

# A West Side Story for Westmont Students

THREE SENIORS SPENT A SEMESTER LIVING IN A LOW-INCOME HOUSING COMPLEX IN SANTA BARBARA TO REACH OUT TO THE RESIDENTS

Most students go off campus for internships and return home to their residence hall rooms. But three young women tried something different last fall: a residential internship at Village Apartments, a low-income housing complex on the west side of Santa Barbara. Carrie Caddell '10, Bridget Leivan '10 and Nancy Shieh '10 balanced full class schedules with an intense experience coordinating projects such as Bible studies for girls. They also created a manual for future interns and a photo documentary, "West Side Story: A Call to Love."

While living in the complex, Bridget encountered diverse worldviews and found a heart for the less fortunate. She says Friday night Bible studies with the local junior high and high school girls were a highlight. "It was a time we could be silly, giggle, bake, use code names for boys, but also share each other's hearts and cry together," she says. "I learned to think less of myself and to reevaluate my priorities in life."

Nancy says gangs, drugs, domestic violence and poverty no longer seem like distant inner-city issues. "The people on the west side have individual stories, struggles, faces, names, real emotions, hardships and dilemmas, and I wanted to meet them with empathy, quality time and understanding," she says. "They are people for us to love, and people who will love us in return. They are our neighbors and our friends."

The experience opened Carrie's eyes to needs in Santa Barbara. "It taught me how to live a life of service that's connected to the rest of my life," she says. "Calling 911 for my neighbor about an incident of domestic violence while writing a paper for my Conflict and Reconciliation class was a great way to apply my education."

Carrie continues to mentor two girls in junior high and has restarted the Bible study for girls. "My involvement at the village is maintaining relationships," she says.

The internship grew out of a project students initiated during spring break 2009.



Carrie Caddell (left) and Bridget Leivan participated in an unusual residential internship.

More than 40 students volunteered at the complex, helping residents with laundry, painting the local community center, washing cars and installing a playground.

Jennifer Taylor, director of internships, says this type of internship requires a certain kind of student. Each one drew up a learning plan to tie the experience to their studies. "The women developed Spanish-speaking skills, leadership skills, experienced living in a different subculture only a few miles from campus, and related to people who live with limited resources," Taylor says.

Bridget took photos of daily life and the neighborhood, working to capture west side culture. "There is such a fierce beauty in the community," she says. "It may take more effort to see it, and I wanted to bring that out." Part of her academic work was creating the photo documentary, which she has shown in local churches to increase awareness about needs on the west side.

Nancy grew to appreciate her education more, becoming incredibly curious about

the world around her. "The internship was stretching, uncomfortable, humbling and heartbreaking at times," she says. "But I know we are called to be with the least of these."

An English major, Carrie gained experience writing a manual to guide future interns through the experience. "It's an introduction to west side and village culture based on our experiences, observations and conversations with neighbors," she says. "It includes recommendations for being aware and safe, as well as emergency procedures." She also helped put in place liability releases and a residential agreement between the interns and the Turner Foundation, which owns the complex.

Carrie says the experience forced her to step out of a more structured role in order to make room for others and to get to know the community.

"I look back at that internship humbled by the lessons I learned from the people I was blessed to live with," Bridget says.