

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WELFARE STUDENTS AID IN REBUILDING NEW ORLEANS

In August 2005 Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast region of the United States leaving a path of death and destruction in its wake. Three years later many communities have moved forward but those in the worst-hit parts of New Orleans are still trying to survive the devastation.

In January, during their winter break, twelve graduate students from the University at Albany's School of Social Welfare travelled on their own to New Orleans for the second year in a row. Initiated and organized by the students, their time in New Orleans was spent working with Habitat for Humanity building houses. Living as some of the hurricane survivors did, they were put up in a middle school that was converted into a housing unit which holds 400 people and is run by AmeriCorps volunteers. "The food was not great, we slept on cots and the showers were cold," said Lindsay Homenick, a graduate student from Queensbury, NY. "But it's pretty much what I expected and still a lot more than some New Orleansians have today." She continued, "There seemed to be slightly more traffic in New Orleans this year, indicating a possible increase in population. The destruction, however, was still incomprehensible."

Dr. Sandra Austin, Assistant Professor, School of Social Welfare and advisor to the group said, "Our students have had the opportunity to join in rebuilding a community but most importantly they have learned how social injustice is challenged." They have seen how "nonprofit organizations are working to advance the needs of the poorest residents through advocacy with city, state and federal governments, and how collaboration between nonprofits and for profit companies can be mobilized to rebuild communities."

Pictured below are the graduate students sitting proudly in front of a house that they had just finished building.



