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## Food Bank Cherishes Ossining Special Ed Volunteers

by Tien-Shun Lee 06/03/11

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Ossining High School special education students Sebastian Correa and Omaro Rowe pack food bags at the Food Bank For Westchester.

Photo Credit: Tien-Shun Lee

When Ossining High School special education students first started volunteering at the Food Bank for Westchester in Millwood, it took them 15 to 20 minutes just to put on gloves and get situated.

Yesterday, it took the students less than five minutes to form an efficient assembly line with several people packing items into plastic bags and several others loading the bags into boxes.

"There's not a single day that goes by that I don't see progress on some level," special education teacher Susan Cable said of her students.

The students have been volunteering one or two times per week for the Food Bank for about six years, Cable said. The structured environment of the Food Bank, where tasks are routine and consistent, helps students to adapt easily to the work.

"It's a perfect match for us," said Nancy Lyons, volunteer coordinator at the

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Food Bank. "I can count on them and they're always very agreeable."

On Thursday, Lyons had 926 "Back Pack" bags to be packed. The bags were to be distributed through 18 different sites to children who are at risk for not receiving good meals during weekends when they are not in school.

Cable's nine special education students were expected to pack several hundred of the bags, and the rest would be packed by a volunteer group from the J.P. Morgan financial service company.

When asked if he liked working at the Food Bank, special education student Danny Vasquez responded with a simple "Yes" and a smile. Asked to explain what he liked about the work, he said, "peanut butter and jelly."

"They all have their strengths," Cable said as she watched a teacher's aide correct a student for putting three granola bars instead of two into a bag. "See, some students are not good at putting things in bags so they put the bags into boxes... There's a job for everybody and a job that really needs to be done."

When not working at the Food Bank, Cable's special education students spend two days unpacking and sorting clothes at a TJ Maxx stock room, and one day folding and stuffing envelopes and doing other rote tasks at the Girl Scouts headquarters in Pleasantville.

"They can't sit in a classroom all day. What point would it serve? The traditional academics of school are not in their future," Cable said. "That's why I decided to get them out working, meeting different people and having different bosses."

*What do you think of Cable's methods of special education? Leave your comment below or join TheDailyOssining.com on Facebook.*

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