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Jteen Charleston Final Project

From a very young age, I have always been deeply affected by the issues of homelessness and poverty. Walking down the streets of New York City, I would squeeze my mom's hand in response to seeing so many homeless people on the cold and unforgiving sidewalks. She would always allow me to put a dollar in their cups, which would result in a smile on their face and in a hushed tone saying, "God bless you". Now wherever I am, I make it my mission to smile at homeless people, give some money if I can, or even buy them a cup of coffee or food. People become homeless for a variety of reasons and the struggles they face are extremely complicated; some of these reasons include, financial issues, mental illness, drug abuse, domestic abuse, health problems or a mix of any of these factors. A common theme among homeless people is having no support system to back them up when things go horribly wrong.

I was so excited to embark on the journey to Charleston, South Carolina with J-Teen over Martin Luther King Jr. weekend. Our first stop was at a dollar store to pick up all of the supplies we ordered with the money we raised in order to donate move in kits to the clients who would ultimately move out of One80 Place, the shelter and resource center for the homeless we were heading to. During the winter of 1984, a group of business, civic, and religious leaders came together determined to utilize the community's resources to make sure that everyone in need had a safe place to sleep and a hot meal to eat. One80 Place is now a full service program that is dedicated to helping individuals and families gain the valuable skills and resources they need to move beyond homelessness.

During our visit we learned that although the number of guests varies each night at One80 Place, they are able to provide shelter to approximately 160 men, women, and children nightly. The rooms we visited were small, however they afforded each guest some degree of privacy by the placement of dressers and curtains as separators to make everyone feel safe and secure. By having the privacy in their living areas and shower rooms, the guests were provided with dignity and the sense that they were worthy of being helped. The living spaces were clean and all of the necessities were provided to help the guests compensate for what they did not have before coming into the shelter. In addition to receiving shelter and meals, One80 Place also provides a comprehensive selection of programs to help each guest stop the cycle of homelessness and learn how to become more self-sufficient. Every client is assigned a case manager who helps them to identify their needs and create a plan for the future in hopes that they will not become homeless again. Some of the services that are available to the guests include employment and educational programming, veteran support, healthcare access, and legal aid. The staff create a welcoming and supportive environment, in which the men, women, and children who seek both comfort and assistance during difficult circumstances are able to finally feel a sense of hope. One80 Place was an incredible facility for combating the issue of homelessness and poverty in our society. It was a privilege to see how much the people of Charleston care about the homeless population in their community and I only hope that more programs can be modeled after this initiative. It gave me a great sense of pride and satisfaction to know that the 75 move in baskets filled with cleaning supplies, glasses, kitchen utensils that we packed would be going to people moving into their first apartments after leaving One80 Place.