



SMALL PROJECTS WITH BIG RESULTS

Doing Good, Feeling Good
The Little Nonprofit That Could

BY MARGARET CRANDALL

From the outside, Goods For Good looks like a quiet, empty school building that could use some TLC. But inside, it's neither quiet nor empty. In the front room, Executive Director Elizabeth Workman is playing a version of nonprofit Whac-A-Mole: Making space on long tables for a children's book drive project, answering volunteers' questions, laughing as one of them parades around in a donated evening gown, taking photos for social media and future newsletters – all while simultaneously working on the projects she's planned for the next few months.

In the back rooms, volunteers are sorting through hundreds of bags and boxes of donated clothing, tossing unusable stuff into “re-donate” and “yuck” piles, while folding and storing

the usable items that will go to shelters for migrants, pop-up events for resettled refugees, and into orders that come in from partner groups. “Who was looking for women's shorts in size small?” someone calls out. “I'll take those!” another responds. “Have more men's shoes come in yet? We're getting low on size 9.”

Goods For Good projects range from coordinating meal preparation for local shelters, creating “We Care” gift bags for isolated seniors, collecting fans for local residents without air conditioning, and much more. Since 2020, Goods For Good has worked with more than 37 nonprofit partners, provided more than \$270,000 in donated goods, and helped serve more than 49,000 people.



Cleveland Park residents, Margaret Crandall, Kathy Okun, Nancy Edson

None of this could have happened without the 1,300 volunteers who have pitched in to help.

“This all happened organically,” says Workman. “When the pandemic hit, I started cooking food for a shelter, then a couple of friends helped me the next time, and after a few months, we had 40 people cooking on a regular basis. It grew so fast that pretty soon I was fielding calls from local nonprofits needing support in various ways. That first year we had something like 600 people cooking for four shelters, collecting toys and games for quarantined low-income kids, assembling Covid health kits for families and seniors, making Birthday-in-a-Box gifts for kids in area shelters and so much more.”

“For me, it's about direct service,” says Cleveland Park resident Kathy Okun, who moved from New York to Washington right before the pandemic. She learned about Goods For Good from the Cleveland Park listserv. “My friend and I signed up on the Goods For Good site to start cooking meals for shelters and dropping them off, because no one was allowed to go in because of the pandemic. Now we can cook *at* the shelter, which we love because of the human connection with the staff and the residents. Everybody can come together



Elizabeth Workman, founder Goods for Good



around the idea of food. ‘What's for dinner?’ is a universal question.”

Nancy Edson, another Cleveland Park neighbor, also learned about Goods For Good from the listserv. “I heard about the new family shelter opening near the Giant on Wisconsin Avenue. I wanted to help but was reluctant to just knock on their door. Through Goods For Good, I was able to drop off birthday cupcakes and party supplies for those kids.” Edson's three-year-old students also pitched in. “I had a little pod during the pandemic. I talked with my students about how they would feel if they lived alone and that's when they said they wanted to help. So my son and I made

cookies for isolated low-income seniors, and my students decorated cards for the bags.” She appreciates the ease and variety of Goods For Good projects. “They do all the hard work and I get to do the fun stuff,” she laughs. “They make it so easy. You can always check out a project online before committing, and there are so many choices there's bound to be something that plays to your strengths.”

And this writer (hi from Quebec House!) is switching to the first person for one paragraph. Some of the most rewarding work I've done through Goods For Good is stocking and organizing the “clothing pantries” at the

migrant center in Maryland with those donations I described earlier. (Many migrants have nothing but the clothes on their backs when they arrive.) During one shift, I saw a young woman, who had arrived just that morning, wearing a clean shirt and a pair of jeans she'd picked out from the pantry. The clothes fit her perfectly, and the smile on her face was proof that these small efforts really can make a big difference.

Want to get involved? Goods For Good can always use more individual and family volunteers, and students can help out and earn community service hours. Financial contributions are welcomed year-round, with an annual appeal in November. Through the Ally program, volunteers can serve as neighborhood points of contact, collection sites, and spokespeople for Goods For Good projects. And if you've got a car and some time, drivers are always needed to transport goods from our projects to those in need.

Learn more at goodsforgooddc.org/.



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