Giving Hope event offers supplies, assistance to Lafayette homeless

Aaron Gonsoulin
aaron.gonsoulin@thevermillion.com

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette nursing students along with community leaders participated in their first outreach program designed to provide assistance for homeless people in Lafayette at St. Bernadette’s Clinic.

Called Giving HOPE — Homeless Outreach Providing Essentials — the program was designed to give back to the homeless by giving them proper medical attention. Students checked blood pressure and oxygen levels, calculated body mass index, performed bone density screenings and provided diabetes information, according to kcdn.com.

Accomplishing these screenings was a joint effort between the community and UL Lafayette students and faculty, said Linda Peters, a community service department worker for Our Lady of Lourdes.

More than 100 of Lafayette’s homeless were helped at 40 different service stations, each designed to cater to their needs, Peters said.

While some waited in line for their free meal, which consisted of corn, salad, a slice of bread, a bottle of water and jambalaya that was provided by both St. Bernadette’s Clinic and Cardinal Coil Tubing LLC, others sat together and enjoyed the food.

“We collaborated — St Bernadette’s clinic, along with UL Lafayette and many of the non-profit organizations that offer the greater good for the homeless and those who are less fortunate in our community,” Peters said. “We brought them screenings and much-needed health information.”

One of UL Lafayette’s nursing students, junior Kori Keen, said the HOPE event promoted a healthier lifestyle.

UL Lafayette second semester junior nursing student Madison Pastorello, gives out bags filled with snacks and a motivational message at “Giving HOPE,” hosted by St. Bernadette’s Community Clinic.

“We offer blood pressure readings, we offer vision screenings and we are also giving them glasses,” Keen said.

Keen also said before receiving essential items such as blankets and backpacks, they were required to establish vital signs as a precautionary measure.

Bethany Borel, a junior nursing major, said helping people in need and witnessing the impact of some good is a fun bonus of volunteering.

“I was giving out glasses, and to see the difference it made for one guy, I was excited,” Borel said.

For UL Lafayette students like Keen and Borel, helping the community is an offshoot of what clinical students do every semester at St. Bernadette’s clinic, according to Dr. Melinda Oberleitner, associate dean in the College of Nursing and Allied Health Professions.

“The students recognized some needs of the homeless population that wasn’t being met, so they decided to work with the community and get some of those needs met,” Oberleitner said.

One of the homeless recipients, Ronndrick Tillman, said the HOPE event means that it’s all about the love from the community members.

“People like me need sleep and rest and something to eat, so pretty much letting me know that they still love us and care for us,” Tillman said.

Another one of the homeless who was out for HOPE, Jesse Pace, said this was a great event to help everybody in need.

“This is the best thing that has happened in a while,” Pace commented.

Peters said the HOPE event means the world to her.

“It means a great deal to me because we have so many homeless people and a lot of times we live in our own bubbles and we don’t realize the needs in our community,” she said.