

Headline:

DePauw Students Strengthen Town Ties Through Service—But More Volunteers Are Needed

By Abigail Marin

Greencastle, Ind. — November 10, 2025

When DePauw University students leave their classrooms, many head into the Greencastle community not just for coffee or groceries but to volunteer and connect with local residents. From mentoring children to supporting animal shelters, students are helping bridge the gap between campus and community. Yet as service needs grow, so does the call for more students to get involved.

For many, volunteering is more than a requirement; it's a source of belonging. "It's not easy being thousands of miles away from family," said Kelly Mendoza, a first-year Bonner Scholar who volunteers at the Putnam County Humane Society. "Volunteering gives me a real feeling of meaning and belonging, and everyone here has been incredibly welcoming."



Kelly Mendoza and some other Bonner Volunteers helping out the Putnam Community Local Park by cleaning unwanted plants.

Johnaton Dansby, another first-year Bonner Scholar, said his favorite part of serving is helping local kids learn to read. "It's fun, and I feel like it connects DePauw to the community around us," he said.

The Bonner Scholars program requires participants to complete eight to 10 hours of community service each week at sites like Asbury Towers Retirement Community, Rescued Treasures and local shelters. According to program data, DePauw's Bonner Scholars collectively contribute more than 40,000 hours of service to Putnam County each year.

Greek organizations also play a role in community engagement. Last month, fraternities and sororities hosted a Fall Candy Fest, where DePauw students handed out treats to local families on campus. The event drew dozens of children from Greencastle and nearby towns.

“It’s about giving back and breaking down barriers between campus and town,” said Gizelle Hernandez, a junior and member of the sorority Alpha Chi Omega. “When kids come here for events like Candy Fest, they see that DePauw students really care about being part of Greencastle.”



Local residents say those efforts make a difference. “DePauw students bring so much energy and compassion,” said Sandy Manson, who works at Asbury Towers. “They make a real impact on residents here. It’s not just service hours; it’s friendship.”

Still, challenges remain. Some students, especially international and out-of-state ones, say they struggle to find consistent ways to connect beyond campus. “The university does a lot, but there’s always more that can be done to help students feel settled,” Mendoza said. “Community work helps, but not everyone knows where to start.”

That question of how to get more students involved matters beyond DePauw. As communities like Greencastle rely on volunteers for essential programs, student engagement becomes a vital link between education and empathy. Service teaches responsibility, builds local trust and turns temporary residents into lifelong contributors.

“This place becomes home when you start giving back,” said Jean, a Greencastle resident who lives near campus. “It’s not just about DePauw; it’s about all of us.”

Jean said there is still a gap between students and the community. “I believe the Greencastle community needs a lot of work connecting with students and vice versa, yet there is not much effort many times to do so,” she said. “This community is very small and needs a lot of help to grow and flourish. We need more volunteers.”

As the semester continues, connections between students and local organizations may strengthen. But the progress will depend on students and residents working together to build those relationships.



AmeriCorps. *Literature Review for Volunteer Management*. Washington, DC: Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), 2017.

[https://www.americorps.gov/sites/default/files/document/Literature%20Review%20for%20Volunteer%20Management\\_0.pdf](https://www.americorps.gov/sites/default/files/document/Literature%20Review%20for%20Volunteer%20Management_0.pdf).

DePauw University. "Becoming a Bonner." Accessed November 10, 2025.

<https://www.depauw.edu/academics/centers/hartman/bonner/becoming-a-bonner/>.

———. "Bonner Scholar Program | Civic Engagement." Accessed November 10, 2025.

<https://www.depauw.edu/academics/centers/hartman/bonner/>.

Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service. "Benefits of Volunteering." Accessed November 10, 2025. <https://volunteer.iowa.gov/volunteering/individuals/benefits-volunteering>.

U.S. Census Bureau and AmeriCorps. "Volunteering and Civic Life in America: New U.S. Census Bureau, AmeriCorps Research." Last modified January 2023.

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/01/volunteering-and-civic-life-in-america.htm>