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A Long Tradition of Service

Peter Bradshaw, a university student who lives in Warrane College in Sydney, Australia, recounts his experiences helping out in a home for the elderly and in a city shelter.

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Warrane College is part of the campus of the University of New South Wales, in Sydney, Australia. We who are residents there have the privilege of furthering our professional formation in a

prestigious academic institution located close to a great city by the Pacific Ocean.

My name is Peter and during 2015 (the academic year ends here in November) I was in charge of coordinating the social outreach projects organized in Warrane. The effort to serve those in need now has a long tradition in Warrane, with many residents taking part in social service projects both nearby and far away. Personally, I have found this job a great help in preparing for the Year of Mercy convoked by the Holy Father.

Throughout the course of 2015 we spent several hours each weekend helping out in a residence for the elderly run by the Little Sisters of the Poor. Each Saturday the team of us who went there had a very enjoyable time, despite what one might at first expect.

When we get there, the nuns who dedicate themselves with such great generosity to caring for the elderly always have a task ready for us.

Usually they ask us to help out in the kitchen, peeling and cutting up fruits and vegetables. They receive abundant donations of excess fruit, and need help in preparing it before it spoils. It's a job that doesn't take a lot of skill, but we don't go there to do something that interests us but something that is really of use.

It's amazing how enjoyable an hour spent cutting up apples can be with a group of friends while talking about university life. And when we run out of topics to discuss, we sometimes start an informal karaoke session as we work.

That's been our usual routine this year but the nuns have also asked us to do other jobs. For example we helped set up the barbecue for an

open house they were holding. And for Palm Sunday we helped to clean and decorate the chapel. They are always very grateful for our help, but on this occasion the nuns even prepared a nice snack for us.

But what perhaps has been most fruitful for the residents at Warrane has been our collaboration with the St. Vincent de Paul Society. With their coordination, on Tuesdays in the evening we visited a city shelter in Sydney and distributed coupons exchangeable for food to those most in need. We go to see people who have asked the St. Vincent de Paul Society for help, and our job is to speak with them for a while, check that their needs are real, and give them the coupons. These encounters can sometimes result in unforgettable experiences on realizing how difficult daily life is for some people.

A number of them come from broken homes and fall into using drugs. But others were once quite successful in life and then, owing to bad luck or a character defect, and sometimes without any blame on their part, they ended up losing everything. We try to spend some time with them and listen to their stories, and do all we can to make them feel understood.

I always return from these visits worn out, but also with new strength to take up my daily work. And also with a deeper gratitude for all that God has given me, in this recently begun Year of Mercy.

Peter Bradshaw