food and shelter, recovery, at-risk youth and job readiness and placement. Candidates must demonstrate a sincere desire for this assistance and a willingness to make the effort to complete the program and break their addiction. St. Jude School has a program where we buy food and cook breakfast in the City Gospel Mission kitchen at 6:00 am on a Saturday morning and serve the homeless guys breakfast. We do it every month and groups rotate turns throughout the year.

From the Notre Dame Club's web site, the Jimmy Heath House is Permanent Supportive Housing based on the "Housing First" principle. This philosophy targets the most difficult cases -- the chronically homeless who make up between 10 and 20 percent of the homeless population and spend years cycling between the streets, shelters, jail cells and emergency rooms -- and give them apartments without requiring them to get sober, in the hope that having a place to live will help them address their other problems. The Jimmy Heath House is a 25-unit development that revitalized 5 historic & vacant buildings, further stabilizing the community, reducing the utilization of emergency services, and most importantly, housing the long-term homeless. The chronically homeless are unaccompanied homeless individuals with a disabling condition (e.g. substance abuse, serious mental illness, developmental disability or chronic physical illness/injury) who have either been continuously homeless for more than a year (average of 4 years) or have had at least 4 episodes of homelessness in the past 3 years. The 25 units (11 efficiencies & 14 one bedrooms) all have full baths & kitchens. The Jimmy Heath House, owned by OTR Community Housing, is another important piece to OTR's rebirth, as a diverse and inclusive community that offers a range of housing options which benefits existing residents and welcomes new residents at all income levels. The Notre Dame Club of Greater Cincinnati serves lunch to the men there every month. I have volunteered with them a bunch of times where we cooked and made food to bring down and serve to the men. All of these projects are done with a big group which makes it nice to share with people I know.

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But although I have helped give all of these people in need a nice/special meal each of these times, just as importantly I have tried to treat them as regular people, to make them feel special in some way:

- Saying Hi to them and looking them in the eye. My Dad says to shake their hand and show them respect even if they are poor, homeless or dirty.
- Asking them how they are doing that day or trying to get to know a little bit about them as a person. Sometimes I ask them their names. This shows them that someone cares about who they are or what they are doing or thinking.
- Wishing them a good day. My Dad says this lets them know someone else is interested in their feelings.

Many of these people are not treated the same as me in everyday life because they are poor, homeless, mentally ill, dirty, jobless or just plain different than me and my friends. Doing these little things can help make them feel better about themselves and make their day and maybe their life a little better. So this is one way that I feel I can make a difference in their lives.