



Evergreen Students Give Back to their Communities Throughout the Year

By Holly Reed

Ellen Shortt Sanchez (left) and Richelle Enriquez (right) give a tour of the satellite food bank at The Evergreen State College. Photo credit: Holly Reed

With 2019 in full swing, many businesses and organizations have concluded their charitable giving and community involvement after the holiday season. But for the students of [The Evergreen State College](#), giving back to the community is a year-round effort, and one that takes on many forms.

The needs of Olympia are as diverse as the people living in it. Through the [Center for Community Based Learning and Action](#)(CCBLA), Evergreen students have dedicated countless hours to meet many of those needs. From

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empowering adults with disabilities, building relationships with incarcerated youth, and finding ways to get others involved with volunteering, Evergreen students have demonstrated that giving is not just a seasonal occurrence, but a year-round commitment.

For Jessica Jimenez-Smith, volunteering has been integrated into much of her time as an Evergreen student. Jessica started at Evergreen in 2015. Her personal involvement in volunteering as a tutor and mentor at [North Thurston High School](#) and [Green Hill School](#) inspired her to reach out to others about volunteering through the CCBLA. She recruited volunteers and interns for Title I schools, after school programs in the area, and other sites that connect youth with educational opportunities.

“Community organizations and schools are usually understaffed, so volunteers make it possible for programs to run,” says Jessica, “if I wasn’t here recruiting volunteers, they would not have enough assistance for youth and educational organizations.”

Jessica mentions one of Evergreen’s five foci of learning, linking theory with practice. For her, community involvement has been a way to apply her classroom learning. Jessica is looking forward to volunteering at [Olympia High School](#) and with [Kokua](#) in the Literacy and Education for Adults with Disabilities (LEAD) program as well as graduation later this year.

Billy Sweetser is in his second year at Evergreen. He has been involved in a number of volunteer efforts and student groups. One of those groups is Gateways for Incarcerated Youth, a program facilitated through the CCBLA. “Gateways allowed me an opportunity to motivate, teach, and learn with incarcerated youth from our Washington State community,” he explains.



*Richelle Enriquez looks for ways to help the satellite food bank continue to improve services to the community.
Photo credit: Holly Reed*

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Billy's volunteering effort inspired him to get involved with a Summer Summit at Evergreen, which was hosted by Gateways, the [Sustainability in Prisons Project](#), and the Justice Involved Student Group. He also traveled to California to attend the California Formerly Incarcerated Students and Alumni Conference and presented at the National Conference on Higher Education in Prison in Indiana.

"My education at Evergreen has given me not only the tools and opportunity to get involved with real change in the community," he shares, "but also given me a community that has supported me in every way in my educational journey."

Community involvement is important to Billy. "By doing my part, helping others, and inspiring others to be their best selves, I believe a small group of people can change the world," he adds. "It is making a difference in the lives of others, one idea at a time, one project at a time, one connection at a time, that makes the journey worth living." He hopes by being involved with his community he can make the world a better place. "Often we cannot quantify our contribution to the community immediately. It is persistence that pays off."

Sanna Nour Mohammadi started at Evergreen in 2018. She also found a rewarding experience being involved with Gateways. "A lot of the youth have families who live far away, which makes it difficult for them to visit on a regular basis, and the rest don't have anyone who would visit them," she explains. "Showing up week after week for the ones who have been forgotten leaves a lasting impact and gives them something to look forward to." For her, giving back means inspiring others that may not have felt that education was the right fit for them. School never seemed like the right fit for her either, until her father suggested Evergreen. Being a student at Evergreen showed her that there are many ways to attain education, and she hopes to pass that knowledge along to others that may not have thought there is a place in higher education for them either.

By engaging in community involvement projects, Evergreen students have found ways to benefit the community while enriching their own educations and

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lives. These experiences will follow them beyond graduation wherever they go, and should serve as an inspiration to all about the importance of wholly inclusive communities.

Take a page from [The Evergreen State College's](#) book, and see what you can do for your community, not just during the season of giving, but throughout the year.

The Evergreen State College

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