Day Four D.C.O (D.C Outfitters)

Last night we participated in D.C Outfitters. Prior to the trip Clair, Lindsay, Courtney and went to an off-campus site where we went through donated clothes from Gettysburg students and organized the clothes into categories. We then brought the bags with us to DC and stored them in the hostel until last night when we brought them to give away to homeless people in the parks. Last night we brought the 6 bags of clothes filled with shoes, pants, t-shirts, coats and sweaters to a local park near our hostel. At first I was unsure of what to expect from the experience. I didn’t know how the homeless men and women would react to us or how I should react back to them. However, as soon as we stepped foot into the park men began to approach us asking for clothes. Everyone was exceptionally nice and whatever reservations I had walking to the park went away. The first two men that came up to me were laughing and having a good time with us and each other. One of the men was a little larger, so when I was holding up jackets he kept saying how Santa Clause needed a bigger jacket than that. Finally I found I sweater that might have been able to fit him, but his friends came up and took it saying that it wouldn’t fit him. Harriet was handing out pants, and she found a very large pair of pants that was the perfect size for this man. He took them and started dancing with them and saying how good he was going look walking down “da streetz” of DC. I was also impressed with how intelligent some of the individuals were that came up to us. Harriet and Tina talked later of a man that expressed his ideas on a Laundromat for the homeless. This would be a place where homeless men, women, and families could go and wash their clothes. I had never heard of this idea and I thought it was a great idea, and would also help the homeless to feel like they had more responsibilities.

I was then approached by an older woman in her I would say her late 50’s who was limping and not wearing any shoes. At first, her raspy voice was hard to understand but I managed to hear her say she needed a nice coat because she was always so cold. My heart immediate went out to her, and I looked through the bag for a nice coat. Unable to find a thick coat, we gave her a thin green windbreaker along with a heavy sweater that she could wear under it. She also took some brown furry boots to keep her feet warm in the winter. At this time she grabbed my arm and asked me to bring her back to her wheelchair that was located on the other side of the park. We didn’t know if we should bring her to her wheelchair, so we all offered to go get it. She didn’t want to move her chair and was persistent on having me bring her over. I couldn’t let her stand any longer because it looked like she was about to fall over, so I began to lead her over to her chair. I instantly became attached and the no touch rule was unintentionally forgotten. On the walk over I learned Catherine’s life story. She was bipolar and diabetic, she was an ex-convict, and had a son and daughter. Her son was using her hard earned money on his new wife and their 7 children, and she was unable to live with her brother because the laws of Maryland don’t allow ex-convicts to be in the same house as an adopted child. She then went into detail about her son, who is also bipolar. She explained that they are the same person, so when the two of them are together they always butt heads. At this point Courtney “Ma” came over to make sure everything was alright. Catherine immediately started to talk to Ma like she had known her forever explaining that she was going to be moving into a home soon, and that it was just being set up for her. I was thankful that she was going to be able to have her own home and I wish the same could happen for all the others in the park. Catherine then told Courtney and me that she was thirsty and wanted a soda from the drugstore. After a few moments of silence, Courtney offered to go get her a Sprite. I went along and we talked about how we were unable to say no when she asked for a soda. Both of us felt that it was impossible to turn her down. After returning with the soda Catherine was very thankful and had actually put on one of the jackets she had received from a bag. We told her it looked so stylish and she began to laugh. We then said goodbye and good luck and walked back over to meet the rest of the group who had almost gotten rid of everything. Walking back to the hostel I began to think of what it would be like if I was homeless. Would I be that friendly, would I be able to be making jokes and would I even be able to survive without the support system of my family? This trip and this class have taught me so much about the homeless and the poor. Stereotypes about the homeless that I once had are completely gone and I understand that it could happen to anyone. Walking through DC I feel that this trip has changed me. I want to give back to the community and I will definitely be coming back to “da streetz.”

