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Seven students traveled to Atlanta during spring break to volunteer with the homeless. Front from left: Emily Owens, a sophomore from Shawnee; Austin Trees, a freshman from Leawood; Libby Johnson, a junior from Lawrence; Carly Curtis, a sophomore from Tulsa, Okla.; Andrew Leicht, a senior from St. Louis; Laurissa Beckman, a freshman from Louisburg and Jessica Brooks, a sophomore from Pleasanton.

Service trips help students give back

BY JENNY TERRELL
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While other students spent spring break working on their tans, Jamie Branch, a freshman from Topeka, spent her break helping others.

Branch and 67 other KU students took

part in Alternative Breaks, a student-run program that organizes volunteer trips focusing on community outreach around the country. This spring students participated at 10 locations across the country. Students at each site focused on a specific

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issue, such as environmentalism and poverty, during the week-long trip.

Branch was one of the two site leaders, participants who organize trip details and manage and lead small groups, for the Denver location. Her team of seven worked with the Autism Society of Colorado. They helped with office work and assisted families with autistic children through a program called Respite Care.

The group helped the parents with autistic children by assisting with chores around their houses and taking care of the children while their parents enjoyed a night out.

"It's a twenty-four-seven job for them; most people hadn't been on a date in ten years," Branch said.

Branch said she was interested in the Denver alternative break site because she worked with disabled children last summer, which opened her eyes to the challenges they face.

The other six students on Branch's team had little previous experience with autistic children. Branch said their reactions to the children were transformed throughout the week.

"It was cool to see us change the kids and the kids change us," Branch said.

L i b b y
Johnson, a junior from Lawrence, was a site leader for a group of seven students who volunteered in Atlanta. Her group worked directly with the homeless population. Johnson said she did not know what to expect going into the trip, but knew Atlanta would be very different from Kansas City.

The group visited Peach and Pine, the largest homeless shelter in Atlanta. Johnson said the room was full of narrow bunk beds with an inch and a half of foam on them. People would often leave sicker than when they came in because the shelter was so dirty. She said she was shocked that the people living there considered it better than living outside.



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Students visited Peach and Pine, the largest homeless shelter in Atlanta, through the Alternative Breaks program during spring break. Sixty-eight students volunteered at 10 locations in the U.S.

"That didn't look like it could be better than anything," Johnson said.

The group stayed at a church called the Emmaus House, which hosts after school programs and works with the community to help prevent poverty. Johnson said she enjoyed working with the kids in the church's after school program

because they were so happy, just like any other kids, and it was important to help keep them from living in terrible conditions.

JAMIE BRANCH
Topeka freshman

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L a u r i s s a
Beckman, a freshman from Louisburg, also went on the Atlanta trip. She said that the trip helped her to break-down stereotypes and that she learned homelessness could happen to anyone. Both Beckman and Johnson said they learned from speaking with people who were previously homeless at a halfway house run by Atlanta Outreach.

"I realized it's not necessarily that they are lazy or anything like that, but it could basically happen to anyone. One day you could be wealthy and the next day some crazy situation could happen and you could lose it all," Beckman said.

ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK LOCATIONS

- AIDS Foundation
Houston, Texas
- Autism Society
of Colorado
Denver, Colo.
- Humane Borders
Tucson, Ariz.
- Lakeshore Foundation
Birmingham, Ala.
- Lower Nine
New Orleans, La.
- Project Live Love,
Atlanta, Ga.
- Teach For America,
Chicago, Ill.,
and Denver, Colo.
- The Steel Yard
Providence, R.I.
- Volunteers of America
Southeast
Mobile, Ala.

Branch, Johnson and Beckman each said they would definitely go on another alternative break. Branch said after being a site leader on her first trip, she has a few ideas of how she could do a better job next time.

— Edited by Kirsten Hudson