

Brien
Croff '10

CLEVELAND PLUNGE

So, taking a step outside my regular service hours...

During my first semester, six other students and I had the opportunity to be a part of the Cleveland Plunge. This was a 2 day "field trip" where we got to see homelessness up close and personal, and also volunteer at several non-profit organizations in the city. It started with *Portraits of Homelessness* an artistic photo gallery at Cleveland State University, depicting photographs of people at the homeless shelter and their stories. I found this to be quite a powerful exhibit. We also toured the said homeless shelter, 2100 Lakeside, the largest men's shelter in Ohio. This is where my perception of homelessness was ultimately realized. The first thing that hit me was the numbers. So many without a home. So many with nowhere to go, no direction in their lives. I didn't *want* to believe it. But there it was, right before me. I guess I didn't know what to expect, wasn't really prepared. I knew then why they call it the plunge. There's no easing into it, it's a headfirst dive into a world so different than we've ever known. But the experience was one of a kind. What we saw, and what we were told, made me understand the effects of poverty and homelessness on an individual, and the community they live in. These people need help, I thought, all the help we can offer.

What I enjoyed about this trip besides the educational value, was also the volunteer projects we performed. Cleaning halls and serving lunch at 2100 Lakeside, packing boxes at the Cleveland Foodbank, and working in restore at habitat for humanity. There was a intuitive difference between this and my regular service, and that was the fact that I was serving people more directly. The simple task of packing a box of food, so that someone would have something to eat next week, and helping someone find a utility that they needed for their new home.

*"A society will be judged by how it
treats its weakest members"*

-Harry Truman