

# *Sojourner House – Shelter Coalition Project*

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When Don Mowry, Professor of the Global Poverty course offered here at UWEC, asked his students to choose a project they would be working on for the semester, Julie, Shauna, and Alyssa never expected it to turn into something so impactful; they never expected to be part of the team that created Sojourner House, the new homeless shelter in Eau Claire.

The girls started out by attending weekly meetings where they were put into subcommittees and worked on the logistics, such as finding a building for the shelter, social outreach, and publicity. They would then take what they learned from the meetings and bring it back to campus to spread the word about the future shelter and about volunteer opportunities. Before they knew, it had all become strong advocates for the shelter; and it became so much more than a project, it became a passion.

Shauna and Alyssa both said, “The experience has been life-changing and thought provoking. It changed our whole perception on what we should be doing with our lives, who we should be helping, and what we should be focusing on. Overall, it changed our whole mind set about helping others and the profoundness of the work.” Not only was it life changing for them, but they also created a ripple affect among their roommates, friends, and teammates here on campus who are now spending many hours at the shelter volunteering. One roommate has even taken a paid position!

Some of the personal characteristics they felt were strengthened because of the experience were empathy, understanding, open-mindedness, and compassion. They said, “Just knowing how to reach out to those types of people or to people other than yourself, and just having compassion for everyone is so important. And also remembering that stereotypes are barely ever true.”

And they would definitely recommend a service-learning project like this to all students. Shauna said, “Service-learning in any capacity is great, because you get to do something for someone other than yourself which is always an awesome experience. And it’s beneficial, because you learn how to help and understand a population different from your own.” She also said the contacts you make with wonderful people through service-learning that you otherwise wouldn’t is a great experience in itself. It’s just people you would never know and never come in contact with; it’s a pretty big motivational factor.”

I asked each of the girls what their take-home message would be for students looking to fulfill their service-learning hours and here's what they all said:

**Alyssa:** "The more you find passion for something, the more you'll get out of it; the more you try and understand, the more you'll develop that passion."

**Shauna:** "The more involved you get, the more you're going to get out of it and the more it's going to impact you in a positive way."

**Julie:** "I think the most important thing for students to know is that when you are really serious about doing something, even if it seems impossible, you can do it. Other students may think it's just a silly volunteer project that will help a few people out, but really it can be a great project that can help an entire community."

At the end of my interview, the girls summed up with, "Service-learning has influenced our education more than anything else, it made us realize what our passion was and what we really want to do with our lives. In the classroom you learn the basics, but service-learning enables you to take the basics and apply it. **You learn way more than you ever expect!**"

The Sojourner House opens the beginning of November, and they definitely are in need of volunteers! For more information visit their website: <http://www.cclse.org/sojournerhouse.php>. You can also check out their Facebook page for up-to-date information and photos of the new shelter!

Be sure to visit the Service-Learning webpage for project information [www.uwec.edu/SL!](http://www.uwec.edu/SL!)