

## Emma Gonzales

After a foot surgery prevented her from working a full-time job, Emma Gonzales decided to make lemonade out of lemons and become a volunteer at the shelter. Emma has been a volunteer here for a nearly two years now, spearheading the operations of our clothing closet – handling the continuous flow of in-kind donations we receive daily. “I came down here with a friend and noticed every time I came down here [CISS] the clothing closet was closed,” she said. “So I got a hold of someone and filled out an application.”

Emma starts her day going to the clothing closet: straightening out items, refolding, making sure that the closet looks nice for clients. She then travels back and forth from the donation room to the closet, unloading clothing items from shirts, pants, sweaters, shoes and coats. The amount of donations can vary day to day, and as we approach the shelter’s busiest time of the year, it can become very hectic – “but we have to keep up with it,” she says. She even decorates the closet on certain holidays, like Halloween and Christmas. She’s made it more than a job: she’s made it a passion.

“I love the people, I really do. They can be frustrating at times. You just have to go by the way they’re living, you have to understand they’re not happy but you just try the best to make their day.” There can be an array of reasons why someone might need clothing Emma says, but she also adds that just by volunteering some of your time, you can make others feel a little bit better every day. She stresses the importance of being considerate to the influx of people coming in and out of the shelter, because the type of characters can vary and homelessness can be such a complex issue to understand. “You have to treat every person by their situation.. to have compassion and try to help everyone the best you can. Even if they’re not helpable, just try,” she said.

While Emma continues to volunteer her time at CISS, she encourages others to give back and get involved when they can. All it takes she says is a blend of a love to help others, a passion for people and gratitude and compassion.