

third dimension

Volunteer for elderly makes point with music

By Liz Crumley

One old woman who used to play organ for silent movies, an old man who says his lip is gone—these people and the rest, "who just like music," are the ones Julie Wilkins, UNL sophomore, is trying to help through music.

Every Wednesday afternoon Wilkins, a piano major, goes to the Americana Health Care Center, for two and a half hours to "try to find a purpose for these people—a reason for living."

"I knew if we could just find something to motivate them..." she said.

This motivation takes the form of a choir for some, personal instruction for others and programs she devises, Wilkins said.

"Moving is a problem"

Inevitably problems have arisen, she said.

"Moving is a problem at that place," she said. When she first went to the home, Wilkins said, she did not expect the people "to be that sickly."

Several of the people are bedridden, she said, and many others are confined to wheelchairs. Wilkins added she has to go to their rooms and bring them down for any program she wants to present or any instruction she wants to give.

A problem also arises because of her working hours (4:30 to 7 p.m.), Wilkins said.

"A lot of people just can't stay up that late. They have to want to come and they have to be willing to stay up late."

Wilkins also said she was forced to give up a program for the residents because of their physical condition. This involved a bell-ringing choir, she said.

"They physically aren't strong enough to hold the bells," she said.

Number varies

However, she was able to start a vocal choir with about six persons in it.

This is the average number of residents she gets per week, Wilkins said. The number varies, she said, because their condition changes so much from day to day.

"But even if one person comes out and appreciates it, then it's worth it," she said.

"I'm young and I try to be enthusiastic and positive. If I am, then they think they are too."

"But if you can get old people inspired about anything, you've made a point."



Photo by Ted Kirk

UNL student Julie Wilkins serves as a volunteer through her sharing of music.

However, Wilkins said she enjoys working with elderly people. They respond. They like the contact, she added. "Don't give me that 50 age group—that middle crop. They're stubborn. They think they're mod and hip, but they're not."

Wilkins said she started volunteer work in her junior year of high school when she gave piano lessons. She said she tried to find someone needing a volunteer piano teacher this year, but none of the organizations she called did.

So she turned to the Community Involvement Services because "I was just running into brick walls everywhere else," she said.

"I just feel that music is a universal language that everybody can be a part of. It can be a real bond between people."

Wilkins said she is getting married in January and will move to Utah. However, she said she wants to start volunteer work again when she gets there.

Lamaze training, tax aid among needs

If your interests fall somewhere between lamaze childbirth counseling and manning an emergency drug line, the Community Involvement Service, Nebraska Union 200, has the volunteer job you may be looking for.

Formerly the Student Volunteer Bureau, the service has volunteer job openings in a varied range of areas, according to Jean Costigan, Community Involvement Service assistant director.

She said the service has posted a list in the Union Main Lounge of 22 agencies that need student volunteers.

Costigan said they especially need students in the areas of Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA), Lincoln's Labor Co-op, Open Door Health Center's drug crisis line

and the lamaze labor coaches program.

40 students helped

"VITA can always use people interested in business," she said.

There is an unusual program for women interested in helping unwed mothers learn lamaze natural childbirth, Costigan said, and volunteers are needed for it.

"Take husband's place"

"The labor coaches take the place of a husband," she said. "They start in the last two to three months of the unwed mother's pregnancy and are on call through the actual birth."

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