

UNH Students Know the Importance of Public Service

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Students at the University of New Hampshire last year logged a total of more than 56,322 hours of community service that included events that benefited the area's homeless, community landscaping projects and mentoring programs for middle school children.

With a recent Trends and Statistics report from the Points of Light Foundation estimating the value of public service at \$14.30 per hour, the value of UNH service totals more than \$805,000 to community organizations throughout the Seacoast area.

UNH's Partnership for Social Action reports the statistics in its annual report, issued last week. According to Marianne Fortescue, director of the partnership, more than 600 undergraduates -- close to 80 percent are women -- volunteered at area schools and service agencies. Nearly one-quarter of the first-year student class was involved in public service projects. Fortescue says about 70 percent of UNH's incoming freshman class have had community service as a requirement or an ethic at their high schools. "Many of them had the experience and want to continue it," she explains.

Fortescue estimates the actual number of hours is greater, as other offices on campus perform community service but do not keep track of how much they do.

"The most amazing growth was Seacoast Reads," she explains. Seacoast Reads is a reading program that matches UNH student volunteers with children in grades K through 3 in the towns of Lee, Dover, Portsmouth, Barrington, Somersworth, Nottingham and Rochester. In 1998-99, UNH student volunteers contributed about 8,000 hours to the program; this past year, 25,800 hours were spent volunteering for Seacoast Reads.

Projects are wide-ranging and include work with youth and the elderly, as well as with non-profit agencies, Fortescue explains.

A partnership with Acton (Maine) Elementary School matched 23 UNH students with 14 Acton middle school girls in an e-mail mentoring project, with the Acton students visiting UNH in the fall and spring. In the Portsmouth School District, eight UNH students tutored middle and high school students in the FUTURES program.

Students organized a hunger banquet to benefit Crossroads House, a homeless shelter in Portsmouth, and a volunteer resource fair that matched 250 students with more than two dozen local agencies.

"Students involved in community service are really committed to it," Fortescue says. "Not only does it help the agency they're serving, it helps them to be aware of what a difference one person can make."

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