



Nursing students honored for assistance

By Howard McEwen • Enquirer contributor • May 2, 2010

The Emergency Cold Shelter of Northern Kentucky honored the Northern Kentucky University Department of Nursing at its recent volunteer appreciation dinner for their work in helping the homeless this past winter.

"Many of us are stubborn about health care and that includes people who are homeless. Bringing health care to them is crucial because their medical issues are more chronic and pervasive due to their circumstances," said shelter operations manager Rachael Winters.

From November 2009 to March of 2010, 12 students and 13 faculty members helped 74 people with various health problems including infectious diseases, diabetes, hypertension, foot problems and slow-healing wounds.

"We learned that it is hard to attend to your health when your basic needs are not consistently met," said Sallie Parker Lotz, M.S.S.W., academic adviser in the Department of Nursing and a social worker. "This exposes nursing students to another aspect of community health nursing, exposes them to a range of health issues encountered by this population and teaches them that the homeless are not defined by their housing status, but by their humanity."

Lotz said faculty like herself benefited "because

"underserved population."

"When you see people who have nothing more than what they carry with them, it teaches you to value what you have," said Bezold. "At the same time it gives one a proper perspective about what really is important in life."

"From a professional standpoint I believe working at the Cold Center provides an awareness about the lack of resources in our community. Alcoholism, drug addiction and mental illness are common problems in the homeless community. Our community needs to have more resources to help people deal with these issues, if they choose to. It can be frustrating, you can only do so much, there are limits to what you can do."

Winters said that without NKU program, many of the homeless would receive no help.

"Many times we had guests who were unable to physically walk to the clinic, were mentally not able to follow instruction, the clinic's hours were not conducive to the schedule or our guests were just not willing to follow through with medical advice."

Winters said guests are required to have Kentucky identification or be referred by emergency personnel.

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"The nurse is able to provide a listening ear, which can be as helpful as any medical intervention," said Bezold. "Life is truly one day at a time for a homeless person, which is a lesson the rest of us could learn from."

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