

# Carver Center teens deliver supplies to homeless in New York City

By Jeffrey Cullen Dean

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Port Chester High School students Maria Garcia (left), Welinton Lopez, Tony Nievcela, Jaresiah MacDonald and Carver Center Teen Center Scholars Coach Daisy Garcia prepare sandwiches for delivery to homeless individuals in New York City.

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Teenagers involved with the Carver Center participated in a Midnight Run to New York City on Friday, June 9, to deliver supplies to homeless folks.

A Midnight Run is the process of collecting and donating supplies to homeless individuals in need of clothing, food, water and shelter. It is an act encouraged by a volunteer organization of the same name that coordinates and provides information on how to help.

Carver Center Chief Program Officer Daniel Bonnet said they organize two Midnight Runs a year, one in the spring and one in the winter. The next Midnight Run will be in November.

The planning and coordination of the project is directed by the teens themselves, Bonnet said. He and Karina Lehan, the center's programs and services manager, present the project to the students and then leave it to them to determine how it will be carried out.

"We encourage volunteerism so our teens can develop these skills to enter the workforce," Bonnet said. "It's a good way to build your resume at a young age."

According to Lehan, Carver Center's Midnight Run was completed over two weeks—from advertising the need for supplies to successfully delivering them in the City, and almost all of it was facilitated by the students.

The students collected clothing, food and toiletries in two donation bins placed outside of Port Chester High School and at the Carver Center. Once the supplies were collected, the students sorted the clothes for men and women and by size. On the night of the Midnight Run, the teens worked in two different shifts. The first was tasked with organizing the items and preparing them for delivery, while the other went down to the City in vans to deliver the supplies to the homeless.

"The only thing we did as the staff was bring back the collection at the high school," Lehan said.

Bonnet said there are set spots where volunteers drop off the supplies—such as Penn Station and a location near Central Park. When the volunteers arrive, they shout "Midnight Run," and the homeless community knows the term and what is being delivered.

"One of the most interesting things I've noticed here is that even though Port Chester is a train ride away from New York City, many of our teens have never been there," Bonnet said. "When they go to this city of lights, there is another side to it where they start to see human beings in a different light."

Bonnet said he participated in a Midnight Run when he was in high school and found it to be a transformative experience.

"You have dialogue with these homeless individuals. You'll see some with a few mental health issues and some just had their cards dealt badly," he said. "I've had a student who took off his shoes to give to a guy in the wintertime because we didn't have his size. That's how moved these kids are."

Maria Garcia, a Port Chester High School rising senior, has participated in Midnight Runs for the last two years.

She helped package bags, organize clothing and distribute supplies in the City.

In the past when she visited New York City, Garcia said she didn't see many homeless and was surprised by the large number she saw at night.

The experience, she's found, is rewarding—she aims to continue service work just like it but on a local level.

"It made me feel a type of joy because I had never done activities like this—going out and helping other people," Garcia said. "I've done volunteer work but not something that will impact someone's life like this. It made me want to get involved in my community and help distribute food at different organizations here in Port Chester."