



Befriending the Poor and Homeless: Women Lending a Hand to Local Individuals in Need

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Students in WELL400: Theory to Practice

The Vision

Expanding upon and incorporating existing leadership development program components, the Women as Empowered Learners and Leaders (WELL) program was designed to provide a foundation for the educational experience at Bay Path University. Through WELL program components, undergraduate women build community through active, student-centered learning and examine their education with great intention, both as they embark upon it and as it comes to a close. Each student is provided the opportunity to analyze and understand her potential to effect change through the development of a practical project that has a positive impact on the local community or world. In the interdisciplinary capstone, WELL400 prepares students to be reflective and capable individuals who can influence and advocate for others.

The Class

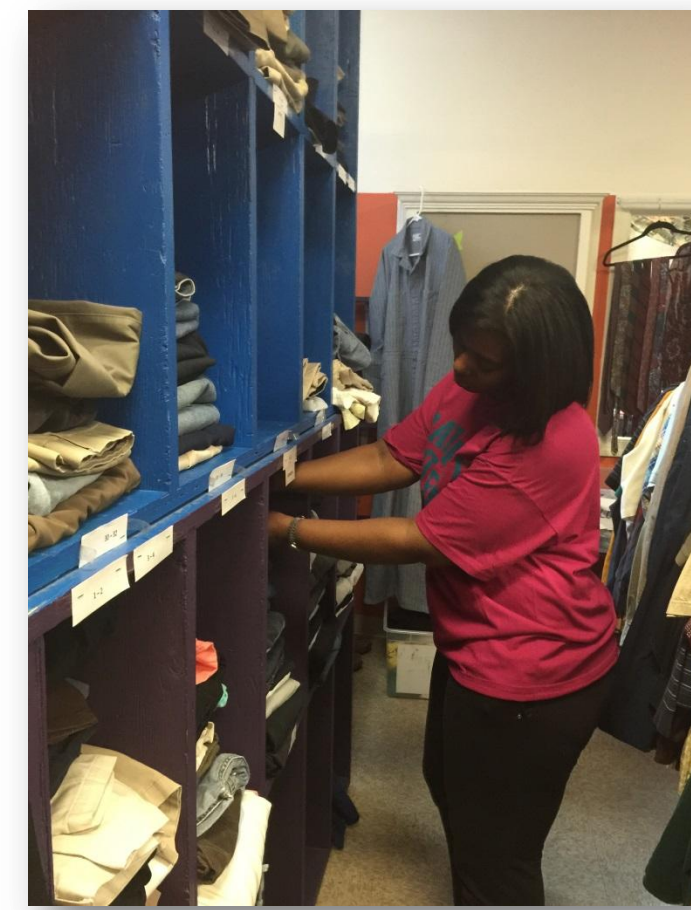
- Examine the diversity of the homeless population and their unique needs.
- Consider the complex social, political and economic forces that shape homelessness as a social issue.
- Blinded by:
 - Stereotypes
 - Our cultural bubble
 - Privileged backgrounds
 - Ignorance
 - Lack of experience

“Not everything about our world can be learned in the classroom.”

- Putting theory into practice.
- Step outside our comfort zone by going outside the classroom and into the community.
- Taking part in a solution.

The Context

- Friends of the homeless, founded in 1988.
- Private, nonprofit organization that provides services aimed at ending homelessness.
- Operates the largest emergency shelter for adults in Western Massachusetts.
- Uses case managers to help homeless individuals obtain and maintain permanent housing.



Statistics

- 40% = Rate of increase in the homeless population in MA since 2007 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development).
- 12.6% = Population of women in MA living in poverty (Spotlight on Poverty).
- 13% = Population of elders in MA living in poverty (Spotlight on Poverty)
- 12,000 - 14,000 = Annual number of individuals in Springfield, MA who end up homeless (Friends of the Homeless).
- 12,000,000 = Americans who spend more than 50% of their salaries on renting or housing costs (National Coalition for the Homeless 2009).
- 18 = Number of students in a class who helped make a difference.

Community Service

Date opened: October 15, 2013 Visits: first year 845, 10/14 – 4/15 435

- Provides the basic necessities to men and women taking shelter at Friends of the homeless.
- Customers receive certificate to shop based on case management, not money.
- Helps individuals transition into permanent housing by helping them obtain small household items.
- First Monday of every month is “Tenant Day”, throughout the week men’s day and ladies’ day is scheduled.
- Constantly seeking donations of clothing and household items.



Academics

- Text: Nilan, D.D. (2012). Crossing the Line: Taking Steps to End Homelessness.
- Journals: reflection on the readings, class activities, and learning experiences of the course
- Research project: Identification of an issue and development of a proposed solution (i.e. the relationship between homelessness and mental illness, needs of veterans)
- E-portfolio: representation of work in core areas, including major area of study and career preparation