

# To listen, to learn, to love

*By Service Adventure alumna, Mariah Denlinger*



Alaska. Who would have thought that I'd be residing in this seemingly far away and exotic place? The cold temperatures, the early snowfall, premature darkness; it's all so new and exciting. I love winter. I love snow. The intricacy of each snowflake, the way it blankets the earth, making things appear fresh and new. I love the feeling of sitting inside by the warmth of the fire in the middle of a snowstorm.

But how much would I love the snow if I didn't have a warm house to take refuge in? How much would I love the snow if I were homeless? Working at the Downtown Soup Kitchen, through Mission Network's Service Adventure program, has changed my perspective and helped me think about how I would view the world differently if I lacked a warm house or a warm place to sleep at night. Sometimes I feel it can be easy to get frustrated when a client occasionally becomes snippy with the hard-working and well-meaning volunteers, but would I act any differently if I were in their shoes? Would I feel like being gracious and loving to people if I were cold and hungry?

The Downtown Soup Kitchen has opened my eyes to the poverty in our world, to the humanness of each individual that enters the kitchen. I feel as though, prior to this experience, I typically thought of the homeless population as just that: a population, a group, a number. They each have stories. They each have families of their own: kids, siblings, parents,

aunts and uncles. Each and every one is a beloved child of God. My heart breaks as I learn more about their individual stories.

Many clients at the soup kitchen need more than food. They need someone to listen, someone to care, someone to love them. And couldn't we all use a little more love? One of my goals this year is to reach out to those struggling with homelessness and to learn from them. They have much to say and I am ready to listen.

### Questions

- During your Service Adventure experience, where have you seen need? What types of need have you seen? (Try to think beyond materialistic need.)

- What are some ways that you can help to meet the needs?

- What are the needs of the people in your hometown? When you return home at the end of your service term, what are some of the ways that you can minister to those people as well?