



OFFICE OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT
Community UConn

Big Friends Program presented at Town of Mansfield Board Meeting

By Courtney Shannon
Nursing '08

During the Fall semester, sixteen UConn volunteers took an active interest in lives of Mansfield students, through their participation in The Big Friends Program. This service opportunity meets at the Mansfield Town Hall on Tuesday nights during the academic year. The program strives to provide social support for students in grades K-8 through one-on-one interactions. The volunteers work to establish and maintain close relationships with the Mansfield students and act as positive role models. Each volunteer strives to promote their student's self-worth and confidence in both their academic endeavors and social development.

The Mansfield Town Hall is the center for the administrative and governmental boards that aims to consistently improve the Town of Mansfield. In an effort to explain to the community the purpose of our program and our presence at the Town Hall each Tuesday night, we made a presentation to the town board.

On Tuesday, October 10th, the Big Friends Program was addressed as the first order of business at the town's board meeting. Patricia

Michalak, of the Mansfield Youth Service Bureau began by explaining how the program was started as a way to provide a service for families in the Mansfield community. She acknowledged and expressed appreciation for the parents and families of the Mansfield students. They honored their dedication and commitment in bringing the students to the Town Hall each week. Without support from the parents and families, our program would not be a success.

At the meeting I explained how the Big Friends program is facilitated through the Office of Community Outreach. I discussed how UConn has become an integral part of the local community.

Each of the exceptional UConn volunteers who dedicate their time to the Mansfield students each week was honored by the board. Each of the UConn volunteers and Mansfield students introduced themselves to the board. These two groups allow the Big Friends program to stand out due to their hard work and effort within the program.

The goal of our presentation was to establish the legitimacy of the program and describe the service that it provides to the residents of

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A Reflection: My Experience in the Community Service Community

By Maddie Ward
CLAS '10

Despite the redundancy of the name Community Service Community (CSC), I think this is one of the best First Year Experience (FYE) classes you can take. This class isn't like other FYE classes where students have the luxury of slacking off. We are constantly engaged and challenged. In our FYE class, we do as much work as we do in any other class. This work forces us to question our place in the community and teaches us lessons that we will carry with us for the rest of our lives.

Before participating in the CSC, I never thought about why I wanted to help people. For some, volunteering brings a purpose into their lives. For others, it is a way to pay back for help received. For me, there were no further motives. I volunteer because I want to help. It took me a long time to realize that I should not be afraid to help others.

When I first came to UConn, I was nervous about not living in an all freshman dorm. I was convinced that it was going to be a while before I made some friends, but I was

surprisingly wrong. My opportunities through the CSC have allowed me to have a number of valuable experiences and develop close friendships.

For our first activity in the CSC, we all piled in a van and drove off to an unknown destination. When we got to Glenridge, I was unsure of what to expect, although, the uncertainty and mystery upon arrival elicited excitement towards the project.

Glenridge is a retirement home that coincidentally houses many former UConn staff. Our assignment was to

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Call For Action, is a weekly email bulletin, that provides information on new service opportunities and related events occurring in the greater Storrs community. To subscribe, please visit our website at www.volunteer.uconn.edu

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work in teams of two in the resident's gardens. Upon arrival, we were greeted by a staff coordinator who was surprised by the number of volunteers. This, in turn, surprised me since normally there are too few volunteers.

We did an assortment of jobs involving yard work. Some of us did landscaping, while others performed gardening tasks. The residents of Glenridge could not have been more thankful for our help. I chose to do landscaping and worked at a house located at the far end of the community.

While landscaping, I met a woman named Rose. Rose was a former teacher at UConn. Her previous and current accomplishments are an inspiration. Rose has a budding interest in ornithology and is an avid birdwatcher. The

garden at Rose's home was meticulously cared, which could be seen through the symmetry in her shrubbery and flawless roses.

From working together landscaping with



Members of the Community Service Community

Rose, I learned that she had recently become a vegan and did not have many snacking choices due to dietary restrictions. I tried to use my limited culinary abilities to make her

something. Together, we made a healthy, vegan trail mix for Rose to enjoy.

One of the things I have learned from volunteering is not to underestimate others. Just because a person is a few generations older than we are, it does not mean they are incapable of accomplishing new things.

What volunteering means to me is developing friendships with those who you were not friends with before. It means human contact. It means showing people that not everyone is alone. There are still good people left in the world whose smiles are real, and who are not simply kind because they are paid to be.

I have enjoyed myself in the FYE class and CSC. It has since inspired me to do three separate community service days. I intend to do the service days well into the next semester and hope to continue throughout all of my four years at UConn.

Month of Kindness inspires students to incorporate kindness into their everyday lives

By Katherine Dixon
CLAS '08

The sixth annual UConn Month of Kindness, which includes numerous events promoting kindness, commenced on November 1 with Anthony Rapp as the keynote speaker of the month. Rapp is well known for his role in the Broadway musical and film "Rent" which addresses the impact that HIV and AIDS have on one's life, relationships, and those who surround them.

During his speech at Jorgenson, Rapp focused on how the message of "Rent" is to raise awareness and acceptance of HIV and AIDS as well as acceptance of those who have contracted the disease. Through his discussion of his personal experience of coming out Rapp addressed the importance of acknowledging homosexuality. The more people that come out about their homosexuality the less power others will have to discriminate against them. Rapp believes that it is hard to deny rights of an individual when one is staring them in the face. Bringing Rapp to UConn made numerous students aware of UConn's annual Month of Kindness and the many events that occur throughout November.

The night following Rapp's speech, Hillel sponsored a casino night. To participate in the poker tournament, participants made a \$5 donation to "buy into" the tournament. Proceeds benefited Blueprint Negev, part of the Jewish National Foundation, which seeks to build a new housing sites for those who are faced by the problems of overpopulation in Northern Israel.

Other Month of Kindness events that took place over the month of November were a charity A Capella Concert, Locks of Love hair donation program and Community Outreach Community Service Days on Saturday's throughout the month. Following November break, UConn students made holiday cards for the Children's Hospital and participated in the "Gift of Life" Bone Marrow Drive to see if their bone marrow matched that of an individual in need of a transplant. November served as a time for students to realize how they can bring kindness into their everyday lives.

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Mansfield. The individual board members responded in an extremely positive manner and expressed both approval and admiration for Community Outreach and the Big Friends program. Many reflected on the positive image that this program conveys towards the reputation of the university. One board member appreciated a different insight into the university rather than the negative portrayal that has been displayed in the media in the past. I believe that our presentation has helped strengthen the relationship of our program and the community. The presentation has also aided in fostering a better work environment and communication between the members of the community and participants in the Big Friends program.

**Congratulations to
Community Outreach
Honorees of the Month**

**November
VOLUNTEERS**

- Michele Battinelli, Willington Center School
 Stephen Bordonaro, Horace Porter School Plus
 Jane Bugbee, Windham Heights
 Olga Chrzastek, Campus Connections
 Stephen DeBrava, Nathan Hale Homework Club
 Alea Doolittle, Stafford Teen Night
 Erin Haggerty, Mansfield Youth Services Big Friends
 Beth Henderson, Stafford Teen Night
 Kristan Jakiela, Project Academic Advancement
 Taylor Johnson, Natchaug School Tutoring
 Jessica Nathan, Generations Connect
 Chloe Paquette, Southeast Elementary
 Scott Raiola, Campus Big Buddies
 Christine Rogan, Windham Heights
 Jimmy Steadman, Mansfield Middle School Tutoring
 Lisa Weand, America Reads Preschool Program

DRIVER

Nick Keenan nominated by Windham Heights

**December
VOLUNTEERS**

- Jena Biondino, Project Academic Advancement
 Jennifer Corbett, Southeast Elementary
 Laura Gasiorek, Big Brothers, Big Sisters
 Marissa Gener, Windham Center School
 Joey Hall, Windham Heights
 Kaitlyn Harris, Natchaug School Tutoring
 Briana Hoganson, Generations Connect
 Terri-Ann Kelly, Horace Porter School Plus
 Amanda Kivell, Windham Heights
 Clarissa Luque, Willington Center School
 Seth Mastrocola, Mansfield Youth Services Big Friends
 Mike Nelson, ESL Family Literacy
 Melissa Parker, America Reads—Goodwin Elementary
 Jessica Parlin, Mansfield Middle School Tutoring
 Vatsal Patel, No Freeze
 Johnny Schreiber, Campus Big Buddies
 Erica Simonich, Windham Heights
 Randy Su, Windham Heights
 Jonathon Then, Southeast Elementary School
 Sapora Turenshine, Nathan Hale Homework Club

DRIVER

Jeremiah Rozarie nominated by Campus Big Buddies



November Community Outreach Honorees



December Community Outreach Honorees

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY
OUTREACH

Department of Student Activities
2110 Hillside Road, U-3008 Storrs,
Phone: 860-486-1165

Upcoming Service Opportunities

Covenant Soup Kitchen Food Drive

Food is desperately needed for Covenant's Emergency Food Pantry Program. The number of families in need of food on their tables has increased since last year, so donations of canned goods and/or money are greatly appreciated. **For more information:** <http://www.covenantsoupkitchen.org/index.htm>

Volunteers Needed for Village Heights Tutoring Program

This after-school tutoring program takes place at Village Heights, a low-income apartment complex. Volunteers are needed to help tutor children of all ages. The ability to speak Spanish would be helpful in participating in the program but is not a requirement of volunteers. Also, volunteers are needed to aid in fundraising and locating grants to rebuild the complex's playground. **Contact:** Nicole Ortiz at nortiz@thecalefoundation.org or (860) 456- 1626.

"Hire-a-Habitater"

Habitat for Humanity is looking to help you with odd jobs in your yard, home, office or dorm! The money you would normally pay to have the work done by an outside source would then be donated to Habitat. Proceeds will support Habitat in building homes locally among other activities. Email Habitat your odd jobs, how many people you would estimate are needed, your name and phone number. **Contact:** uconnhabitat@gmail.com

Volunteers Needed at CPTV

There are multiple dates in **December** CPTV is looking for volunteers to answer phones and record pledges in their Hartford studio. They provide free, off-street parking, training and refreshments. Groups are encouraged to wear shirts representing their organization and will be acknowledged by name on-air. **Contact:** Jennifer Gawitt Pratt - jpratt@cptv.org or 860-275-7280