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Priceless

Homeless. Hopeful. Heros. These few words have changed my life. It's not just the thought of volunteering, it's the effort, the commitment, and the time spent helping others for no pay. These words have been following me like a shadow on a hot day. To me, volunteering doesn't just impact the person I'm helping but it impacted me as well.

My church has opened up many opportunities to volunteering. My favorite one is IHN- Interfaith Hospitality Network. People who attend this week-long stay at our church are homeless and waiting for a permanent home. They stay at our church and need company. My dad and I ALWAYS volunteer to sleep over and entertain the people staying. I bring toys for the kids and entertain them. It's incredible how appreciative they are having so little and knowing how much I have at home.

Secondly, the word hopeful describes a mission trip I went on this past summer to New York City. We visited different food pantries and prepared, served and cleaned up after homeless people in some of the worst parts of the city. Feeding, giving and socializing with these homeless people was just mind-blowing and an experience I will never forget. So many sad stories were shared and punched a hole in my heart but their smiles were priceless. They said thank you non-stop. These food pantries depend on groups like ours to serve 100-200 people daily. The group I went with was called YSOP- Youth Service Opportunities Project. They recruit volunteers and send them to soup kitchens, pantries and even daycare centers for children who has a parent in jail. I hope more people volunteer. I barely knew the people who went on this trip. But in the end we had so much fun and I don't think I could get a better job volunteering than this!

Lastly, I volunteer for the STARS program at Brick Hockey Club. It teaches special need kids how to skate and play hockey. Hockey is one of my favorite sports so this was an easy volunteer position to take! Every Sunday morning coaches and players get together to help kids build their

confidence. These kids are so smart and unbelievable. I enjoy lacing up my skates just to see their smiles. Their appreciation is incredible and their happiness shoots adrenaline down my spine and straight to my heart. These kids call us hockey heroes but I think they are truly the heroes!

Volunteering isn't just showing up. It is an incredible opportunity to gain experience and share your story with others. It's also a time to encourage others not so fortunate and to inspire them. Volunteering impacted me as greatly as it impacted those I helped. IHN blows my mind to see the kids playing with so little. The mission trip was an unforgettable experience. The special kids who show up on Sundays to play hockey are an inspiration to me. Volunteering is working without pay because the experience is priceless!