

StandUp Volunteer Spotlight Award

Carmen Byron



What motivated you to take action and get more involved with the Street Outreach and School Mentoring programs?

I've always had a passion for helping others. Kids especially. Throughout college, my working on the weekends and class during the week made for that purpose a little harder to achieve. But since I've graduated, I've been kicking things into high gear trying to make a difference in every way I can. I just feel that if you're able to do something, you should do it.

Identify the most valuable lesson or experience that has changed your perspective about youth homelessness while volunteering for StandUp.

The most valuable lesson would probably be love. The sense of community is a lot stronger than I assumed. I always figured that it was "every man for themselves" especially out on these Atlanta streets, but that's clearly never the case. The kids really are a family with each other. Blood couldn't make them closer and it really is beautiful to see.

Please give 3 words that describe your experience volunteering to help our youth.

Fulfilling, emotional and new

If you could change one thing to improve the well-being of our community, what would it be and why?

One thing that I always come back to when I'm out on Outreach or at the schools that I could change would be the people. I know that sounds completely outrageous but I'm talking about how people treat homelessness. It's really not what you would think it is. It's not a dirty person sleeping on the streets or acting "crazy". Some of these people literally had it all one day and lost it all the next. Some of these people have legacies and families. Sometimes, people are so quick to write homelessness off as something that people have control over but it's not that easy. Some of us have the things we have because we have a community of people who are willing to help us when we're down. We as a whole have to be more considerate and understanding to what we see. Just imagine if we as a people would treat homelessness as a temporary situation and

actually give them the same help we would give our friends. The effects would be monumental.

What are some of the characteristics that you possess which help in your Street Outreach counselor role and positively impact your work with homeless youth?

Well, I wouldn't call it exactly a "characteristic" but I think the fact that I look so much like the youth 😊. I'm able to relate and bond with them on a different level. We help youth 24 and younger and I'm 23 so our conversations have the potential to go a lot deeper than most. I see them as someone who could easily be a person in my class, one of my friends or even one of my younger cousins. So I act as such. The same could be said when I mentor. I'm not "too far" in age than they are so we're able to talk about things more on a "sibling" level than a "mentor/mentee" role. I appreciate that so much and do not take it for granted.

Thank you, Carmen. We are truly blessed and grateful to have someone like you advocating for our kids and for making the impact you do every time you interact with our kids. You are the best!