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After college, I really started getting involved in volunteering. I moved to different places — Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and then to Cleveland. Volunteering was a way to get to know

the community and people who had similar values. It just gets you out of your own problems. And it reminds you of this greater world, this world you might have forgotten about.

I'm the director of volunteers at the National Council of Jewish Women/Cleveland. But I'm also the co-founder of ClevelandGives, a young-professional organization that started about a year and a half ago. We looked around Cleveland, and saw if you wanted to

volunteer at, say, Habitat for Humanity, there were a lot of places where you can continue to volunteer at Habitat for Humanity. But if you wanted to see different places to volunteer at in Cleveland, there were no opportunities to see what the different nonprofits were doing. We thought they were doing so many great things. We started ClevelandGives so people could see the great nonprofit opportunities in Cleveland, and realize they didn't have to do

the same thing. It's supported by the National Council of Jewish Women because our missions are the same: to help women, children and families in Cuyahoga County.

► **Sometimes, misery is about isolation** — you're so inside your own head. Volunteering is about connecting. It's connecting with another human being. It's connecting that person to the community.

► **With our volunteering events, we always want to offer the volunteer something so you learn a new skill.** You learn about cooking and you learn about mural painting.

► **Once you are volunteering, you realize, 'Oh, wow! Look at what I'm gaining!' But I think that's probably not the first instinct when you think about volunteering.** Probably the first thing you think is, 'Oh, what a big sacrifice I'm making.'

► **One of [ClevelandGives'] last events was at the Ohio City Bicycle Co-op.** It's a really cool co-op in Ohio City that most of our members who attended the event had never heard of before. They refurbish old bicycles and give them to neighborhood or low-income kids. They teach the kids about bike safety and helmets. You can also go there and take classes about how to take care of your bike and bike safety. They have a shop there. You can buy refurbished bikes, too.

► **It was a cool event.** People learned how to do things like change a tire, which is something that everyone can use that they might never have used before. So they were taught this skill, and then they gave it back to the Ohio City Bike Co-op — they needed all these tires changed.

► **A lot of these nonprofits know what's going on in Cleveland, or they have an understanding of the neighborhood or the people.** So when you get to know more nonprofits, I think you get to know Cleveland more.



► **We do this Partners in Reading Group at the National Council of Jewish Women.** Every month we go into the school system. We visit schools in Cleveland Heights, Shaker Heights and Cleveland and do a book club with fifth-grade girls. It's like a normal adult book club except there's no wine. They read a book, and we read a book. We talk about the book and discuss the issues.

► **We were working with a group of fifth-grade boys this year, and they weren't reading the book.** It would have been really easy to just stop going, to just say, 'We're putting in all this work, and they're not putting in the work, it's just a lost cause.' Instead, we kept going, and we kept trying to get them engaged in the book. Halfway through the year, maybe they read a quarter of a book. Or they read a few pages. So we kept engaging with them. We didn't give up on them, which I think is an important thing in volunteering — not giving up on the person.

► **When you go through your stuff looking [for things] to donate, remember that there's another human being at the end of it.** If the stuff is awful, smells and you would never use it, throw it out. Don't just donate it. Everyone at their core has dignity.

► **Gratefulness is what I've gotten most from volunteering.** And I think gratefulness is one of the best traits that you can have to live a positive life.

► **I want [my children] to go to the hospitals.** I want them to go to the food bank and donate food, to see the difference between going to a supermarket and being upset because they can't have gummy bears and going to a food bank and seeing how grateful people are for an orange or a potato.

► **I'm always worried when we start a new project that we're not going to be able to do it** — there's a worry that, 'Oh God, we're going to commit to this, and we're not going to have the people or the manpower to be able to do it.' But people continue to amaze me. People, at their core, want to help. They want to be involved.

— Interview by Lyme Thompson