

## Home Is Where The Heart Is

They call the Lamb Center a place for transformation. This is true, not just for the guests, but for the volunteers as well. It is a place of love and community in a world that desperately needs both. At a time when I desperately needed both, when I did not realize I needed both, the Lamb Center was there for me. Attempting to put into words what the Lamb Center means to me is a futile endeavor--I cannot. I went there broken and met broken people, but I found healing.

I have been volunteering for a couple years. I can say that the Lamb Center has brought me so much more joy than I ever expected it to. My involvement began with meal preparation; twice a month I would arrange a group of volunteers to prepare lunch and another group to serve it the following day. The first time I visited the Lamb Center, I was bringing food and a couple volunteers. I recall walking in with trays full of food and no idea what to expect. That first visit, I served the food and took in everything the Lamb Center had to offer. I learned of all the different services offered to guests and I thought that summed up why the Lamb Center was a powerful place.

Man, I was quite incorrect. While all the offerings of the Lamb Center are considerable, one of its best offerings is community. This little place is big on love. Most of my time at the Lamb Center is spent talking to guests. These broken people are among the most beautiful people I have ever met.

These guests have turned the broad, generalized "homeless" into individuals. I have met such a wide range of people. I have met university graduates, hairdressers, maids, construction workers, husbands and wives who do not complain because they are together. I have met people well-versed on international events, the Bible, and the best way to prepare meals from scratch. Each person at the Lamb Center represents a unique perspective—experiences, insights, and opinions. The term homeless may apply to them, but it is unfair and ignorant to focus on their lack of shelter as their defining characteristic. They are much more than that.

I knew when I started volunteering that I would like it. What an understatement. I had no idea how impactful it would become. I had no idea that I would never be the same. My time at the Lamb Center has transformed me on so many levels. Through meeting the guests, I understand how few the differences between us are. Through knowing the guests, I know God better. Through loving the guests, I love myself more. The idea of unconditional love did not really make sense to me until I attempted it with the guests at the Lamb Center.

Walking into a homeless center with an open mind and an open heart is not always easy. With such a diverse client base, you never know who you will meet. That's part of the beauty of volunteering. I have met some of the most positive people here and I have met those with little hope. I recognize that I am not there to fix anyone, nor to speak with

authority on their lives. I go there to be a friend. I listen when guests want to speak. I make conversation and pray that my words carry love in them.

One of my favorite parts, though, is bringing other volunteers to join me. These other volunteers are college students like I am. We are often sheltered in the bubble of George Mason University, sometimes too wrapped up in classes and clubs to look outside university borders. Taking them to the Lamb Center is a wake-up call. Loving others through simple conversation is an easy way to help them gain perspective on their lives. When I bring them around, they begin to realize that when I speak of the Lamb Center with a smile, it is completely genuine. While guests may have a hard life, they offer so much wisdom to us. While they may view their lives as rough, they are not without hope. When it is easy to resign to hopelessness, it is easier to see the hope of others and be inspired. That's another thing the Lamb Center does.

It has been wonderful to get to know the guests. There are so many incredible people to meet and so many stories to hear. The Lamb Center has taught me gratitude for the many blessings I have been given in my life. It has shown me the joy of loving my neighbor without condition and I am lucky that I have been able to help others see this joy as well. It is a source of love and I feel honored to have returned some of this love to the people there. For some, this little building becomes a home. I must say, I feel quite at home here too.

Please understand how inadequate this reflection is. The Lamb Center, for me, is more than mere words can express. It is a source of hope, of love, a place to serve. Every time I arrive there, I enter with the hope of making someone's day brighter, of bringing someone else joy. I always benefit though. I always have my day brightened, I am brought joy, and I am humbled again by the way God works through each act. From the little things, like sneaking someone an extra spoonful, to the bigger commitment of hours each week to make the Lamb Center a nourishing meal, the love with which these acts is performed pales in comparison with the love I have received. Yes, the Lamb Center is a place for transformation and I thank God every day that it continues to transform me.

You can learn more about the Lamb Center at <https://www.thelambcenter.org/>.