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Volunteer work impacts college student's goals

By AMY SMITH THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE
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Cecelia Madrigal, donations coordinator at Warm Blessings Community Kitchen, has fun at her job.
Submitted

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When Cecelia Madrigal made the choice to volunteer at Warm Blessings Community Kitchen, she had no idea how life-changing the decision would be for her.

“We moved here from New Jersey in 2012, and after I graduated from LaRue County High School, I went to (Western Kentucky University),” Madrigal said. “My sister and I signed up to volunteer at Warm Blessings in 2020 as a way to keep in touch and stay connected.”

Madrigal soon transitioned from volunteer to staff member as weekend shelter coordinator, a hefty responsibility for a 19-year-old.

“Knowing how to navigate a room full of adults as a 19-year-old and knowing how to keep people safe at all times was me growing up a little bit more,” Madrigal said. “When you’re volunteering, you get a lot of instructions and feedback and just kind of step in where you can. But as staff, there is a lot more planning that goes into it. Because I was doing the shelter portion, I had to make sure people were being fed and getting the things they need and that they weren’t losing their things.”

Getting to know Cecelia Madrigal
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Career: Donations Coordinator at Warm Blessings Community Kitchen
School: Western Kentucky University where she is majoring in social work
Family: Cecelia Madrigal's mother is Sara Madrigal; she has a sister, Emma.

Volunteer work: Room in the Inn and Christmas Assistance program

Pets: A rabbit, Flop

Hobbies: Making collages, painting, making jewelry and crocheting

Sports: Competitive arm wrestling. Madrigal is the highest ranked female arm wrestler in the state and won prize money in Battlegrounds Three in 2023

Favorite genre of music: Old rock

Favorite recording artist: Janis Joplin

From the weekend shelter coordinator, Madrigal moved to a position as assistant to Melissa Torres, director of Warm Blessings, before landing the role she now has as donations coordinator.

"Cecelia is our donations coordinator, and quite literally my right-hand man," Torres said. "There is no way our pantry would run efficiently without her, and she is the most brutal and physical worker that I've ever seen, going above and beyond every day for the people that we serve."

Madrigal has been so impacted by her work at Warm Blessings, she changed her major at WKU to social work.

"The relationships that were built are what inspired me, not so much from the social worker because they have limitations, but as a professional working with multiple populations and the people you meet, the stories they have and the things you learn about life."

Madrigal said hearing the stories of people who visit the shelter has significantly changed her perspective on homelessness.

"It's like (I thought) being homeless was X, Y and Z, but having children and the parents are working two jobs and still not making it is hard," Madrigal said. "That could be my reality. For people who have it so good, it can only take one thing to knock you down a couple of notches and humble you."

Shannon Avila volunteers at Warm Blessings and said Madrigal's compassion is heart-warming.

"Cecelia wants to help everybody," Avila said. "She has a passion and dedication of working with people on the lower aspects of society. She will be outstanding at this throughout her life, and I look forward to watching her grow into her full potential."

After Madrigal graduates from college, she hopes to put her degree in social work to good use by managing a permanent shelter for Warm Blessings.

"Ideally, we will have a shelter open, and I can stay with Warm Blessings working in a full-time shelter which has been our dream for a while now," Madrigal said. "Our staff has put in so much time and effort planning, and we have seen the need for years. Without the proper shelter, there just aren't many wins."

Madrigal said that Warm Blessings Community Kitchen has been the most important place in her life since 2021.

"To fully understand the things we do and the full scope of what we do, it isn't just meals. It's laundry and showers and helping people get documents and having someone to talk to when they are in a

bad spot. It's very impressive to me.”

Madrigal strives to make the people she has met know that they are important.

“Most of the people walking down the street on Dixie, I know, and I'll wave and acknowledge them and make them feel seen,” Madrigal said. “I also keep tabs on them and want to know they're OK. Those relationships are awesome.”

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AmySmith



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