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## Volunteering Is Worth More Than Just Your Time

By Nicole Kiser

When The Stewpot first opened in 1975 as a soup kitchen, volunteers entirely ran the organization. Now, almost 46 years since its opening, The Stewpot still relies on volunteers to provide additional support and services to clients and staff. “We have a mail program volunteer each day of the week, we have art program volunteers, [and] we have different volunteers that work with the children and youth program,” says Adrienne Nicholson, the manager of volunteer services at The Stewpot.

Other volunteers provide meal service at the Second Chance Cafe, sort and pack food for food distribution or volunteer for special events like vision clinics or voter registration workshops. In a typical year, Dominique Anthony, the outgoing Stewpot Alliance president, says that The Stewpot Alliance, a support organization for The Stewpot, uses their 150 or more volunteers to host annual events like a talent show, a women’s tea, an art show and Soup’s On, The Stewpot’s main fundraising event.

### So how do volunteers help nonprofits?

Volunteers provide both **their time and expertise** to the nonprofits they help. As of April 2021, the value of a volunteer hour in America is **\$28.54**.

With millions of volunteers donating billions of hours, volunteers generate **over \$200 billion** in value for nonprofits. The value volunteers have provided has allowed The Stewpot to grow to include a wide range of social services, including casework services, children and youth programs, and, most recently, rapid rehousing services.

“We’re able to get more done,” says Nicholson. “We’re able to better serve our clients, more efficiently as well, which allows us to save a lot of money, which we can then pour into other programs and other resources to help [the] men and women and children who we serve.”

When the pandemic and subsequent lockdown restricted volunteering at The Stewpot, “pretty much all of our staff members pitched in,” says John Swindle, the volunteer and meal service coordinator at The Stewpot. “At the dining hall, our kitchen staff stepped up to help serve...[For] all of our other volunteer opportunities, our staff picked up the slack.”

In some cases, “the different programs pivoted and turned to hiring additional staff to help get the job done,” says Nicholson. “Especially our food distribution program,” says Swindle, “There is a lot of food that comes in for that program and we had



*Volunteers serving lunch for The Stewpot’s meal service at The Bridge. Courtesy of Rob Guild.*

a lot of sorting that had to be done... so we hired extra staff specifically for that.”

Volunteers haven’t been totally absent. Throughout the year, volunteers created manna bags, back-to-school and holiday handouts, and bagged meals for clients of The Stewpot. Volunteers could also sign up to help with children and youth services online. And, like any other year, the volunteers have helped prevent staff burnout by supporting staff and providing additional resources.

According to **Forbes**, employee turnover has long been an issue for the nonprofit sector with the voluntary annual turnover rate at 19%, sig-

nificantly higher than the all-industry average of 12%. A recent **study** surveyed over 1,000 nonprofit employees: “45% of responding nonprofit employees indicated that they will seek new or different employment in

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# STREET *Zine*

STREET *Zine* is a program of The Stewpot.



The STREET *Zine* is a monthly newspaper published by The Stewpot, a ministry of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas. The Stewpot provides services and resources for people experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of being homeless. The organization also offers opportunities for a new life.

As part of this ministry, the STREET *Zine* seeks to raise awareness about the issues surrounding homelessness and poverty. At the same time, the monthly publication offers financial opportunity for homeless clients who sell the paper to Dallas residents. Vendors are able to move towards economic self-sufficiency by using the money they receive from selling copies to purchase bus passes, food, and necessary living expenses. Clients also receive stipends for contributing articles to STREET *Zine*.

The content in STREET *Zine* does not necessarily reflect the views or endorsement of its publisher, editors, contributors, sponsors, or advertisers. To learn more about this publication, contact Betty Heckman, Director of Enrichment, 1835 Young Street, Dallas, Texas 75201 or BettyH@thestewpot.org. And to read more about STREET *Zine*, a member of the International Network of Street Papers, go to [www.thestewpot.org/streetzine](http://www.thestewpot.org/streetzine).

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## A Letter from the Executive Director

By Brenda Snitzer

**Volunteers:** They are the lifeblood of nonprofits. Volunteers make it possible for a nonprofit to do much more than it could with only staff. Stewpot volunteers are part of what makes The Stewpot special. The Stewpot was started 46 years ago by church staff and volunteers who wanted to feed people in the neighborhood who were experiencing homelessness. Some of those volunteers from the beginning still volunteer and support us today.

Without volunteers, we would never have been able to make the impact we have. It would be impossible to name all the incredible volunteers who have made a difference in the lives of those we serve. In normal times, which means before the pandemic, we have over 4,270 volunteers a year who give their time at The Stewpot.

They serve meals at our Second Chance Café at The Bridge; help make prepared meals and package groceries to give community members in need at the food distribution events three times a month; sort clothing to provide to our clients; sort, file and distribute client mail; work with our artists or Representative Payee clients; and write and publish STREET *Zine*. Our volunteers on the Stewpot Board help us stay fiscally and organizationally on track and our Alliance Board and members help us raise money through our annual luncheon, Soups On, to support our programs. These volunteers provide over 38,000 hours a year. Their service translates to over a million dollars in individuals providing volunteer “staffing.”

When the pandemic first began, and for over 13 months, we suspended volunteers from serving. It was distressing because not only do volunteers help do so much, they are a huge part of the Stewpot family, bringing joy to all around them as they serve. We really missed them! And we are so glad we have been able to bring them safely back to campus.

In this issue, you will hear some of our volunteers’ stories. They have made a difference and many of their lives have been changed as well. One such story is a romance that began in 2005 between one of our meal service volunteers, Scott Erickson, who worked at the Dallas Morning News, and a staff member, Suzanne, who was then the Director of Children and Youth Program. This fall they will have been married nine years and Suzanne Erickson is now our Senior Director of Programs.

My own entrée to a career in nonprofits came out of my family’s volunteer story. My parents volunteered both at my sister’s school and for the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, an important organization for us because my sister was diabetic. Both my parents served as co-presidents and active fundraisers for years, so our whole family volunteered there. That experience set me on a course to serve on staff of nonprofits for the past three decades.

My life is immensely different because of the volunteers that I have worked with over those 30 years, including my husband, children and extended family who all volunteer wherever I am. Recently, I was so pleased to have my Dallas Regional Chamber — Leadership Dallas ‘21 class volunteer at The Stewpot. My classmates and their family members served in our food distribution program as well as creating Manna Bags and special cards for our clients. They brought their children, from teens all the way down to age two, and taught the joy of service as they started them on a legacy of care, concern and giving back for others. It’s never too early to teach our children this lesson.

The Stewpot Volunteer Services is led by manager, Adrienne Nicholson, and coordinator, John Swindle. They are amazing folks who can help you find the exact right volunteer opportunity. You can contact them through [volunteer@thestewpot.org](mailto:volunteer@thestewpot.org). We hope you will come serve with us!

*Brenda Snitzer is executive director of The Stewpot.*



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## The Pastor's Letter: Living on Threshold Time

By The Rev. Amos Disasa

I watched the opening ceremony of the Olympics with my kids. We tuned in halfway through the parade of athletes. Mali and Monaco were #1 and #2 respectively on the Disasa family best-dressed list. The Brazilian flag-bearers stopped and danced the Samba, predictably, on their way out. If you didn't look past the tight camera shots on the athletes to see the empty seats of Tokyo's Olympic stadium, the traditional parade of athletes appeared just as it had in previous opening ceremonies.

But the strange juxtaposition of the scene couldn't be avoided entirely. Most of the athletes raised their arms to wave as they walked in. Which, of course, invited one of my kids to ask, to nobody in particular, "Who are they waving to?" But the obvious answer, "Nobody!", was too unnerving for me to say aloud.

Across the country, Americans have been planning like this fall will be our opening ceremonies. Everybody is ready to be back in the people-gathering business. Still, I think it's

healthy for us to acknowledge that our best plans can't account for what we do not know.

Look around, and you'll notice that we currently reside in threshold time, an interlude between a past we can't return to and a future we do not fully know. In threshold time, it's okay to ask questions like, who will be there for our parade, and what will they expect? And it's normal, even faithful, to wonder if we too will lead parades for which there is nobody to wave to.

You may be tempted to hear pessimism or worry in the paragraph above. Please don't. Those who choose to stand firm on thresholds are on holy ground. God is most active when we don't know what's coming next. The biblical record is full of stories that recall how people were transformed into prophets only after a time of walking in circles, waiting in the dark or stuck helpless in stormy waters. When I consider our circumstances beside the witness of God in scripture two truths emerge: 1) God's up to something, and 2) This interlude is likely to last longer than we want.

Some of what we remember as normal is re-emerging. And it will be tempting to accept what we recognize from the past as evidence

of where God is now. But God was never in the familiar rituals or the symbols. God was in the people, and the people are still going through the tumult of the pandemic, which has taught us that our bodies are fragile, our needs are simple and there isn't enough time to love things or people or dreams that don't love us back.

You don't go through that and come out normal.

Thing is, we don't know how we will come out. Despite all announcements to the contrary, this is not over. Not even close. We are in between the end of the beginning and what will be next. If this feels ominous, let it.

We are in a season of waiting for change we can't make come sooner, through time that is not linear, to arrive at a place we would never choose to go. The good news is that God is here in this season of waiting. While we are here, may we grow in the spiritual discipline of doing nothing, so that God can complete the one thing we've always said we need: transformation.

*The Rev. Amos Disasa is senior pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas.*



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This is Crucial is a podcast with live and interactive recording sessions focused on healing justice and racial equity. It is an opportunity to learn from a rotating guest list of experts as they sit down to discuss these important, timely, and sometimes uncomfortable topics. This is Crucial is hosted by Rev. Amos J. Disasa (Senior Pastor of FPC Dallas) and Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell (Senior Pastor of FPC Berkeley).

# Volunteering as the Golden Thread of Democracy: A Conversation with John Bridgeland

By Bill McKenzie

*John Bridgeland, CEO of Civic and co-founder and CEO of the COVID Collaborative, is author of Heart of the Nation: Volunteering and America's Civic Spirit. The Ohioan formerly served as director of the USA Freedom Corps under President George W. Bush and as a member of the White House Council for Community Solutions under President Barack Obama. He spoke with STREETZine's Nicole Kiser and Bill McKenzie about the importance of volunteering, its impact on individuals who serve and on those whom they serve, and the difference volunteering has made in his own life.*

**Your book, *The Heart of the Nation*, focuses on the value of volunteerism, which you call “the golden thread of democracy.” Why is volunteerism so important for individuals as well as for our communities and our democracy?**

Volunteering is the opportunity for ordinary Americans to do extraordinary things. It gives them a chance to leave their scratch on their neighborhood, their community and on history.

Benjamin Rush, a Founding Father, said that when you serve today, you connect yourself to other

Americans — those in the past, some of whom fought and died for our freedom, but also to future generations. The legacy of your service is the foundation of the world they will inherit. That is a beautiful statement of the connectedness of this tradition that Alexis de Tocqueville was so taken by when he traveled this country.

In our system of democracy, the highest public office is “citizen,” not “president” or “senator”. We have to remind Americans of the centrality of their roles as volunteers and community leaders, and of the importance of serving on boards of nonprofits and community organizations as well as in government itself, and the power of volunteers to effect change.

[Historian] Doris Kearns Goodwin says that transformational change always occurs from the ground up. Citizens who cared about places and went to protect them led to the creation of the national park system. Americans who cared deeply about those who were excluded from the Constitution changed this country through the civil rights movement. There are countless examples of “big citizenship.”

Sometimes people think that volunteering is this nice little activity that happens on the weekend. But Martin Luther King [Jr.] was a volunteer. He had no elected office, but he changed this country through his platform. The act of volunteering is something that is noble and that we should respect. It can also be something that affects one life or one neighborhood or that changes the landscape of the country.

**You have used the term “big citizenship.” I love that term, but what does it mean?**

I am a Republican because I believe in big citizenship more than big government. Seeing individual citizens come together in common cause from all different backgrounds is big citizenship. Our

country was founded on the notion that Americans would be active citizens — Benjamin Franklin’s challenge of “a Republic if you can keep it.” You do need to engage government to bring things to scale nationwide. And programs can provide resources, support innovation and bring big ideas to scale.

But President [George W.] Bush used to talk about unleashing “the armies of compassion.” Fundamentally, it is human-being-to-human-being and neighbor-to-neighbor that make up the “big citizenship” necessary to tackle problems.

**Similarly, you have talked about making volunteering a “core strategic function and not just an add-on.” What do you mean by that?**

I think young people in the United States lack rites of passage. As you become an adult, there ought to be an opportunity and common expectation for every 18-year-old to have a year of national service, where they work on a public challenge with people who are different from them.

National service is a way to make volunteering systemic. We should embrace that. It is extraordinary what committed people can do. And we know that for every full-time national service corps member, they leverage an additional 32 volunteers in their projects, such as a Habitat for Humanity build.

**How would you make volunteering more accessible for everyone?**

After 9/11, the White House’s Freedom Corps office organized over 300 businesses to change policies and practices to support volunteering, such as approving paid leave for volunteering, providing “dollars for doers” and organizing them in a collective effort called, Business Strengthening America.

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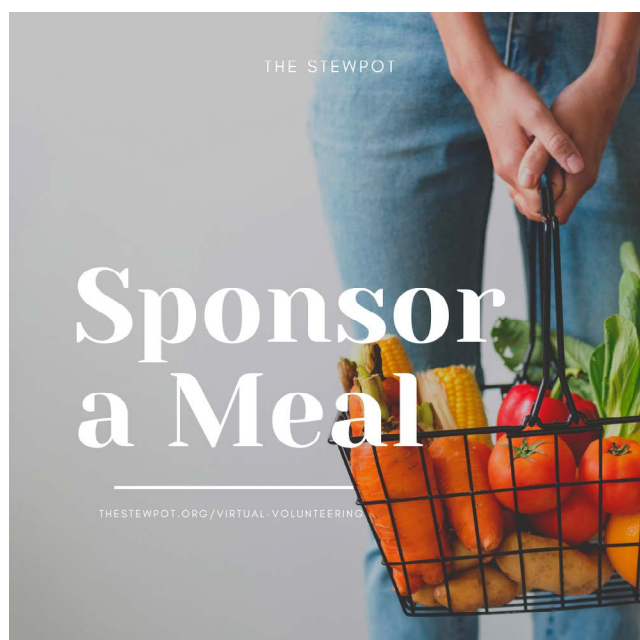
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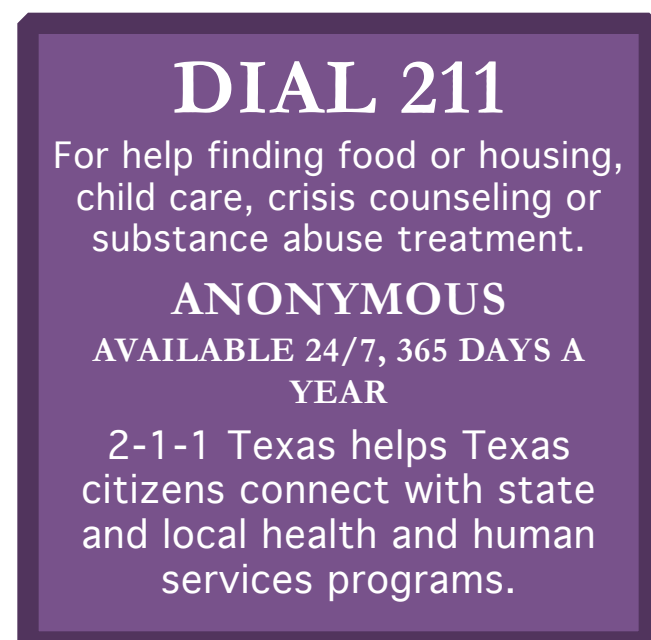
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# A View from the Street: From Student to Volunteer to Employee

By Sarah Disasa

Elizabeth Ocaña is no stranger to The Stewpot. She has been involved with The Stewpot since she was in second grade. “I attended the children and youth program, known as Saturday School,” she said. Her mother had heard about the program through some of their neighbors and through City Park Elementary School.

Saturday School, now called Saturday Kids’ Club, provides enrichment programs for children in first through fifth grades. Activities at Saturday Kids’ Club include art, drama, computers, games, group discussion and field trips. When Ocaña began attending Saturday Kids’ Club in second grade, it was just the beginning of her involvement with The Stewpot.

***It was a natural next step for Ocaña to come on staff at The Stewpot, after having been a student of the Saturday Kids’ Club program, a Venturing Crew participant, a college scholarship recipient and a Stewpot volunteer.***

During her middle school and high school years, Ocaña began volunteering at The Stewpot with Saturday Kids’ Club. The very same program that

served Ocaña as a child had become a place for her to serve others. “The rewarding part of being involved was being able to give back to the program,” she reflected.

In high school, Ocaña took part in Venturing Crew, another program at The Stewpot that serves at-risk youth in grades 9-12. During Venturing Crew, youth meet on Wednesday nights and participate in activities such as field trips, ropes courses, college visits, campouts and other special events to encourage furthering their education and developing their interpersonal skills.

Ocaña’s connection with The Stewpot has impacted her life in many ways. “But the main one that impacted my life,” she said, “was receiving a scholarship to continue off to college.” With the help of The Stewpot’s educational scholarship, Ocaña attended and graduated from Mountain View College. “I probably would have struggled getting into college without their help,” she said.

It was a natural next step for Ocaña to come on staff at The Stewpot, after having been a student of the Saturday Kids’ Club program, a Venturing Crew participant, a college scholarship recipient and a Stewpot volunteer. In 2015, she was offered a position with the Saturday Kids’ Club program.

Ocaña still works with the Saturday Kids’ Club program when her schedule allows. Her full-time job is with Carrollton Farmers Branch ISD, where she is a lead teacher at a child development center. When she is available, Ocaña helps to continue the good work that others poured into her life when she was a child at The Stewpot, by teaching and mentoring the current children who attend the program.

She recalls her own childhood experience at The Stewpot as a place where she had many friends, participated in fun activities and engaged in hands-on learning with field trips. “It was a place I con-



***Elizabeth Ocaña working with a child that participates in The Stewpot’s children and youth program. Courtesy of The Stewpot.***

sidered my second home,” she said, “a program that changed my life and even my family’s. I remember having such amazing teachers,” she said.

It was the teachers and mentors from Saturday Kids’ Club and Venturing Crew that left a lasting impression on Ocaña. “They were a great support system,” she said. Ocaña explained that since her parents did not know English, it was hard for them to help with finding resources to further her education.

It is no surprise that Ocaña is continuing her education still today. She is pursuing a bachelor’s in education at Brookhaven College. “Once I get my degree, I plan on continuing my education career,” she said.

*Sarah Disasa is a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas and the STREETZine Editorial Advisory Board.*





# Joe Delivers: A Stewpot Volunteer Helps Street People Get Their Mail

By Poppy Sundeen

Homelessness means more than no place to live. It means no place to get mail. Which, in turn, means no address to use for job applications, no valid Texas ID, no voter registration card and not much of a shot at turning things around.

Joe Williams is one of The Stewpot mailroom volunteers who helps get clients' mail — and their lives — moving again.

“The Stewpot provides clients with an address, so they can have mail sent to them,” says Williams. “It’s a big operation — picking up the mail, alphabetizing it and filing it in addition to handing it out.”

Passing mail out to recipients is just one piece of the overall process, but it’s a particularly rewarding part. “I’ve seen the light go on in people’s eyes when they get their Social Security card or an ID card so they can get jobs and benefits.”

## A history of volunteerism

Working in the mailroom isn’t the only way Williams has made a difference in the lives of Stewpot clients. He served for several years as a representative payee helping people on disability manage their money.

“The Stewpot provides a bank account where clients’ Social Security and other benefit checks can be deposited and kept in their name. Representative payees meet with them to help them devise a

budget, including cash to meet their weekly needs.”

The program allowed Williams to share the expertise he acquired during his 35-year career as an investment adviser and his education. “I majored in economics at Southern Illinois University.” After college he was drafted. “I spent a year in Vietnam. I was lucky. I wasn’t in the worst of the war.”

In 1975, he married, and he and his wife moved back to Dallas, where he pursued his career and became involved with the Children’s Medical Center (now Children’s Health). “I went through their training program to become a part-time volunteer chaplain.” He was often called to fill in for other chaplains who couldn’t work the overnight shift. “I met with parents of very sick children, some who were facing difficult decisions.”

***He looks forward to seeing the familiar faces of Stewpot clients. “You get to know their names and recognize them when they come in to pick up their mail.”***

## A return to organized religion

For most of their married life, Williams and his wife were not affiliated with a church. Then, about two decades ago, they began thinking about joining a congregation. They chose First Presbyterian Church in downtown Dallas. “I consider one of the core teachings of Christ to be the idea of loving your neighbor. What I found in the church was strong evidence of the practice of that commandment.”

Williams sees the commitment in action through The Stewpot, a ministry of the First Presbyterian Church. “It was started 46 years ago to serve people who were our neighbors — street people living near the church. I thought that was evidence of putting our money where our mouth is.”

Since joining First Presbyterian, Williams has become involved both as a Stewpot volunteer and as a member of church leadership. He’s currently serving a three-year term on the congregation’s governing body, the Session.



*Joe Williams. Courtesy of Joe Williams.*

## Pandemic precautions put volunteers on hold

In spring of 2020, as COVID-19 spread through North Texas, Session members made the decision to halt onsite volunteer participation at The Stewpot. It was a necessary precaution to limit virus transmission, but it strained the ability to provide vital services, such as mail delivery, to the community.

Staff members stepped up to make sure the mail continued to go through uninterrupted. “Our Stewpot staff came in and worked the mailroom and handed out the mail throughout the pandemic,” explains Williams.

## Back to the mailroom

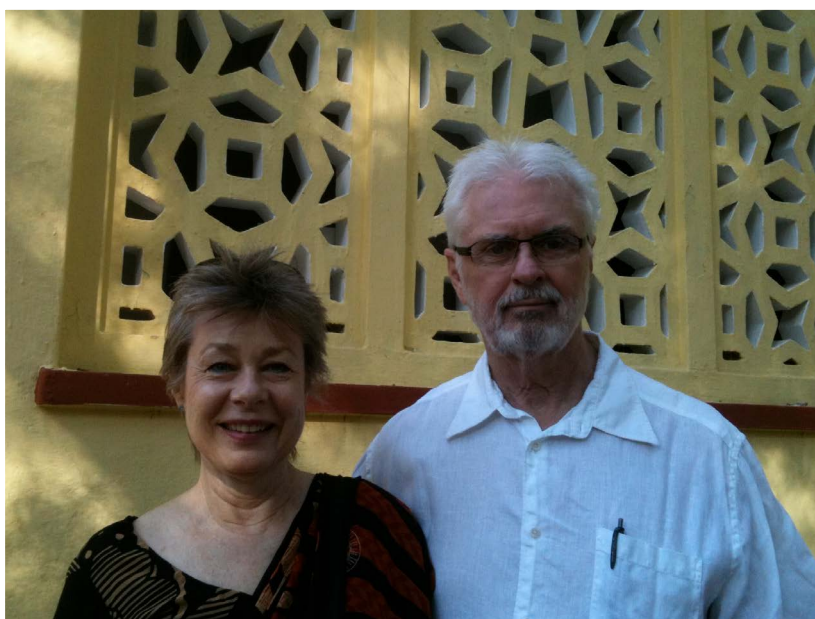
With the widespread availability of COVID-19 vaccinations and a relaxation of pandemic restrictions in recent months, volunteers are now able to return to The Stewpot. Williams was among the first volunteers to come back after getting the all-clear.

Now his Wednesdays are once again filled with sorting, alphabetizing and filing mail for Stewpot clients. “I’m not back to handing out mail yet, but hoping to start that again soon.”

He looks forward to seeing the familiar faces of Stewpot clients. “You get to know their names and recognize them when they come in to pick up their mail.”

It’s gratifying work, especially when a homeless client gets a long-awaited letter or a critical piece of identification. “I get to see the benefits of what I’m doing and what The Stewpot is providing.”

*Poppy Sundeen, a Dallas writer, is a member of the STREETZine Editorial Advisory Board.*



*Joe Williams (right) and his wife. Courtesy of Joe Williams.*



Continued from page 1

the next five years. Of that group, 23% said that nonprofits would not be among the types of organizations they intend to pursue." Utilizing volunteers effectively can **reduce employee workload and expand mission impact**.

In addition to reducing the cost of turnover, volunteers can serve as a potential employee pool. Volunteers that are hired on as employees will be familiar with the organization and its mission, are dedicated to the organization's cause and may have already formed connections with clients. The Stewpot found some of their part-time employees through their volunteering.

***"It's amazing to have ambassadors out in the community. The volunteers that we have feel like they are...a part of The Stewpot family and so they represent us out in the community," says Nicholson.***

Volunteers are also a valuable resource for fundraising. According to a Corporation for National and Community Service **study**, 40.3% of non-volunteers donated to charity while 78.7% of volunteers donated from 2013 to 2014. A study of **Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund** donors found that 50% of donors "say volunteering leads them to give more financial support."

Furthermore, volunteers can serve as brand ambassadors. Word-of-mouth endorsements from volunteers can give a personal touch to awareness and fundraising campaigns and can help an organization gain access to **"new and diverse communities."** As part of the public, volunteers are an organization's most effective advocates to their community and to government officials.

"It's amazing to have ambassadors out in the community. The volunteers that we have feel like they are...a part of The Stewpot family and so they represent us out in the community," says Nicholson. "And then they will tell their friends and their family about The Stewpot, and so it's so good to have our volunteers as Stewpot ambassadors in DFW."



*First Presbyterian Church youth volunteering as part of Youth Service Week. Courtesy of the First Presbyterian Church.*

#### But what's in it for me?

The benefits of volunteering go beyond the organization. According to the **Mayo Clinic**, "volunteering increases social interaction and helps build a support system based on common interests," which both strengthens your community and your mental and emotional health.

According to an **article** in the Journal of Social Service Research, volunteers report higher well-being, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and social connectedness than non-volunteers. A **study** by UnitedHealthcare and VolunteerMatch found that "93% [of U.S. adults] report[ed] an improved mood, 79% report[ed] lower stress levels, and 88% report[ed] increased self-esteem by giving back."

Volunteering helps you physically, too. The **study** by UnitedHealthcare and VolunteerMatch also found that "volunteers are significantly more likely to feel they have greater control over their health and well-being." Furthermore, older adults

who volunteered **"were able to delay or even reverse declining brain function"** and faced **reduced mortality rates**.

Volunteering also exposes you to different cultures and ways of life that will increase your understanding of others. Additionally, volunteering can teach new skills that can help you transition careers and stand out as a job candidate.

"There's people that come [to volunteer], and it's their first time coming, and you can see the look on their face. It's changing them, how they think about it, how they want to be a better contributor to their community and look at things differently, or how they live their life," says Anthony. "It makes you think about life differently. It takes you out of your every day, in-and-out, running on the hamster wheel...and maybe life is not so bad after all."

*Nicole Kiser is managing editor of STREETZine.*

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*Continued from page 4*

Bank of America mobilized mentors and tutors in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg public schools. They had something like six days of paid leave for volunteering. A lot of those volunteers became more deeply involved in the schools. There were countless examples of such public good.

We also expanded opportunities for Americans to serve through national service programs, such as the Peace Corps, VISTA, AmeriCorps, Conservation Corps, and Senior Corps. And we created a new Citizen Corps, Medical Reserve Corps, Volunteers in Police Service, and Fire Corps to engage more trained volunteers in disaster preparedness and response.

We need to continue to increase opportunities to serve through these efforts and are making progress with the new Civilian Climate Corps and one billion additional dollars — a doubling of the federal investment in national service — in the American Recovery Plan.

### **How has volunteering made a difference in your own life?**

I was raised in a family where my parents grew up in the Great Depression and my relatives served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam. There was a culture of frugality, discipline and service. Through church, I went into a prison and interacted with all this potential that was wasting away. I also volunteered through church in a soup kitchen. As a kid, it was eye-opening to see people starving. There was this line between surviving and not surviving that I saw firsthand as a kid in soup kitchens.

These experiences have taught me that individual volunteers can transform lives. And neuroscience

now tells us that volunteering triggers regions in the brain that make us healthier and happier. Thomas Jefferson told John Adams that the “pursuit of Happiness” — with a capital “H” — was not just an individual right, but a cooperative enterprise we help one another achieve. You cannot be fundamentally happy without worrying about the happiness of those who are vulnerable. I would love to see more of that spirit in the country, across faiths, politics and these other things that needlessly divide us.

### **How can volunteering be done in a way that it is not charity being done for someone else, but as people working with each other?**

The act of providing food and shelter, two of our most primal needs, doesn’t have to be characterized as charity. It is just providing food or shelter. People are grateful for that, and I see that in the soup kitchens where I volunteer.

But I often see the same people coming through the food line and wonder what brings them there? And what kind of help can we offer them? Martha’s Table in Washington, D.C. provides access to health and dental care, works with individuals if they need mental health counseling and helps them think about finding a job. That’s powerful volunteering — thinking about how you can change systems to uplift lives.

That is not charity. It becomes a trampoline for them to jump to a better future.

### **You have written about student homelessness and have been involved in addressing it. How deep is this problem? And how might it best be tackled, including through volunteering?**

It is a huge problem that I learned about while

working on America’s dropout problem. A group of us wrote a report called Hidden in Plain Sight, which captured the perspectives of students who were experiencing homelessness — how they feared being stigmatized and bullied, and so they didn’t self-identify, and they often then didn’t get the supports they needed.

## **Volunteering is the opportunity for ordinary Americans to do extraordinary things. It gives them a chance to leave their scratch on their neighborhood, their community and on history.**

We created a campaign to help increase the identification of students who are homeless without stigmatizing them. We made it clear that under the McKinney-Vento Act school districts are required to admit students who are homeless even if they have no identification or place of residence. And that school might be the one place where these students could find stability and a pathway to a better future.

A lot of groups focus on housing, and that is important. But we looked at whether schools could broker the services students need. I’d like to now see a Student Success Corps, where students have access to near-peer mentors and tutors who can keep them on track and get them the supports they need.

*Bill McKenzie is a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas and the STREETZine Editorial Advisory Board.*



**Hard Luck Automotive Services co-founder Adam Ely sits in his repair shop’s garage. Courtesy of Ryan Magnani, for The Curbside Chronicle.**

## **Hard Luck Automotive Services Is Driving Generosity**

By Brendan Hoover

The man on the other end of the line says he has a 2005 Toyota Sequoyah with blown airbags. He’d bought new ones to install himself but got hurt at work. He asks for an estimate. Adam Ely sits behind a small cluttered desk — a big man sporting denim overalls, a shaved head and biker beard. He looks tough and fearsome, but his voice is smooth and reassuring. He’ll install the airbags free of charge.

You can hear emotion in the man on the phone’s voice. His family needs a working vehicle, but he lacks the money for repairs. “Thank you so much,” he says.

Ely sits back in his chair after the call ends. “What’s free in the world right now? Nothing,” he says. “This is our way of coping with all the \*\*\* that’s going on.”

*Continued on page 9*



Continued from page 8

This episode encapsulates how things go at Hard Luck Automotive Services. The nonprofit was founded in 2017 by Ely and his wife, Toni. It's a place to go to for people beaten up by life that's run by men who've seen their share of hardship and suffering. A former paratrooper and Chinook helicopter crew chief, Ely spent 39 months in combat during tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. But serving his country was not enough. Ely wants to do more. "I'm trying to effect a little bit of change," he says. "I've got to know there's good people out there."

After returning from combat, Ely pondered opening a garage for hobbyists — a place people could go to work on their own vehicles. But what he calls his "light bulb moment" came when he helped his daughter's friend fix the floundering Hyundai she relied on for her pizza delivery job. She couldn't afford the \$450 repair, so Ely completed the job for about \$60 in parts. "It just needed a tune up," he recalls. "She started crying."

He told a philanthropist friend, who suggested he turn his good deed into a nonprofit enterprise. Hard Luck Automotive Services was born. At first, Ely didn't have a garage, so he crisscrossed the metro from job to job with a toolbox in the bed of his truck. He received some local press, and the BBC even did a print story on him. In April 2019, blue-collar television personality Mike Rowe and his web series "Returning the Favor" featured Ely and his wife and surprised them by leasing a shop for them. "It was crazy," Ely says.



**From left, Monte Huffman, Litahni Shawhan and Adam Ely work together on a repair in October. Hard Luck has been a relief to hundreds of Oklahomans who have difficulty affording maintenance on their vehicles. Courtesy of Ryan Magnani, for The Curbside Chronicle.**

Most mornings, cars are lined up outside the shop. Once the gates open at 9 am, it's a case of first come, first served. If you can afford the parts, the labor is free. The shop is open to anyone regardless of race, creed, sexuality or political affiliation. Everyone has a story: lost jobs, no help, the coronavirus. "If you come through the gate, you've swallowed a tough pill," Ely says.

in repair bills during the last six months. "Life will kick you in the dirt, and we just hope we can do something to help," he explains.

Hard Luck's newest volunteer, Monte Huffman, started six months ago. He spent 21 years in the Army as a logistics officer and another 14 years with the Defense Logistics Agency. Now, he works on other people's vehicles. "We don't judge," he says. "The goal is to get them out as cheaply as we can and back on the road safely."

But really, how can Ely afford to run a nonprofit auto repair shop? Ely, Shawshank and Huffman all receive modest military pensions, and they sell custom designed t-shirts and accept donations to buy needed tools and supplies. Local stores offer discounted or free parts. Still, it's hard to help people without going in the hole yourself.

The City of Midwest City has recently offered to give Hard Luck a parcel of land on which to build and occupy a new shop after the lease on their south Oklahoma City location expires in April 2021. "We've got to come up with about a quarter-million dollars to build a shop, but I think if anyone's crazy enough to do it, it's us," Ely grins. The plan is to remain a nonprofit and make repairs as long as they can. And they take each day as it comes.

*Courtesy of The Curbside Chronicle and INSP.ngo*



**Adam Ely repairs a car part. Along with his wife, Toni, the couple co-founded Hard Luck in 2017. Courtesy of Ryan Magnani, for The Curbside Chronicle.**

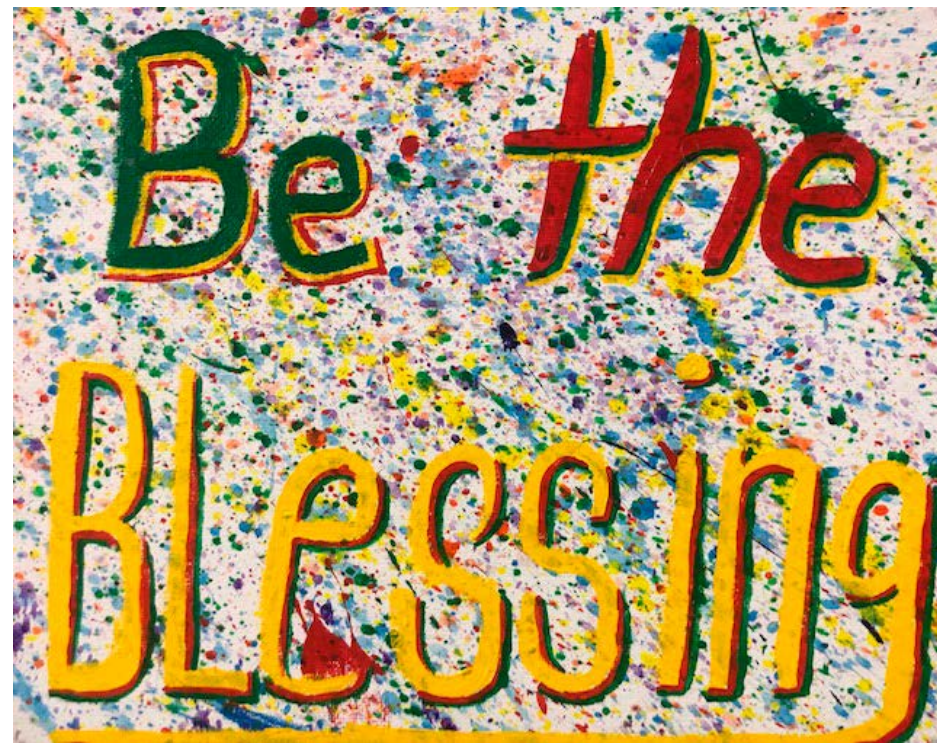
What Hard Luck clients get is a friendly face, a helping hand and maybe a cold drink. "We get single mothers, people who live in their cars or just people down on their luck," says Litahni 'Shawshank' Shawhan, a former Navy lieutenant and propulsion mechanic who has volunteered at Hard Luck for a year. Shawshank figures the shop has saved clients nearly \$100,000



# Stewpot Artists



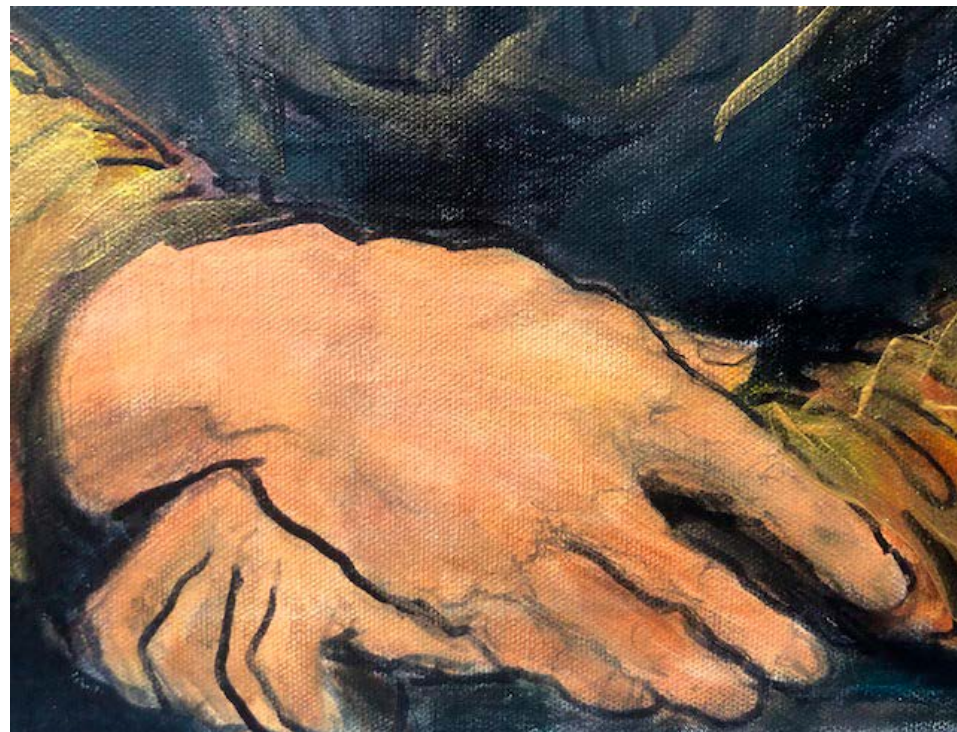
*Detail: Upon This Rock I Will Build My Church*  
Cornelius Brackens, Jr.



*Be the Blessing*  
Gershon Trunnell



*Left: Thank You!*  
Gershon Trunnell



*Above: Detail from The Vision of Mona Lisa*  
Herbert Lee Jackson



## Around The Stewpot: Meal Service Volunteers

By Nicole Kiser

What started as volunteers serving soup became a nonstop affair for The Stewpot.

“We are in charge of the Second Chance Cafe, which is the dining hall and kitchen at The Bridge. We serve three meals a day, every single day of the year. Even holidays, even during Snowmageddon, we served meals every single day,” says John Swindle, the volunteer and meal service coordinator at The Stewpot. “We always need volunteers there.”

Volunteering for the Second Chance Cafe has been full of memorable moments. “So there’s a piano in [The Bridge], and sometimes the clients will play, but [one Christmas], Nordstrom...had a group volunteering, and...if you’ve ever been to Nordstrom, sometimes they just have people playing piano. Well, the person who does that at Nordstrom started playing the piano. And the clients loved it, everybody loved it, it was a great way to start your day,” says Dominique Anthony, the outgoing Stewpot Alliance president.

While volunteers for the Second Chance Cafe have to be at least 18 years old, The Stewpot has had a wide range of volunteers throughout the years, including volunteers from companies like ORIX USA and the Zix Corporation, sports leagues and Southern Methodist University. This year, when The Stewpot’s annual luncheon, Soup’s On, went virtual, the chefs organized by Chef Brian C. Luscher, culinary director of 33 Restaurant Group, could not prepare meals for those attending the event, and instead donated their time toward preparing meals at the Second Chance Cafe.

With volunteers allowed back, The Stewpot is

ready to start making memories again. “We put the word out via social media and also made one of our volunteer pages live with the sign-up link. We really tried to roll out volunteer opportunities in stages, reaching out to small groups [of] core, recurring volunteers first, and then over time sort of just open that net wider of who we wanted to reach out to be able to sign-up,” says Adrienne Nicholson, the manager of volunteer services at The Stewpot. “Volunteers are so thrilled to be engaged and involved once again. People were definitely going stir crazy not being able to be with us and with our clients, so it’s been really wonderful having volunteers back.”

One of those core volunteers is Debbie: “Debbie — she volunteers at The Bridge almost every day...She’s there serving breakfast almost every day,” says Anthony. Swindle recalls, “She has one of those masks that looks like a face. And she loves wearing it in because all of the guests that come in to eat get a kick out of it...Whenever she wears that mask, it’s always a big hoot.”

“For somebody to take time out of their day, Monday through Friday, to show up, they’re not being paid, they have a smile on their face every day, they give everybody a hug, she’ll even do a dance for you if you want, that’s heaven on earth,” says Anthony. “You don’t find that everywhere. It’s because she wants to be there, she believes in the mission, and she has a love for people.”



*Volunteers from UKirk SMU serving lunch for The Stewpot’s meal service at The Bridge. Courtesy of Rob Guild.*

“When you work with volunteers, it’s people that want to be there...The Stewpot has such a great following, and people that believe in the mission and have a great heart for the mission,” says Anthony. “That’s one of the reasons why I go every Wednesday because, I can’t do it everyday — I can’t be Debbie — but if I can go once a week and start my day with something awesome, then it just makes my day.”

*Nicole Kiser is managing editor of STREETZine.*

## Volunteer Spotlight: Douglas McKenzie

By Suzanne Erickson

The children and youth program at The Stewpot has had many wonderful volunteers over the years. One of the most dedicated volunteers recently is Douglas McKenzie. When Douglas was in high school, he volunteered for three summers helping shepherd the elementary school students in their summer camp

activities. He decided to volunteer because he loves working with children. He wanted to help out the children that come to The Stewpot programs because they may not have had the same opportunities for camp and activities that he did growing up. His favorite part of volunteering was seeing the kids’ faces during activities when they were doing something fun. One of his favorite activities was making slime during science class.

Douglas shared that volunteering at The Stewpot taught him how to be a better listener

and leader. He also learned that each child is great, but they all have different needs and personalities.

Douglas hopes to continue to volunteer during college and also wants to consider being on the Kids’ Club staff in the future. Douglas graduated from Lakehill Preparatory in May 2021 and will be playing basketball at Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth in the fall.

*Suzanne Erickson is senior director of programs at The Stewpot.*



# Street Newspapers - A Voice for the Homeless & Impoverished

## What is STREETZine?

STREETZine is a nonprofit newspaper published by The Stewpot of First Presbyterian Church for the benefit of people living in poverty. It includes news, particularly about issues important to those experiencing homelessness. STREETZine creates direct economic opportunity. New vendors receive ten free papers. After the first ten, vendors pay twenty-five cents for a paper to be distributed for a one-dollar or more donation. Vendors typically profit seventy-five cents from each paper. Vendors are self-employed and set their own hours. Distributing STREETZine is protected by the First Amendment.

## Advertise in STREETZine

Support STREETZine and its vendors with your business or personal advertisements and announcements.

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(3.5 x 2)

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\$100.00 - Jumbo  
(6.5 x 5)

\$200.00 - Half Page  
(6.5 x 10)

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Email:  
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## STREETZine

Self-Help For People Living In  
Poverty

### Distributing STREETZine is protected by the First Amendment.

STREETZine Vendors are self employed and set their own hours.

They are required to wear a vendor badge at all times when distributing the paper. In order to distribute STREETZine vendors agree to comply with Dallas City Ordinances.

If at any time you feel a vendor is in violation of any Dallas City Ordinance please contact us immediately with the vendor name or number at [streetzine@thestewpot.org](mailto:streetzine@thestewpot.org)

### CHAPTER 31, SECTION 31-35 of the Dallas City Code PANHANDLING OFFENSES

Solicitation by coercion; solicitation near designated locations and facilities; solicitation anywhere in the city after sunset and before sunrise any day of the week. Exception can be made on private property with advance written permission of the owner, manager, or other person in control of the property.

A person commits an offense if he conducts a solicitation to any person placing or preparing to place money in a parking meter.

The ordinance specifically applies to solicitations at anytime within 25 feet of:

- Automatic teller machines;
- Exterior public pay phones;
- Public transportation stops;
- Self service car washes;
- Self service gas pumps;
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- Outdoor dining areas of fixed food establishments.

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\*If your vendor is no longer distributing papers your donation will be applied towards papers that are shared among active vendors.

[ ] Check here if you prefer that your check be returned if your vendor is no longer active.

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