
The Importance of Volunteering in My Life

The cornerstone of birthday parties; the item of choice for food at 3AM: Pizza, something that everyone loves. For me, I went as far as pretending to be lactose intolerant to avoid eating it. I hate pizza. Whenever I can, I avoid eating, smelling, and even being in the proximity of pizza. Don't get me wrong; I love the taste of pizza. Its savory cheese and fragrant sauce, melted on seasoned dough, with a variety of toppings to choose from, actually became my most consumed food growing up. Not by choice, rather that was all I could eat.

Living the "American Dream" was a struggle, especially when my two parents were underemployed, working labor jobs, and our family was living paycheck to paycheck. Given that money was limited, we'd save money every place we could. We had to pay the bills and rent, so we saved where it was easiest – food. We would eat out almost every day of the week because it was more affordable than buying groceries and preparing food. We had limited choices for two reasons: we were strict vegetarians and couldn't afford to drive out every day to access more vegetarian options. Thus we became Renzo's Pizzeria's most loyal customer. Almost every day my dad would walk in after work with a box of pizza in hand. Pizza, the food that everyone loved became the thing I couldn't even look at. It took me back to the times where we struggled the most; the times where we all crammed into one bed; times in which "home" meant anything but. When I look back, I wish that someone had helped us; and that's why when I could, I decided to be the person to help families just like mine.

No other subculture in society is treated as poorly as the urban poor. They are often disdained for being lazy or entirely responsible for the circumstances that they are in. Living close to the city of Chicago, I have witnessed the poverty that runs rampant in every part of the city, as well as the stigma associated with the poor:

"Don't give them any money, they'll just buy alcohol or cigarettes".

The thought of wanting a warm meal or a place to stay is overlooked entirely by everyone passing the urban poor. However we cannot possibly think like that, that's too humanizing. We treat the poor like they're lesser than us; we don't treat them the way humans deserve to be treated.

Coming from a poor background, I can easily relate to the urban poor. Greatly shaken by the utter disregard for the well-being of the homeless, I take things into my own hands. For many years now, I've been actively involved in food distribution for the homeless in Chicago. My friends and I have been working with local eateries to collect the food they would throw out

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every Friday to give out to shelters and pantries in Chicago, and thus feeding those who cannot afford a meal. Also, instead of participating in the greedy and materialistic madness of Black Friday, every Black Friday my friends and I purchase and prepare traditional Thanksgiving meals to hand out to homeless people in Chicago. To give away and serve the poor on a day that is saturated with self-indulgence is something I take great pride in, and is special and unique to me only.

Volunteering has played such a critical role in my life; it allows me to actually make a difference. Today, I've seen authorities simply throw money at a problem as the ubiquitous solution to all issues. This is extremely flawed. I believe in the goodness of humanity. I believe in leading a life as men and women for others, even with the widespread societal ills around us. I have a social responsibility to do my part to express at least a little goodness for those in need.

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