

# **SIUE Community Action students to help grant local families' holiday wishes**

by Madelaine Gerard, Staff Writer  
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EDWARDSVILLE - Approximately 35 undergraduate students at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville are making a difference in the lives of local families this giving season through a course devoted to experiential and service learning.

The students are enrolled in Community Action, an entry-level course in the SIUE College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Sociology. The class has teamed with Illinois's Children's Home + Aid Society of Southern Illinois (CHASI) for their annual

Help for the Holiday's Campaign and is on track to raise more than \$10,000 to grant holiday wishes.

They have spent the semester organizing fundraisers and promoting associated events, including the upcoming Crown Room Toast to Charity event at Ballpark Village in St. Louis from 8-11 p.m. Friday, Nov. 11. All proceeds will go directly to purchasing gifts and household needs for CHASI clients.

"I originally enrolled in this course, because it was an elective that fit my schedule and it sounded interesting," said Ladijah Hollingsworth, a senior majoring in sociology, specifically employee relations. "But, I have realized that this is so much more. There are children and families that depend on our class to raise money for them to have basic necessities that most of us take for granted."

"I was pleasantly surprised when I realized this class would offer instruction on how the organizational process works and how organizers enlist the help of massive amounts of people," added Heather Frink, a junior psychology major. "Throughout the project, we have utilized our personal contacts to obtain private donations, and have organized fundraisers and promoted events.

"We recently received our families and now will begin shopping for their holiday wish lists. We'll deliver our purchases to Children's Home + Aid to distribute in mid-December."

Mark Hedley, PhD, associate professor of sociology, leads the course, but says his involvement is limited, because he emphasizes the course is built around this service learning project.

"The goals of the course include fully integrating a service learning perspective into an academic course, and providing resources, material and media, to Children's Home + Aid that they would have difficulty accessing themselves," Hedley explained. "Without making any material donations themselves, the students organize the local community and their own social networks to provide donations for families identified by CHASI."

According to Hedley, the students' efforts are guided and supported by texts focused on community organizing. Those involved stress the significant positive impact this course has made on the students, and those whose wishes they will help grant this holiday season.

"This course has taught me how to network and encourage others to get involved," Frink said. "I've also learned to be more direct and outgoing by contacting individuals that I don't know personally, in order to achieve a goal."

“I appreciated that we were able to apply textbook concepts to a real organization and real life experience,” Hollingsworth added. “The biggest takeaway from this course is that I’ve spent my semester making a tangible difference, in addition to gaining a better understanding of community structures. It makes me feel as if my University dollars are going toward a good cause.”

For more information on the Nov. 11 event at Ballpark Village, contact Frink at [hfrink@siue.edu](mailto:hfrink@siue.edu).

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