

# Community base activity integration and reflection

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BUSTER**

Yanjun Chen Community Base Activity Integration and Reflection I worked as a volunteer at Martha's Kitchen, which is a non-profit organization that serves meals to the poor in the community. The experience gained taught me a lot about myself, our society and the marginalized group in our communities. I was able to interact and work with the homeless community. The poor and homeless are often unfairly labeled as criminals, drug addicts, uneducated and uncivilized individuals. Working at Martha's Kitchen gave me a new perspective on these individuals. I learned that some of the homeless were actually very well educated. Some were even teachers and engineers before unfortunate circumstances forced them into the streets. I saw them sitting together having good conversations as they enjoyed their meals. They shared what they received from the kitchen only eating enough to sustain them ensuring that the kitchen could feed many. They were poor but shared the little they had. After the meals, they respectfully cleaned their spaces before walking out. This experience of volunteering enabled me to revise my preconceived notions about the homeless community. I was able to experience firsthand and practice what I learned in the classroom. Marginalization before my experience at Martha's Kitchen was simply a topic discussed in social sciences. While working with the homeless, I witnessed social exclusion in action. The homeless are denied basic human rights to food and shelter. Justice should be impartial, protecting the rights of all citizen. Unfortunately, such is never the case, especially for marginalized people. However, organizations such as Martha's Kitchen and homeless shelters provide much-needed help for the poor and homeless. Our society should put up more systems to assist these marginalized individuals and to integrate them back into the society.

While growing up in China, I developed biased opinions about the poor and the homeless as influenced by the society. These marginalized people were presented as violent criminals and con artists who took advantage of others. While working at Martha's Kitchen, I interacted with them as I served the meals. I found that they were polite people always with a smile on their faces despite their unfortunate circumstances. They appreciated the workers in the kitchen and respected the space they were provided. I met individuals who worked hard whenever they secured temporary employment and shared their little income with others. The volunteering position enabled me to appreciate the experiences of the people who are marginalized. This experience enabled me to revise my preconceived notions about the marginalized in our society particularly the homeless community. The Martha's Kitchen volunteering experience taught me the value of compassion. I learned how to treat others with dignity and how this compassion impacts the society. The volunteering position was my first community-based service, and it has had a great impact on me. I now believe it is the responsibility of all the individuals in the society to take care of the less fortunate. I, therefore, plan to participate in more community-based services particularly assisting marginalized communities. I also have a new appreciation of the impact I can make through civic participation.