

College Students Flock to Camden for Spring Break

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Camden, New Jersey, March 2009 – Instead of fleeing the dorms, cafeteria food, and schoolwork, eighteen college groups are headed to Camden, NJ to do a different kind of work with UrbanPromise Ministries. From Malibu, CA, to Williamsburg, VA, universities including: Pepperdine University, The College of William and Mary, Bowdoin University, and the University of New England, among others. Over two hundred and twenty students of various backgrounds occupied with all fields of study are coming together over the next six weeks with at least one thing in common; an urge to get involved with service at the grassroots of America—the children being raised amongst some of our countries most dire issues.

UrbanPromise has a clear mission, to build a city of promise, one child at a time. By equipping Camden's children and young adults with the skills necessary for academic achievement and moreover, life management, UrbanPromise has grown from a tiny summer camp program to a multifaceted institution with a reputation of solidarity and success. Among their many programs are private schools for all ages, after school programs, summer camps, and various other recreational and educational programs, each targeting different parts of the lives of Camden's youth. College students will have the opportunity to help with and learn about programs in each category.

Students in "Workgroups" will be engaged in a variety of work projects during their week stay in Camden including: maintenance projects on the UrbanPromise campus, tearing out the old floor of a building under renovation, and re-painting busses, to name a few. Odd-jobs have piled up over the winter and the staff and youth of UrbanPromise are happy to have a wave of excited and energetic college students to give a hand.

A student reflecting on her time working on a run-down UrbanPromise house "felt like she was actually doing something for Urban[Promise]." Anna, nineteen, from Pepperdine University went on to say, "While I've had the opportunity to volunteer at many other non-profit organizations, I've never been involved with the real, nitty-gritty grunt work before...it's been really rewarding so far."

After children enrolled in UrbanPromise's many school programs are dismissed to after-school programs, the workgroups get to jump in and interact with UrbanPromise's most treasured resource—the children of Camden. Many children stay all the way until six in the evening, giving the students many chances to help out with homework, tutoring, or

simply just playing around with the kids. According to Brent Liebman, UrbanPromise Intern Director, between three and six PM are the most dangerous hours for a young person to be left alone in Camden. “WorkGroups are great not only to lend a much needed hand to the staff, but the kids love them.” Andy Joshua, director of AfterSchool Programs went on to say, “Our youth have the opportunity to get to know university students from all across the country...it’s a great way to get kids excited about college!”

At first, Prarna, twenty, from The College of William and Mary, assigned to Ms. Thomas’ “Aftercare” program was skeptical about how much of a difference her presence would actually make to kids whose situations were so unlike her own. “Coming from an affluent area I doubted my skills would be adequate to deal with some of the hardest issues these kids face. I was struck, though, by how quick the kids responded to me and how friendly and open they were after hanging out for only an hour.”

Ms. Thomas noticed it too, and commented that “they want a lot of attention, some of them need it, and don’t have many other places to get it.”

As university students learn about Camden and its people, they will be better able to help. For now, though, their kindness and attention, as explained by Jim Cummings, Director of Work Groups, “is the work of super-heroes.”