

Group project description:

Our project aims to connect volunteers directly to volunteer organizations, shelters, etc., and allow shelters and communities to post for and request necessities/services. By prioritizing certain time frames and nearby locations as well as categorizing organizations' different requests, available volunteers can choose through a list of what items they can provide and schedule a delivery of items according to the request. We want to create this platform in order to broaden the reach of volunteering opportunities to our targeted user group of volunteers and establish a system that will strengthen connections within local communities.

Interview questions:

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you from/where do you live?
3. When did you start volunteering?
4. How often do you volunteer?
5. Why do you volunteer?
6. Where have you volunteered before?
7. What's your favorite part about volunteering?
8. How did you find your volunteering gig?
9. Do you volunteer independently or do you go through an organization?
10. How long does it take you to travel to your volunteering location?
11. How do you travel to your volunteering location?
12. Has COVID-19 impacted your ability to volunteer? If so, how?
13. How comfortable did you feel going to your volunteering location during the pandemic?
14. Is there anything to make volunteering easier for you during Covid?
15. On average, how many individuals do you interact with during each shift?
16. What is the distribution process at your location if you work with food or goods? (clarify if needed - how do you assign roles? How do you get food?)
17. What are the hardest parts of volunteering for you? (both before and during COVID?)
18. Do you have volunteering-related Internet websites you regularly use?
19. How do you currently look for volunteering opportunities?
20. What features of the websites make it stand out?
21. Does the organization you volunteer at have a website?
22. If so, what are your thoughts on the website?
23. What do you wish to see on the platforms where you find volunteering opportunities?

Insights:

- The aspect of human connection while volunteering is very important and the pandemic has decreased the quality of said connection, something an online-based platform has the potential to do as well.
- Volunteers value their health as well as the aspect of giving and community so finding ways for them to continue volunteering safely during these times is essential.
- Larger volunteering groups or organizations already have their own process of partnering with companies and other groups who want to donate goods.

- Creating an app/website that is very user-friendly and easy to navigate for those who aren't tech savvy is crucial in order to target the valuable, older generation that make up a large population of volunteers.

Interview:

Q: So where are you from? And where do you currently live now?

A: Hmm. Well, I kind of feel like I'm from the Denver, Colorado area. That's where I did most of my growing up and I moved to the Pacific Northwest almost 20 years ago, maybe 18 years ago. and it became my new home. I started in Portland, and now I'm in Seattle and so I feel like this is where I'm supposed to be.

Q: Yes, I love the Pacific Northwest, and when did you start volunteering?

A: I've been volunteering since I was 18 years old. I went out to live on my own when I was 17, and it was during the era of so much social change. The women's rights movement and gay rights movement– all kinds of stuff was happening and I just thought, well, I just thought it was important to do something at that point because I was really involved in those rights movements and other ones, and civil rights and stuff like that. So I just thought “well, I should be doing something”, and I just started. Just on my own. I think the first place I volunteered at was a safe house and I worked for women; a private or a secret shelter for women who were being abused and battered, and I worked with the little tiny kids who didn't get to go to school and did some programs for them. I had taken some preschool training. So I had that in my little wheelhouse. Yeah.

Q: Oh, wow! That is so important. Oh, my gosh, I love kids. I work with them myself. too, Sometimes, aside from school, it's awesome. Yeah. How often do you volunteer now?

A: Well, it kind of it depends on what's going on in my own life. But I try to go weekly and sometimes it's every other week. yeah, you get on a pretty regular basis.

Q: What is their favorite part about volunteering?

A: Hmm. My favorite part is just meeting other like-minded people in whatever organization I'm hanging out in. It's getting to know that there are other people who have the same beliefs that I do and, you know, creating community there, and at the same time serving a community that may need a little extra help at the moment. If it's kids, or if it's, you know, whatever it is. Yeah.

Q: How many people do usually meet?

A: Well, so there's the people in the office, and so there's always 3 of us at the window and there's 2 people kind of working on the program Then there's usually a couple back in the office. So I get to meet new people that way who are amazing, doing amazing things. But then people who come to the window, it can vary between like 6 or 8 people at one window per session to 20. Just depends on how busy it is that day, and it has everything to do with the weather and, you know, all kinds of things some days are slow, some days are super busy. Whenever we give out gift cards, the lines are so long!

Q: Yeah, I feel like philanthropic work brings such a community like around whatever it is that we're doing, you know? Yeah, and how did you find your current volunteering gig?

A: A friend who was volunteering there told me about it. It was, you know, the deepest, darkest part of the pandemic, and I was like I haven't volunteered in almost 2 years and I feel like, you know, I just need to do that again. And she told me, she goes "well, I volunteered at 'The Window of Kindness'", and I'm like, "what the hell is the Window of Kindness? I need to be there!" Yeah. So I went. Yeah, she said "all I do is sit behind this window and give people stuff that they need and talk with them and give them a cup of coffee and, you know, we chat and like that is the perfect volunteer job. Easy lift, I will just say. I used to run my own nonprofit for about 10 years, and it was a big lift.

Q: Oh, wow! So do you ever still volunteer independently, or usually with your organization?

A: I just started up again, post-pandemic, with the window of kindness, and we'll see how far it goes. Because I'm a writer, I've more in my adult life, later you know, last 20 years volunteered in reading and writing programs for people who might not have access, or who want more or whatever. So it's a nice little break from that because that's details a lot of work, and it's fine, and I love it because it's what I do. But this kind of, like I said, feels like an easy lift, although I know that it doesn't seem that way to others who would have a hard time doing it.

Q: Yeah. I see. How long does it take you to travel to your current volunteering location?

A: 10 minutes.

Q: Oh, that is very close. What is your means of travel?

A: I actually take my car. To bus and walk, you know, it'd probably be half an hour, maybe more. 35 or 40 minutes.

Q: Very understandable. How has Covid-19 impacted your ability to volunteer?

A: I did not, because I was an older human and because my husband has diabetes, and because I myself had an autoimmune disorder for most of that time, and still do a little bit. So I didn't feel safe volunteering in that way anymore. So I didn't until vaccines and masks and protocols and all that kind of stuff started happening. I mean I don't even know how long I've been volunteering here. Feels like forever, and it feels like I just started so I can't really remember. it's been months, not years that I've been there.

Q: Yeah. Covid has made everything just flip over upside down. It's crazy. So would you say there's anything to make volunteering easier for you right as of now, during this pandemic.

A: There are vaccines and masks. Our clients don't necessarily wear a mask which I know makes it harder for some people who want to volunteer because we really are face-to-face through the window with them but I'm willing to take that risk because I wear a good mask, and you know, get my boosters and I think it's okay.

Q: So on average, how many individuals do you usually interact with during each shift?

A: As far as the people at the window, yes, our customer base basically, our clients. I would say, 10 to 12. And there's 3 windows on this little patio that look outs. And then 3 of us are there, and we have all of our food and hot drinks and stuff ready to prepare right with us. and so 3. Of us are helping people at the same time.

Q: Oh, I see! How long are you usually there?

A: Oh, we do it from 3 to 5. They do it 4 days a week I think.

Q: Oh, okay is it usually weekdays?

A: Yeah, also, they added Saturdays recently. It's really great for a lot of people. It's great for people who want to volunteer and work traditional work hours.

Q: Yeah, Oh, that's great. And are you familiar with the distribution process at your location? Do you know how it works?

A: Well, the items, almost all items come in through donation, I believe, and then through some fundraising, they're able to purchase things we don't get donated. So, for instance, outdoor research donates so much outdoor gear every year. Raincoats, rain pants, and other gear, as they have it. A sock company that when you buy a pair they donate a pair. We have a wall of socks, honestly. Big huge wall with all these socks and the most popular item we give out is probably socks. I think it's so important because they get ruined and a lot of the people who live outside, their feet are bad. They're facing a lot of disease from being outside and from not having good nutrition or medical care. So we give out a lot a lot a lot of socks. And so those are all donated by companies. But then we get a lot of personal donations. There was a Rugby team that came in last week with all these guys and their families and just pulled so much stuff. Clothing, and kinds of things that people might need living outside and brought them in and just covered the floor of our donation center, and then we go through and we, you know, sort them all for size and some things we donate on to other organizations if they're more appropriate elsewhere. And then, you know, we always have things like food and snacks, some hot food donated by restaurants, donated by schools who have extra leftovers, donated by church groups who want to make sandwiches and donate them every week, you know. Tons and tons of sandwiches. Canned food for people who can cook in their camps or if they're living in a car or an RV or whatever. Or if they're in housing, you know. Yeah, we just have lots of stuff come in and lots of stuff go out and sometimes we don't have a lot of stuff for them, but we always have humanity and kindness. And a cup of coffee, and hopefully, some hot food.

Q: Do you know how your organization has reached out to donors, or how donors and volunteers have found you guys?

A: Well, I know that now that I'm aware you know they have a nice online presence. They have a newsletter. They have a social media presence. They have a board, you know, directors who get the word out in their circles. They had a photography project where they photographed many, many, many faces of people who live unhoused, and that was a really beautiful— It's still a beautiful collection of black white photos that go

around, and they had a campaign called “Just Say Hello” about breaking down the barrier when you see someone who looks unhoused outside, and you know we avert our eyes, or immediately come to some conclusion about them, instead of just like we would anyone else just looking at them and saying hello, interacting in that simple way of humanity so. They've had several different campaigns. All I do is really work the window but I notice what's going on around me.

Q: Oh that's very moving. I think I did see the black and white photos on the front of the website. They were very moving. Yeah. And what would you say were the hardest parts of volunteering for you? Pre-pandemic compared to post-pandemic. Or the “right now pandemic”

A: Well, pre-pandemic, you felt like you could do anything. You could touch people, you could hug people. You could engage in ways that I think now we feel a little less able to. It's a little harder to convey, you know. They can't see you're smiling. They can see your eyes smiling, but they can't see your face smiling. I think that's it— is that it's a little bit harder to really connect at that level with people, although I think that some people say it's the best part of their day. Coming to the window, and just having people there that are happy to see them and greet them, and remember their name, and remember that they like their coffee with a scoop of high chocolate in it. I mean I have a friend who tried it and just couldn't. She couldn't handle the unmasked clients.

Q: It's definitely different for everyone but it makes sense during this pandemic. Do you currently have any volunteer websites that you use or know of?

A: I do not, except for theirs. I mean they have a volunteer hub. And so that's where we sign up and they have a nice communication circle that goes to all the volunteers about meeting. Like “we have this opening that just came up and we need someone desperately”, and you know so, but not as far as other ones, just because I'm not actively looking to do any other volunteering at the moment.

Q: So you use the volunteering website that they currently have. Would you say there are any features that stand out to you about the website?

A: It's easy to navigate and find your way in easily. There's no mysteries, you know. It's not like I forget how you get in. I'm an older person, and we sometimes have a hard time with technology, and it's super simple. And the other thing is every communication that they put out is full of love and happiness. I mean the way they all communicate and write. If you read their website, it's all about love and empathy, and you know they appreciate the volunteers. We just were in the middle of volunteer appreciation month, and so much love pouring out! I went last week and they were tons of cookies and cupcakes for the volunteers, and usually they're for the customers, you know. And there were beautiful handwritten cards from them.

Q: That sounds so sweet. It sounds like an amazing organization. Would you say that the organization ever has any issues finding food or any items? And if so like, how would they deal with that?

A: I probably can't speak to that because I don't do anything in procurement. I just witness what's happening, and there are times when we don't have some of the things that our folks have come to love you know. Like, "I'm sorry we're out of chips" or "we're out of granola bars" or "we're out of waters". I mean like water is so essential, and sometimes we just don't have a lot of bottled water, or we don't have any bottled water on hand. But I know that, for instance, we really like to give out hand sanitizer and masks, and it seemed like hand sanitizer got harder to get, so they invested in big jugs and little bottles and had volunteers fill all these little bottles and handling them and everything. So there's a lot of innovation that goes on behind the scenes.

Q: Wow! That is putting a lot of work into it yeah. I love to hear it, though. Do you ever personally donate items to the organization as well?

A: I do. I try to donate both money and in-kind goods. I'll take things with me or they have an Amazon wish-list and so I'll just do that every once in a while. I try to regularly make sure I'm doing that as well. I'm a person that does have the money to do that. I'm older. I'm comfortable whereas I know other people that volunteer, their gift they can give is their time, of course, of course, you're I'm in a position.

Of course, of course. I feel like anything, anything at all, is so important and so appreciated by the community. Yeah, I definitely try to do my part, it's hard with school going on. Yeah. Well, I think that is all on my part. If you have any questions about what we're doing or just any questions in general?

Yeah, I'd love to hear what your end goal for this project is. If you're creating something or I don't know what your actually making

So the class I'm taking is Human Centered-Design and Engineering: Introduction to User-Centered Design. And so, basically the whole quarter is sort of focused on one singular project that we create, whether it's a website or an app that sort of focuses on the larger community, and, like I said, the theme was "back to whatever this was". Yeah, so for my project group, we're all very philanthropic. We love to find volunteering opportunities, and I guess, thinking about our own experiences, we thought "well, what if there was a platform where we could connect, sort of, many large volunteering groups and organizations, shelters, to individual volunteers who might have stuff on hand, but they don't know exactly who to give it to. So we were thinking that, you know, groups could be posting or listing items or services that they need as like priority, and so volunteers can sign up for whatever they want to give, whatever services they are available to offer. And yeah, just basically streamlining the process, making it efficient, and building a community around volunteering

Love that. That is so awesome. A big, huge resource network for volunteering and that's really great. So hearing you talking about design and all of that stuff and kind of the back end of things. I just think what's different about Facing Homelessness is the incredible humanity that is present even on just a website, or even, you know, in interactions. It doesn't feel like you're on an app or on a corporate website. There's this humanity, this thread of loving kindness that goes through it, which I find makes all the difference as a

volunteer. It makes you want to tap into that instead of, maybe, if you're volunteering for a bigger organization, United Way, or something. It might, you know, it might have those kind of superlatives, but you might not feel that actual connection from a real person happening. It'd be like, maybe corporate-speak you know. And also there are a lot of older volunteers, because we have more time. Because we have done with work already and we have more time in our lives and just, you know, keeping older people in mind when designing things. It's really important. If they can't do it, then they're just not part of the world anymore but that's not really true. We have a lot of good resources to give.

Yeah, of course. That's exactly why, you know, each project member is supposed to interview someone and we want to get, you know, feedback, insight. And I definitely want to keep those points in mind and trying to humanize the platform. Trying to keep it sort of local at least for now, so that you know, we're able to create that sort of human connection.

Yeah. Well, I wish I could talk more about the distribution. I mean how goods come in and go out but from what I've witnessed, they're very smart about finding organizations that already will donate goods that are needed, and then making connections. Somehow word of mouth getting out. The wish list that's on a site where you can buy things. I'm not delighted that it's amazon but Amazon is so easy. So just making donating easy is really really crucial. Because a lot of us would rather give goods than money, in a weird way. It's like I want to give some people socks.

Right. The tangible items

Yeah, so. That's all my very many 2 cents.

No, greatly appreciate it. Thank you so much for your time!