

# Spring Break Students Give of Themselves | CPD

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Eleven students from Minnesota spent their spring break at the CPD, performing service work for people with disabilities

The words “spring break” often bring to mind a group of young people piling into a van and driving 24 hours to ... Utah? To do service work for people in need?

Wait, what? Doesn't spring break usually involve someplace sunny and tropical, with beach volleyball and beverages with little umbrellas stuck in them?

Not if you're an Alternative Break Experience (ABE) participant at the University of St. Benedict's and St. John's University in Minnesota. For the fifth consecutive year, a group of students has chosen to visit the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University to recycle power wheelchair parts, practice social skills with young adults, go bowling with young children and hit the ski slopes with Common Ground.

Eleven students made the trip, arriving on March 1 and leaving on March 7. In between, they packed the days with activities and spent their evenings with host families, learning about life in Logan and at the CPD. The group was honored as “Volunteers of the Year” at the CPD's annual Nacho Party on March 2, and also spent time with the Aggies Elevated and PEER students and participants at DSL and TOP Sports.

## Meet the students

*Chris Morgan, peace studies undergrad/master of divinity and faculty adviser, Denver, Colo.*

“I work in a hospital in St. Cloud doing clinical pastoral education,” he said. “As an undergraduate, I worked for two years for ABE, went to jonah house in baltimore, then kentucky, wanted to stay involved with abe, because i'm a faculty member and they can rent from avis for a cheaper rate, sent me on this one and thought it really fit, worked at a summer camp for pwd, did a year of service in denver



*The Bennies and Johnnies were welcomed at a Nacho Party on March 2.*

“One of the things I was thankful for was the short little drives to see a little bit here, check in a little bit there,” he continued. “I also really enjoyed taking apart wheelchairs at CReATE. It was really satisfying—they've got a great little system. Take it apart, put it where it goes—if that was in St. Cloud, I'd be there weekly.”

*Megan Hoisington, elementary education major, Faribault, Minn.*

“I came on this trip because I would love to get a masters degree in special education,” she said. “My mom is social worker and works with elders with disabilities. I thought this would be a wonderful opportunity.

“I really liked the Aggies Elevated program and Project PEER,” she continued. “I loved interacting with our peers because that's super cool. They're at the same level we are. I really enjoyed getting to know the family members of the people with disabilities and it was great getting to know you staff members, too. You put your heart and soul into this, you're really invested.”

*Maranda Miller, nursing major, Lakeville, Minn.*

“Last last summer I worked as a personal care attendant and worked with a woman with cerebral palsy,” she said. “I wanted to come here and meet more people with disabilities and learn to advocate for people with disabilities.”

*Katherine Reisdorf, elementary education major, St. Paul, Minn.*

"I came because I think it will be really helpful for me as a teacher, because I'm going to have students of all abilities," Reisdorf said.

*Mary Franz, nursing major, Broomfield, Colo.*

"I love the ABE program, and I was a co-leader for the Guatemala trip last year," she said. "This past summer, I had an internship in Bosnia for an NGO that worked with people with disabilities and I loved working with that population--seeing the resilience of people who have experienced trauma and the community that surrounds them. This trip is absolutely applicable to me.

"It was not just the different age groups, but a lot of different areas that you have here," she continued. "I loved hearing about the different aspects, how diverse and complex this area can be. You can be involved in so many areas and make a difference in so many different areas. It was really cool to see what Common Ground, the CPD and CReATE all do. A week is definitely not enough, but we packed it in and made it happen."

*Kim Miller, biology major/psychology minor (pre-physician's assistant), Litchfield, Minn.*

"I have a cousin who has Tourette's," she said. "One of my best friends from high school has a brother who has Down syndrome. With my plans of being a PA in the future, I want to learn more about the different disabilities out there. I want to expand my horizons.



"I have worked with people with disabilities in the past," she continued. "With the amount of direct interaction with them, I have changed immensely, and that's very

beneficial to me where I'm going in the future. I really enjoyed the day at CReATE, to know the nitty-gritty of how much it takes to provide wheelchairs to people."

*Krystal Heinen, pre-pharmacy (biology and chemistry) major, Sauk Centre, Minn.*

"I worked on a Habitat house in Oklahoma," she said. "It was a great opportunity, but there were not a lot of encounters with people with disabilities. I've traveled to other countries where opportunities for people with disabilities are very limited, so I'm interested in that global perspective.

"I was just amazed at how many opportunities we had to meet people and make connections," she continued. "Whether with our host families or bowling or breakfast, that was so enjoyable for us. We're all taking away something really important."

*Katelyn Thoresen, psychology major, Rogers, Minn.*

"I loved the Aggies Elevated students, just because they're our peers and we have friends on campus," she said. "I know it's a new program but it was just cool to hear about it. I really think we had a great balance of all the activities. We all had different highs and we all found something that inspired us and will continue to impact our lives. It was so meaningful to just meet with these people and just talk and chat about normal things in life."

*Claire Buysse, chemistry major, Marshall, Minn.*

Claire came on the CPD trip because she has a cousin with a disability.

*Jacob Shrode, accounting major, Plymouth, Minn.*

"I really liked the one-on-one connection and forming that relationship with people, and learning more about people in general was just really cool," said Jacob, who has worked with Special Olympics. "The hospitality—there are really great people here. The variety of activities was really great, we weren't at one place for a long time, and we always had places to go."

*Jill Valerius, elementary education major, Maple Grove, Minn.*

"I work for ABE currently, and have been to Philadelphia and Ecuador on service trips," she said. "For seven years I worked at the 'Be a Buddy' program at my church. My aunt is deaf, so working with her at holidays and family

gathering is really fun. This is really applicable to my future classroom.

"I really enjoyed the age groups we got to work with," she continued. "It wasn't just one age group, it was pre-schoolers to young adults, so you kind of have to change what you're doing with each group. This is the only ABE program that has host families. That is so cool, and lets us know more about the culture so we have a greater appreciation of what we learned. Our host families are great, and we have a great appreciation for them."

The host families had a great appreciation for the students, as well.

"The three students were great to have at our house," said Vonda Jump, senior researcher at the CPD. "They were very interested in hearing about our work, and were bubbling with excitement about what they did with the CPD each day. It was fun to see their energy and to hear their plans. They are definitely going to make a difference in people's lives and having this week at the CPD was great for them to realize that people with disabilities are just like you and me, but they have a different ability in some areas than I do. One student said that she was a little nervous interacting with people on the first day, but by the third day, she felt completely comfortable. I think it is a great opportunity for exposure for students and for consumers of CPD and Common Ground services."

This was the third year Alma Burgess and his family hosted SBSJ students. Burgess is a project coordinator at the CPD.

"It was a wonderful experience getting to know these young adults," he said. "It was fun talking to them and hearing about their experiences as they associated with people in the activities during the week. It was a great to be involved with their trip to Salt Lake and work with them at CReATE. They worked hard and didn't complain at any of the things they were asked to do, they just went right to work once an assignment was given. They were busy most evenings, but we sure enjoyed the evenings that they had free and they could spend it with us at home, visiting about who they are and what they have learned in life."

Jared Schultz, a CPD Faculty Fellow, said hosting two students was a great experience for his family as well.

"I was impressed with the way that they spent time with our daughters, all of whom are teenagers," he said. "They spent time talking, sharing experiences, and just hanging out. As strange as it sounds, for a week they were a very real part of our family. I also appreciate the example that

they were for our family. It was not lost on us that these young adults were giving up a party opportunity to serve others. We could tell that they were enjoying themselves just as much as if they did something else for their break. We would welcome these students in our home anytime."