

Ursula's Story...

IVC San Diego volunteer Ursula Briner shares her experience with IVC and Rachel's Women's Center:

This is my first year with IVC. I had been a volunteer for 3 years with Seniors for Kids. It was affiliated with First Five – a State program to prepare pre-schoolers for Kindergarten and school in general. It was a FUN job. And then I saw the IVC ad in the Southern Cross. It appealed to me because it puts emphasis on spiritual growth, along with service to others. So I applied and was lucky enough to be assigned to Rachel's Women's Center.

What an experience it is. It is such a wonderful place, a safe harbor for women to spend the day, away from the danger of the streets or from domestic violence. We serve over 100 low-income and homeless women a day. I am there 2 days a week from 9- 4. There is, thankfully, the never-ending job of taking in donations of clothing. I sort the clothes, put them on hangers and bring them to the boutique to hang them on racks and I bring cartons and cartons of shoes in to put on shelves. It's great physical labor, lots of carrying, bending and stretching – an added benefit to my health.

I also help with serving lunch – every day 50 women are chosen via lottery to get a delicious hot meal. They are so appreciative. Whenever the staff needs me, I get to man the front desk where the women check in. There I get the opportunity to talk to them. I learn of their circumstances, hear their heartbreaking stories, what brought them to the center. The hardest thing for me is when they have no night shelter and we don't have a bed available and it's so cold this time of year. We hunt up warm clothing and blankets and hope they find a place at the Rescue Mission, St. Vincent's or the Tent. Most of them have great hopes for the future. They tell me they are with us only for a short time. They earn tickets for the boutique by doing housekeeping jobs around the center. They pick appropriate clothes to go job hunting and every time someone is scheduled for an interview we cheer and pray for success. I also see the seemingly hopeless cases – women who are mentally ill, or can't break their addiction.

I have so many stories in my journal – some of them I have shared in our monthly IVC meetings. So, as Shane Claiborne says in his "Irresistible Revolution" I have been fortunate enough to not only give to charity, but actually to MEET the poor. What have I gained spiritually? Well, it makes me realize that, whatever I am or have, is by the grace of God. And, when I find that pride wants to sneak into my mind, thinking that I am too intelligent or hard-working to be in the predicament the women at Rachel's are in, I beg the Lord to forgive me, because it is HIS gift to a very undeserving creature; and I pray – a lot!