

Public Interest

Georgetown Outreach



PHOTOS BY HOLLY EATON

When first-year student Jackie Smith attended Georgetown Law's student activities fair last fall, she knew she wanted to join Georgetown Outreach, a Washington, D.C., area community service organization she'd read about that organizes volunteer projects to serve the poor, homeless and others in need. But when she went to sign up at the fair, she learned that Georgetown Outreach had actually become defunct. So her first act of community service at Georgetown Law was to revive the group itself.

She recruited friends from her class section to get the group up and running, and asked Holly Eaton, director of pro bono programs, to e-mail first-year students who had participated in Orientation Week service projects. Soon, Georgetown Outreach was back in business.

"I think it's important to connect law students with community organizations in D.C., both for those of us who will pursue public interest careers, and for others who will gravitate to the private sector but will keep pro bono

in mind," Smith wrote in an e-mail message.

Responsibility for organizing service projects rotates each month among 15 section leaders, Smith says. After they secure volunteer opportunities, they recruit student volunteers through e-mail messages, posters and information tables.

In November, Section 2 students Sean Doran and Jarod Taylor organized activities to support the homeless and families who would otherwise not have a traditional Thanksgiving meal. Students, staff and faculty were asked to "Stuff the Turkey" — a turkey piñata set up at a table in McDonough Hall — with money during the week leading up to Thanksgiving. The group hoped to raise \$700, which would provide 100 meals, Doran said. Instead, it raised nearly \$1,000.

Georgetown Outreach organizers also planned a panel discussion featuring Georgetown Law alumni who work at the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless and the National Law Center for Homelessness and Poverty. A team of students also participated in a Saturday Walk for the Homeless in support of Bread for the City, which provides a variety of services for vulnerable residents of Washington. Later that day they prepared meals at Martha's Table, another local organization that offers comprehensive services to those in need.

"Homelessness is an issue close to my heart," Doran says, based on his experience working as a Jesuit volunteer at Covenant House in Newark, N.J. "I don't think you can go through an experience working with the homeless, day in and day out, and not be affected."

In January, Smith and other Georgetown Outreach members organized a law school-wide community service day involving about 70 participants working at seven projects throughout the city. Students sorted and boxed food for the Capital Area Food Bank; helped clean Christ House, a medical facility serving the homeless; prepared food for Ronald McDonald House; moved office furniture for Community Life Services, which provides integrated care to low-income and homeless community members; and participated in other projects.

Organizing a large, one-day event spread the word about Georgetown Outreach and enabled students from different class years and sections to mingle, Smith says. Smith modeled the community-wide service day after a similar one the Center for Social Justice at Georgetown's main campus organizes each year.

"I thought the Law Center should participate in this fantastic tradition," she says. "I think it's important to remember our Jesuit roots here — we are men and women in service to others."