

IMPACT HERO FINALIST



Alyssa Carlucci

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Feeding the Hungry. Building Belonging.

Imagine the choice: food or utilities, food or medical care, food or housing. If you've never been in a position to face choices like that, it can be hard to understand the reality for millions of Americans. Yet, it's a very real struggle.

According to Feeding America, a report by the USDA shows that 34 million people face hunger in the U.S. — including more than 9 million children — and in 2021, 53 million Americans relied on food banks and other community organizations for help feeding themselves and their families.¹

The issue of hunger in America is staggering. David Nasby, a former executive at General Mills, once sharpened the nation's focus with the following insight:

“America is the richest country in the world. And yet tonight, thousands of your neighbors will go to bed hungry. It may be your child's schoolmate who is undernourished and has difficulty learning on an empty stomach. Or it could be a co-worker, a working mother whose low-wage job doesn't make ends meet. Perhaps it's an elderly neighbor who has to make a decision whether to delay filling a prescription or buying groceries. The faces of hunger are as broad as the faces of America.”

And it's with a similar spirit that Alyssa Carlucci, one of Grace Hill's 2022 Impact Hero finalists, volunteers her time with Xavier Mission's Welcome Table.

Xavier Mission is a nonprofit — or as they prefer, a “for-impact” — organization that runs a myriad of programs and projects, all focused on providing “basic services as well as opportunities for empowerment and self-sufficiency to New Yorkers in need.”²

One of the programs Xavier Mission runs is the Welcome Table, a place where the homeless and hungry can find a hot meal and a friendly face each Sunday, and it's here that Alyssa has found her calling.

A Family Connection

In many ways, volunteering to feed others is a natural outpouring founded in a family tradition of service to others. Growing up, Alyssa worked at a summer bazaar hosted by a local church, where she and her brother helped their dad run the pizza booth.

“Food and good works are linked for me. I worked with my father and brother at the church bazaar from [the time] I was big enough to handle pouring soda. I would have taken over

¹ Feeding America (<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america>).

² Xavier Mission (<https://xaviermission.org/about-us/>).



when he retired, except I immediately burned myself on the oven, and that was that for me.”

But from that experience, Alyssa's philanthropic spirit merely grew. In high school, she volunteered at an assisted living facility, the town library, and summer camps. She served on the board of directors of her high school drama club after it became a 501(c)3 nonprofit, and in college, she devoted her summers to running theater camps for children with special needs.

So while caring for others certainly was a defining quality in her youth, it’s a passion that has extended into adulthood.

After moving to New York City, Alyssa began searching for a volunteer position she could maintain while working full-time. Although interested in feeding the hungry, she stumbled on Xavier Mission when her Google search — “soup kitchens NYC” — delivered the organization’s name.

As Alyssa shares, “Food insecurity is a terrible thing and affects so many people in so many ways. I was drawn to filling a clear gap in the social net.”

Food insecurity is a critical need, and Xavier Mission fills a gaping hole in the social safety net by operating on Sundays when most social service agencies are closed.



Feeding People With Food and Kindness

Since the summer of 2019, Alyssa has volunteered her time on Sundays to help serve lunch to those in need and show genuine kindness to every man, woman, and child that enters.

Since the Welcome Table offers “grab-and-go” options, as well as table service, Alyssa’s “job” each week might vary depending on the unique needs of the day.

But she does it all, from packaging food into to-go containers and running those from the kitchen to the street to labeling leftovers for the community pantry. However, she specializes as a runner. In this role, her main tasks include taking meals to the disabled and elderly, bussing tables and trays, and serving coffee, tea, and lemonade.

Perhaps more importantly, every single person gets her undivided attention and is welcomed without judgment. When she volunteers, she wears the same bandana to be easily recognized by those who come regularly.

Bittersweet Realities

As you might imagine, serving in a soup kitchen highlights the heartbreaking realities of hunger in America. On the first day she volunteered, the volunteer organizer told her, “We might be the only friendly faces the guests see during the week, so the first priority is not necessarily getting food in hands but getting food in hands in an intrinsically kind, dignified way.”

As she further explains, “I help feed homeless children, which sounds just about as heart-breaking as it is. [But the Welcome Table] is not just for homeless people. In families where kids are fed through the school system, no school means no food. Some government food services



only run on the weekdays; some of our elderly neighbors who get by on government support must save food over the week so they will have food to eat on the weekend.”



Every person has a story. Every need is different. Every face holds heartache. Every heart longs for connection.

While Alyssa passionately serves, she also notes that “there is very little joy or enthusiasm about working in a soup

kitchen.” And each week, Alyssa encounters bittersweet moments; below is but a small sample of current realities:

- ★ Overhearing “Yes, the children will eat tonight” while packing leftovers for a man.
- ★ Trying to “spoil” a school-aged child while hiding the sadness that he’s there at all.
- ★ Realizing what it means for someone to eat at a table when most of the time they eat on the street.

But those faces and stories are one of the main reasons she persists and why she makes sure customer service is her absolute priority. At the Welcome Table, those simple acts of kindness build belonging and community, and Alyssa sees that as a small gift she’s able to give.

THE WORLD NEEDS YOU

It’s easy to feel overwhelmed by the world’s problems. Likely, you’ve been there, wanting to help but not quite sure where to start.

But Alyssa has some great advice to help you find your place in doing good for others.

Step 1 - Start with your natural strengths

If you have an outgoing personality, look for public-facing opportunities for involvement. However, if that is not what you enjoy, many volunteer positions rely on behind-the-scenes support. That “quiet” support is just as valuable to nonprofit organizations. “You can crochet blankets for preemies in the comfort of your living room or stuff envelopes,” says Alyssa. “I’ve done both!”

Step 2 - Go to Google

Alyssa found Xavier Mission with a Google search because she knew she was interested in feeding the hungry. But if you aren’t sure what interests you, widen your search. Googling “volunteering near me” is one way to find opportunities. Social groups like the Rotary Club, religious organizations, chambers of commerce, and the library also might be avenues for help getting started.

Step 3 - Give it a try

Don’t be afraid to try something new. Likewise, don’t stay where you don’t feel you belong. “Try out different things until you find something you’re good at and like doing,” says Alyssa. “If you’re good at it, it won’t be a hardship. If you like doing it, it won’t be a chore.”

As Alyssa reminds us, “It’s about playing to your strengths to sustain long-lasting impact.”



Why Not Me

Each of us makes decisions about how we spend our time, talents, and treasure. For some, charitable giving comes naturally, and for Alyssa, that definitely is the case. Yet, she acknowledges that the “how” and “why” behind her heart for service also spring from an acute sense of gratitude.

“I know I have been very lucky in life,” says Alyssa. “I have resources that so many others don’t, and while I’ve worked very hard, I certainly haven’t earned it all. It’s easier than many people know to fall on hard times.”

And ultimately, she believes that the impact of her time far outweighs any perceived burden.

Alyssa understands she can’t end hunger by herself, but in her commitment to show up, she’s doing her part to make a difference, one person at a time.

“Alyssa does all three of those things with a smile and a bandana, so they recognize her. She is truly making an impact on our community one moment at a time.”

About Alyssa:

After a professional season in the world of nonprofit and performing arts, Alyssa Carlucci accepted a position with Rose Associates, Inc. three years ago. Currently, she holds the position of Associate, Projects, where she coordinates various activities for Rose Associate’s COO related to overall direction, plan, and policy-making.

In February of this year, Alyssa rescued a pet bunny, which she named Clover. She adds, “Rescuing a pet and adopting from a shelter is its own simple way to help your community, especially elderly animals who are so often ignored.”



Fun Fact: Clover has a new home and an Instagram account (@ClovertheBeautiful)!

Written by Trisha Sheffield, Grace Hill Content Marketer

Grace Hill’s Impact Hero Awards Program recognizes individuals who make a difference in their local community.