

# Dozens of USD students go 'AWOL' for community-service

More than 50 students from the University of South Dakota traveled during their winter break to the southeast United States, central Minnesota and Central America to volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, spend time with children in need, and assist Ecuador farmers with the planting and harvesting of their crops.

As part of USD's Alternative Week of Off-Campus Learning (AWOL) program, 17 students repaired homes destroyed by tornadoes in Birmingham, AL; 11 students worked with the LeBonheur's Children's Hospital and the Hope House in Memphis TN; 11 more students worked with community organizations in Minneapolis, including local soup kitchens and Meals on Wheels; and 17 students traveled to Ecuador, where they learned about conservation and forest preservation best practices.

Birmingham, AL  
"I speak for our whole group when I say that this trip made a huge impact on our lives in many ways," said USD student Jessica Sundleaf of Sioux Falls, who spent a week in Birmingham working with Habitat for Humanity.

In 2011, a tornado devastated homes in the Birmingham area and throughout the South. Sundleaf and other students learned how to install insulation, use a nail gun and put up siding.

Additional trip volunteers from USD included Katie Beckman of White Lake, SD, Kayla Brower, Monique Ellefson and Daniel Price of Sioux Falls, Melissa Kutil of Hartford, SD, Kaylee Bahr and Ashley Miller of Aberdeen, Rachel Blake of Centerville, Kara Fischbach of Mellette, SD, Amos "A.J." Meyer of Williams, IA, Paige Moser of Rapid City, Jonathan Schreiner of Remsen, IA, Emma Smith and Megan Waldner of Huron, Nick Weinandt of Yankton, and Learning Partner Danielle Hollmann of Estelline, SD.

Memphis, TN  
Many of the families that worked with USD students in Memphis were amazed that the volunteers were giving so much of their time while receiving nothing in return.

However, Brooke Decker of Huron disagreed. "In all reality, I felt that we weren't gaining anything but everything," she said.

Students partnered with both the LeBonheur's Children's Hospital and the Hope House, a learning center for children who have at least one family member that is HIV/AIDS positive. Throughout the week, students divided their time between the two organizations and interacted directly with the children and their families making crafts, distributing hot cocoa, playing games and more.

Students volunteering in Memphis included Abby Wolf of Jordan, MN, Jessica Colburn of Aurora, NE, Chelsea Zaragoza of Ruthven, IA, Abigail Hubble of Fulda, MN, Christine Brown of Watertown, Joshua Rogers of Fort Pierre, Brett Lorenz of Aberdeen, Mattea Stokke of Platte, SD, Molly Larson of Sioux Falls and Learning Partner Tyler Miller of Mitchell.

Minneapolis, MN  
Working in a homeless shelter was a real eye-opener for students who spent time in Minneapolis with several community outreach organizations.

"I had always thought that I knew a lot about this city," said Jake Renze, the trip learning partner who lived in Minneapolis for several years, "but I was humbled very quickly."

Participants on this trip focused solely on the issue of homelessness and poverty working closely with community-based Families Moving Forward, Habitat for Humanity, Community Emergency Service and Meals on Wheels.

Student volunteers included Alexa Walker of Vermillion, Eric Schlinggen of Rapid City, Tim Nelson of Council Bluffs, IA, Andrew Fick of Quimby, IA, Amy Sandhurst of Sioux Falls, Lindsey

Jones of Burke, SD, Kelly Turner of Rochester, MN, Allison McEntee of Lennox, SD, Rebecca Molsberry of Algona, IA, and Alicia Karn of Tea, Ecuador

"It is amazing to see what people from other cultures do to support their families," said Casey Kelly of Omaha, who was one of 17 volunteers from USD that spent a week in Ecuador working with the organization Jatun Satcha.

While in Ecuador, volunteers focused their efforts on learning about conservation and forest preservation taking place along coastal Ecuador. Students worked with local farmers and residents on many projects, including crop planting and harvesting, helping with mangrove reforestation and repairing homes in the community.

Ecuador trip participants included Dan Davies of Vermillion,

Alyssa Day and Mary Galvin of Sioux Falls, Anna Hyronimus of Brandon, Kendall Schneider of Aberdeen, Hanna McElroy of Sioux City, IA, Caitlin Blumer and Emily Struck of Yankton, Kyle Kirby of Salem, SD, Michelle Corio of Elk Point, Heather Allemang of Neligh, NE, Leah Aklad of Beresford, Brent Olinger of Emery, SD, Marisol Lopez-Munoz of South Sioux City, NE, Audrey Flatgard of Arlington,

SD, and Learning Partner Karl Reasoner of Sioux Falls.

Housed in the Center for Academic Engagement, AWOL offers students the opportunity to combine community service with education during academic breaks. The AWOL program is in the eighth year on campus and the program has continued to grow. Prior to departure, students participate in six weeks of educational training.

By utilizing experiences and education, AWOL enables students to become active citizens, whose community becomes a priority in their everyday life and provides them with avenues for continued community involvement and learning.

More information is available at [www.usd.edu/engage/service-learning/awol-alternative-breaks.cfm](http://www.usd.edu/engage/service-learning/awol-alternative-breaks.cfm).

# Don't Forget!

Valentine's Day is Tuesday, February 14.

**Tuesday, Feb. 14th • 5-9pm**  
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Petite Filet Mignon... \$9.95 OR Burgundy Sirloin... \$11.95  
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