

# Teens at summer institute come away inspired to help poor

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



Through Catholic Charities Summer Institute, teens learned the reality of what it is like to be poor and vulnerable in Arkansas.

About 51 high school students convened at St. John Center in Little Rock July 6-10. They not only learned more about what Catholic Charities does, but got involved in the ministry with their hands, landscaping around a shelter for the homeless, visiting a food kitchen, working at St. Augustine Center for Children, walking in the path of the homeless, volunteering at the Arkansas Food Bank, praying in front of an abortion clinic and visiting the St. Joseph Helpers, a pregnancy resource center, across the street.

All came away with an expectation to start doing something for the poor in their local communities.

It was the third year for the weeklong program, known as C2SI, organized by Catholic Charities and the diocese's Catholic Youth Ministry Office.

On July 9, a group was landscaping at Our Home, which provides a number of services for the homeless, including a shelter, free child care, food and job training.

The institute was an eye-opening experience for many.

"In the community we are in, I look at the people around me and I used to think 'they messed up somewhere, it is their fault.'" said Ben Lykins of St. John Church in Russellville. "These people want out, and that is something I never realized. There are so many people that are here and it is not their fault at all."

Luke Hall of St. Edward Church in Little Rock said many people have wrong stereotypes of the homeless and needy.

"People need to take a closer look at what is actually going on in today's world," Hall said.

Phillip Smith of St. Jude Church in Jacksonville said everything most Americans take for granted are not available to all.

"We need to always be aware that there is always somebody that is worse off than you are and try to help them out," Smith said.

Another group was helping that afternoon at Arkansas Food Bank.

"I don't live in Little Rock, but I am here often and I see homeless people on the interstate and under bridges," said Ashton Wills of St. John Church in Russellville. "I learned about what it is like to be in that situation instead of reading or hearing about it, I am actually there."

Hannah Adams of St. Joseph Church in Pine Bluff said she learned of the big role Catholic Charities plays and how she can get involved.

Katelyn Murtha of Immaculate Conception Church in North Little Rock said she learned about poverty in Arkansas and how some people have to travel for miles every day just to get something to eat and a safe place to stay.

"Some people don't have enough money to buy the basic necessities like electricity and running water," Murtha said.

Ashley Kleinsorge, also from Immaculate Conception Church, said she learned there is so much more she can do as a teenager for people who don't have as much as she does.

"I learned not to take so much stuff for granted that we think is very little and does not mean anything, because there are so many people that don't have anything that we have," she added.

Olivia White of Our Lady of the Holy Souls Church in Little Rock attended the institute last year and is now a volunteer at the food bank.

"I learned a lot about social justice issues like hunger and poverty around the state," White said. "I worked at St. Francis House, and it just really inspired me to continue to live out my mission. It kind of called me to serve those in need so that is why I am back here at the food bank this summer."