

## **Spokan't Touch This**

March 13, 2012 By [Rebecca \(Edit\)](#)

Why hello there!

This is Rebecca and Olivia bringing you the latest news from Spokane, WA. There are 14 of us participating in this Collegiate Challenge and today was our first day on site! In the morning, we drove to the Habitat for Humanity office and were warmly welcomed with smiles, coffee, and muffins. The staff was extremely excited to see us and being able to talk with them and be around their positivity woke us up and got us pumped for the day!

On site at Deer Park, we were broken up into groups. The first group worked on the framing of one duplex while the other group triumphed over painting the inside of half of another duplex. It was cold. It was dirty, but most importantly, it was fun. We were able to meet a family that is currently working with Habitat to build their own home – it was a privilege and we hope to talk more with the families we are helping. We believe that our actions will not only benefit the lives of the individual families of the houses we are building, but will also add on to the worldwide positivity and love that Habitat has been creating.

We've been becoming closer as a group. Fun and laughs have been shared by all! We're all looking forward to the upcoming days and what they have in store. We hope to increase our awareness and knowledge of the issue of poverty and what we can do as individuals and as a whole to help those in need.

Spokan't Touch This 14: Melissa, Hilary, Ben, Olivia, Rebecca, Michelle, Sarah, Adam, Zach, Chika, LoFree, LoWeezy, Ryan, and Emily.

We'll update soon! God bless!

## **First day: this time for Yakima!**

March 13, 2012 By [Alexa \(Edit\)](#)

Hello all,

My name is Alexa and I'm a participant on the Collegiate Challenge Yakima trip! We've got a total of 17 people on our trip and we are having an amazing time up here thus far. I'm a junior Nursing major at UP and I am one of two of the Yakima bloggers on our trip! (Sarah W. is our second blogger. Stay tuned for her posts coming soon!) Back to blogging now...

Wow. Our first day in Yakima is almost over! What a day full of traveling, mysterious hail, and skirting around dust storms. We all made it safe and sound and are relaxing and laughing in a church basement. We were invited to dinner at the home of Caroline and Craig (and Clyde the

adorable dog!). They did Habitat builds in El Salvador and thought it would be a nice gesture to invite us into their home just as the peoples of El Salvador showed them great hospitality.

During the day, and during our meetings and potluck, we have been gradually giving each other nicknames that we have to vote on first. So far we have Dobby: Sara Tellez, Cooties: Tyler Oshsner, RPS (Rock Paper Scissors): Jorge Gonzalez, and Cray-Kay.

Tomorrow will be our first full day of working at the Habitat site. We met Sharon, who is a coordinator of Habitat for Humanity groups in Yakima County. We are all very excited and anticipating a fun and exhausting day of hard work and service on the site together.

Alexa and This time for Yakima Crew

## **Second day: Change of plans!**

March 13, 2012 By [Alexa \(Edit\)](#)

Day two:

Our Yakima CoChall (Collegiate Challenge) group woke up to Cray-Kay (Kailey Sparks, one of our two group leaders) and Kellie, our other lovely group leader, running around our sleeping bodies blasting “Waka Waka” as our wake up call! It was pretty amusing because before the trip we all agreed that music would be a good rejuvenator in the morning but I don’t believe anyone was expecting music as a literal wake up call!

When we finally got out the door in the morning and drove to our site we met Harry, our site manager, and he told us we would be going to postpone the original plans of pouring concrete (because it was snowing!) and we were going to a different site (on Lincoln St.) where our help was needed. At Lincoln we met BJ, a long-time Habitat volunteer (who has a full time job at a hospital) and Ryan (a cool, fun dude according to Cray-Kay). We were really lucky to be indoors the majority of the day because of the bitterly cold wind and occasional snow. For lunch we all piled into a small room and munched on our PB&Js and laughed a bunch. We all went to the YMCA and showered after our long day and had an amazing Burrito Bar meal for our first CoChall home-made dinner together. Go dinner crew! We all ended up sitting on the kitchen floor after dinner playing Apples to Apples—it was almost as if we were a big ol’ family that had known each other for years and years.

The cool thing about these Moreau Center trips—or any trip in general- is that you get thrown together with people you would never expect to fall into comradery with, and yet it you all get along and laugh for hours on end together. Not only that, you accomplish amazing things together as a group.

This time for Yakima (to sleep!) Alexa & Crew

## Third Day: Reunited and it feels so good

March 13, 2012 By [Alexa \(Edit\)](#)

Third day: Yakima

Breakfast crew (aka myself, Jeff, and Becca) got woken up a bit earlier than everyone else this morning to arrange and bring out all the breakfast and lunch materials. The kind of breakfast you have can make or break the start of your day: we fueled well. Before we left the church this morning Becca lead us in a morning stretch that revitalized our stiff limbs and relaxed our breathing and centered our minds. We are here to serve others and help the community of Yakima and those in need for housing here.

Today we had to split up into two groups because Harry (our site manager) only needed 6-7 people on the site to pour concrete. Oh and by the way, it was sunny all of today and therefore we were able to pour concrete... woot-woot! The rest of our group (Tyler A. (aka Tweety Byrd), Lupita, Sarah T. (aka Dobby), Adrienne, Sarah S., and Valerie) were at a new site that already had exterior walls down (and a foundation of course). Kara was our site manager and we was as many of us deemed, an inspiration. She started off as a volunteer through AmeriCorp with Habitat (she started out on sites just as volunteers like us-learning the ropes) and then after 3 years she became site manager, which is a salary position). Kara came to the site today after slicing her hand open the previous day and still was active in supervising, helping, and hammering like the rest of us. She had a great attitude and was a woman we all admired on our site.

Steve, the executive director of Yakima County's Habitat for Humanity chapter, came to our site around lunch time today to talk to us about Habitat for Humanity, what they do, and the population they serve. He was straight with us and very authentic. He explained many details about what criteria there was for families to get houses. He explained what the families have to do, like the "sweat equity" 500 hours the family has to put in), and he conversed with us about what the process looks like for a family who is chosen. Steve encouraged us to look around at the neighborhood around our site and think about what it would be like to live in one of those houses and think about how a Habitat house could positively affect the community. One a final note: Steve's favorite thought was how the work he does and the work us volunteers do positively impacts the lives of children who live in the homes we help build. Today we got a real taste of how our hard work—and time with the saws and hammers—and we got to really understand how we positively impact struggling or disadvantaged working-class families.

One of my personal highlights of the day was of our two groups reuniting after our long day of separation and chatting about our experiences on the two different sites and how we each processed the information Steve gave us on how we are impacting and helping change the lives of families in Yakima county. During our reflection time after dinner I shared with the group how it was particularly challenging for me today to look around at different houses in the neighborhood and see small old houses, boarded windows, tatty curtains, chipping paint, broken

furniture outside, and no green grass out front to realize how not every child in this neighborhood is necessarily going to have the same opportunity-filled and picturesque childhood that I had. I shared with the group that as children we are given everything, but now that we have grown more and are able to give back, we now get to be part of the process to give children safe, comfortable homes that they will have many birthdays, celebrations, sleepovers, and family dinners in.

We are making a difference day by day and we plan on more tomorrow. First we'll need some sleep.

Zzzzz,

Alexa & Crew

## **Cheetos & Dust Storms**

March 14, 2012 By [Sarah \(Edit\)](#)

It would not be sufficient to say that the first day of the Yakima Collegiate Challenge was “eventful”. Traveling to Yakima, WA was filled with hilarious, beautiful, and scary experiences. The Columbia River Gorge was very beautiful today. Clouds spotted the bright blue sky and rugged white peaks formed on the Columbia River below. Two highlights of our road trip were when we stopped to get free coffee and also have lunch at a beautiful park on the cliffs above the river. Our peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and Cheetos definitely hit the spot.

After stopping for lunch, we continued to head northeast towards Yakima. However, we had to take a different route because the main highway was shut down. There was dust storm and a bad accident on the highway, so it would take five hours until it reopened. We zigzagged through country roads until we made it safely back onto the main highway. It was super challenging trying to keep our four cars together, but everyone worked together to reach Yakima as one group.

Around 3:30pm we pulled into the parking lot of Center Lutheran Church. Sharon, the regional Habitat for Humanity leader, was already in the parking lot welcoming us to Yakima before we were even out of the car. She showed us where we would be living for the next week. Sharon also made goodie bags for us that were filled with candy, Chap Stick, and an awesome shirt.

For dinner we were invited to Craig and Caroline’s beautiful home. Craig and Caroline go to the Center Lutheran Church. I am so grateful for their kindness and generosity. Caroline prepared a four-course meal that included crunchy French bread, juicy oranges, crisp salad, gooey spaghetti, and rich brownies. After dinner we played a hilarious game called Hoopla and Sharon debriefed us about what to expect for our upcoming week.

Our team is already bonding and ready to get building tomorrow morning! But now it is time to get some shuteye. Good night!

## Measure Twice, Cut Once

March 14, 2012 By [Sarah \(Edit\)](#)

The sky was gloomy and snow began to fall as we arrived at the Habitat building site. Harry, the Habitat contractor, explained to us that we could not lay down the foundation on this building site because there was a chance of rain. We were quickly rerouted to another Habitat site a few blocks away.

The neighborhood of the housing site was very rundown. Stray dogs and graffiti were scattered through out the streets. Once we made it to the new building site we met BJ and Ryan. They volunteer in their spare time to help build Habitat houses. BJ and Ryan are really awesome because they are super patient with us. We nailed up molding, installed closet doors, and cut wood siding.

For lunch all seventeen of us crammed into one bedroom to stay warm. We even had people sitting in the closet! This was my favorite part of the day because we were all together. When we left in the afternoon, we could clearly see the difference that our team made in just one day.

## Foundations

March 14, 2012 By [Sarah \(Edit\)](#)

By 9:30 am our team was ready and eager to build a house. We were a little disappointed to discover that our Habitat team would be split up onto two housing sites. However, we quickly recovered from our disappointment because we remembered that we were here to serve Yakima County.

At the site my team worked on, we leveled the wood frames for the foundation and then poured the concrete in between the frames. Helping with the early stages of building this home was a very rewarding experience. Our team was able to recognize that we are leaving a lasting impact on the Yakima community. This house will provide shelter and comfort for several generations of families.

For dinner we devoured pancakes, sausage, and eggs. Every night we have a group reflection and play games... the perfect ending to each day. We are feeling a little sore, but ready to put up some walls tomorrow!

## Worms Anyone?

March 14, 2012 By [Sarah \(Edit\)](#)

This morning we decided to stay on the building sites we worked on the previous day. We all have a "connection" with our building sites, so we did not mix up the teams and go to different homes. Today on my team's building site we painted diesel onto wood boards. The painters put

on white astronaut suits to protect their clothes and skin. They looked like life-size Pillsbury Dough Boys or astronauts. It was hilarious! Then we secured the wood boards into the foundation with metal plates and over 600 nails into the wood boards.

For lunch we drove across town to the other building site, so we could all eat lunch together. At the site we were able to meet a family that is going to receive a Habitat home. We briefly talked to the husband and he explained that his family wanted a Habitat house for their little girl. He wants a safe place for his little girl to grow up and play. The husband and the wife are super kind and giving. They brought us warm pizza for lunch, which we easily devoured in less than ten minutes. While this family waits for their Habitat home to be built, they are helping build their neighbor's Habitat home. Meeting the family was an eye opening experience because it made the effects of our work more tangible and real. I am so happy that this young family is receiving a Habitat home!

After lunch we were all getting a little tired and loopy from the diesel fuel. I knew something was wrong, when over half our group licked a worm for fun! I am excited for lasagna tonight and to see what tomorrow will bring.

## **Fourth day: Lights, Camera, Hammer!**

March 14, 2012 By [Alexa \(Edit\)](#)

Did you all get that? ;-)

Our fourth day was pretty great- very productive, very tiring! Sore muscles and droopy eye lids are the norm now! Our group has been officially split into two sites because that is where we are needed. We are bummed about being split but have grown fond of our own construction sites and enjoy the work we get to do there. For the second day in a row, we have worked on our separate sites. Not only are we helping multiple families this week, but at lunch today, we reunited with our entire group and we met a family that was going to be living in the home next to the site we were working on (two houses are being built on one corner property). The family brought us lots of pizza, home made banana bread, and beverages. They shared their story with us- and we got insight and a visual image of a family who was getting the kind of houses we were helping build. Our group got to see their appreciation and the possibility of hope for their and their child's future.

CoChall Yakima in the news:

[Today's excitement on the news!!](#) (some of our group members/group leaders talking about our trip)

[Yakima Herald publicity pictures at one of our two sites!](#)

Us in video on the news!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVe\\_B\\_HNhOE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVe_B_HNhOE)

## **Hand Ups, Not Hand Outs**

March 15, 2012 By [Rebecca \(Edit\)](#)

Hello again! Rebecca and Adam here!

We realized that in the previous post, there wasn't much explanation about Habitat for Humanity and about the wonderful work the organization does. We could go on forever about it, but we believe that the video below sums everything up perfectly. For those who are not familiar with the organization, we hope you take the time to watch this video. It is truly amazing and inspiring:

Yesterday, March 14th, after a long day of working at the site, our group was invited to eat dinner with the Habitat staff at the Spokane office. There, we talked about the significant amount of poverty that is in our country and worldwide and about the many situations that can lead to individuals and families dipping below the poverty line.

Today, the group was again split among the two duplexes. There was plenty of flooring, painting, reinforcing, and hammering to go around. We were able to meet more of the homeowners, which was extremely inspiring. I believe I can speak for everyone when I say that meeting such wonderful people helps to keep us going and reminds us that what we do has meaning. We were invited to have dinner with people of the Spokane community at the Salvation Army where we are staying. It was a very positive and fun experience with tons of good food and BINGO!

All of us are now getting ready for bed and preparing for another full day of hard work! As one person stated, Habitat does not give hand outs, but rather hand ups – they help to empower people and help bring them to a more healthy, positive life.

## **Keep CoChall Weird: Worms and Squiggles**

March 15, 2012 By [Alexa \(Edit\)](#)

Day five:

When we asked our site manager, Harry, if our group of volunteers were the weirdest he'd ever worked with, he responded, "Oh yeah." Then Kellie, one of our co-coordinators, replied nodding in return, "Oh yeah, we truly keep CoChall weird."

Today *has* been a truly weird day. First off, three crew members cut down a tree on our site. Kailey (Cray-Kay), Sally (Sassy Pants), and Kellie (newly dubbed "Wormy") got all excited about killing a tree that needed to come down according to Harry. I was disappointed, but what can I say, I'm a nature lover! As the morning progressed, we started getting restless and a few of us: Sally, Kelly, Laura, Jeff, BJ (another awesome volunteer) and Kailey, all started to get worm crazy. What I mean by that was that Kelly ate her first worm (swallowed it) and then many others followed! I only smooched the worm with my fellow site mate and Fields Hall friend

Sarah W. It was pretty adorable. I channeled Katy Perry when I started singing later in the day, "I kissed a worm and I liked it!" We played a few rounds of Silent Football during our lunch break and while waiting for the inspector and a few of us got demerits. Demerits are like punishments if you mess up during the game. Those with demerits had to do "butt squiggles." Butt squiggles are just movements of your behind in the shape of letters of a word or words the punishers decide. Many of us got the number of demerits required to do butt squiggles so we ended up all squiggling it up for "CoChall Yakima" (I don't know if they took pictures or videoed... I hope it was just pictures!). After that we were planning on pouring concrete but we didn't get to because everything was running a little late. Tomorrow we are just waking up extra early to get to the site by 8:30am and pour by 9 or 9:30am.

We finished up at our site early because of concrete issues (haha, that was punny) and headed over to the other side off 14th street and helped our other Yakima buddies with their tasks. We finished at 4pm and some went to the YMCA to shower, some went shopping (me, Sally, Valerie, Tyler O., and Sarah W.) and we planned out the rest of our meals off of our budget! We ate a delicious dinner of pesto pasta, salad, and some side bread, and we enjoyed delicious cookie brownies that Sarah W., Sally, and I made together! In between dinner and dessert we had a good reflection about the day and puff painted team shirts! We made some shirts for our site managers/other fellow week-long volunteer friends like David, Ryan, Kara, and Harry. We are going out to dinner with them tomorrow night to a Mexican restaurant and will present them the shirts then! We all puff painted our Habitat for Humanity shirts we received for free in our welcome goodie bags our first day. We included things like "Yakima 2012" and our nicknames and doodles on the back of our shirts. The night concluded with a fun game of Mafia and lots of excitement, "death," frustration, and amusing tension. It's just a game... that's just what you have to tell yourself!

What a week it's been! We have our final full day tomorrow and the site on 5th St. and Willow. Thank you to all of you readers of this blog. Thank you for your support throughout our journey and thank you for helping guide, support, bless, teach, raise the people that I have gotten to know these last couple days. Who knew we'd all be this close by the end of the trip. From awkward car rides to ridiculous jokes, weird accents, singing, dancing, worm eating, butt squiggling, and much much more, we are close now. We are connected through this trip. We will never forget this trip, and this trip will have a positive ripple effect on the service and leadership we involve ourselves with in the future. We are changed (in small ways and in larger ways) and we also have the ability to evoke, provoke, and inspire change within our own lives, with our own friends, and within our communities. This trip has been amazing and it's not even over yet!

On another note... [CoChall Yakima in the news](#): today our two construction sites were interviewed by KNDO (NBC news). Adrienne ("Stitch") and Becca ("Narcky") were interviewed by the news crew but many of their responses and words were cut short by editing. Becca talked about how we weren't here for the publicity but rather to work with community members and make a positive impact in the community. Adrienne talked about how the family was volunteering on the site as how they and the neighbors were helping out. The two found it a bit frustrating that their words were cut because it truly showed how media sets their own agenda and skews how they tell stories.

Again, thank you all... and another tidbit of news... all our nicknames have been chosen!

Jeff: J-Low, Tyler: Tweety Byrd, Danniell: Cleatus Maximus, Jorge: RPS (aka "Rockie" (Rock Paper Scissors), Tyler O.: Cooties, Laura: Hammie (or Hammer Time), Sarah S: Drill Bit, Valerie: DA Law, Sarah T: Dobby, Sarah W.: Philosoraptor, Sally: Sassy Pants, Adrienne: Stitch, Becca: Narcky, Kellie: Wormy, Kailey: Cray-Kay, me (Alexa): The Beav (aka Eager Beaver), and Lupita: The Riddler.

Open minds, open hearts, and open hands... to fill with a hammer and nail,

Alexa & the CoChall Yakima crew

## [We Are Connected](#)

March 17, 2012 By [Alexa \(Edit\)](#)

Friday was our final day!

Today we poured concrete and it was awesome, backbreaking, and fast-paced work. I can truly appreciate the physical and mental toll the day took on me. It's important to have those days, they make you feel like you are alive, building character as well as muscles. During lunch we all met up at our site and enjoyed lunch together. Sharon our Habitat coordinator in Yakima made us two cakes and showed her appreciation with putting gummy worms on top! I mentioned to everyone: "Hey, now we've all licked/eaten worms!" and Cray-Kay (Kailey) responded, "Haha-No." Apparently the worm eaters like all their glory! ;D After cake, Harry and Kara presented newspaper clippings, appreciation awards, and a mixed CD and or a long gummy worm for some laughs to all of us CoChall-ers! We all really appreciated their appreciation.

Once the concrete business was complete for the day, we went over to 14th and Willow and helped out our fellow CoChall-ers at Kara's site. We ended in solidarity and took a few concluding pictures. After that, Kara, Ryan, BJ, and David came over to the church for dinner of tamales and tacos as per our invitation and we had a wonderful meal and game of Mafia afterwards with them. We presented puff painted shirts to our guests and they enjoyed them. Also, our lovely leaders were presented with cards all of us had signed to show our appreciation for them. Kara's shirt said: Karaoke on the back with a puff-painted tool belt on the back! (how cute!) Harry: The Boss Man. David: D-Boss. Ryan: The Gate-Keeper (because he constructed a metal fence the first day on the site with us). BJ: Double Duty (because he had a job at the hospital too).

Later in the night after we said our sappy and sweet goodbyes with our guests, we had a really awesome and unique reflection. Many of us chatted about the impact the trip has had for us and what/how we can bring what we have learned and experienced to those who inquire about it. Of course it's been a wild, fun, amusing time with all of our group... but I've also learned much about Habitat, housing issues, and the goal of Habitat. It is my duty to spread the word (as accurately as I can) to those interested in Habitat/housing issues. This is important so I can express the amazing quality of the learning-service trip to those who ask and who are interested.

On Saturday morning, Kailey and Kellie made us a delicious, gourmet green pancake breakfast with eggs for St. Paddy's Day before we headed out to go back to campus. Around 2:30pm today we all arrived safe, unharmed and sleepily on campus. We parted ways with the knowledge in our hearts that we will have a reunion banquet soon and that we would be exchanging pictures and numbers on a Facebook group soon. Some of us had withdrawals of each other later in the day and ate dinner at the commons because we weren't ready to hang out with "real people" yet.

Keep all your spirits thriving,

Alexa