

SMALL PROJECTS
WITH BIG RESULTS

DOING GOOD,
FEELING GOOD

THE LITTLE NONPROFIT THAT COULD

BY MARGARET CRANDALL



Elizabeth Workman,
founder, Goods for Good

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 nonprofit 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 low-income 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.

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 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, and making Birthday-in-a-Box gifts for kids in area shelters."

Spring Valley resident Ximena Traa-Valarezo, a Social Development consultant at the World Bank, started volunteering with Goods For Good when the pandemic started.





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Since many of her international work projects were put on hold, and traveling was canceled altogether, she decided to get involved locally. “I was looking for nonprofits where I can give back to the community here, particularly immigrants. We are all immigrants. I’m an immigrant from Ecuador who came here 43 years ago on a Fulbright scholarship. My husband is an IMF retiree from The Netherlands.” When she saw Goods For Good needed people to cook meals for people with HIV and terminal cancer, she signed up because “it was something that I could do safely, at home. And I like cooking.” The website made it easy, too. “The instructions are clear and well explained, and everything is transparent and organized and sensitive to the needs of the people they’re serving. That impressed me.”

Once the pandemic restrictions eased, Traa-Valarezo wanted to do more than just cook. She signed up to help sort donations and fill orders for clothes at Goods For Good headquarters and now she’s also leading Goods For Good pop-up events to distribute clothing to recently resettled refugees at local apartment complexes. “These are not huge megaprojects, but they have a great impact,” she says. “That’s what makes Goods For Good so outstanding. And it’s done all by wonderful volunteers.”

She hopes people reading this will reach out to her or Goods For Good to lend a hand. “I have met so many nice people, many of whom have full- or part-time jobs and still find time to do this work because it’s worth it. It’s not hard, either. Once you get started, you get the hang of it. It’s very gratifying to be able to help.”

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 to and from partner organizations.

Learn more at goodsforgooddc.org.

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