

Brandon Baum | The Other Way Ministries

Throughout my time working over the summer at The Other Way Ministries I have learned a lot of life skills but also personal and spiritual skills. This is my second time being an ambassador for this program working at ICCF a couple of years ago to switch over to The Other Way this past summer. As a student at a Christian College, I felt like stepping back into the mission role was a good fit for me and it felt like something I was called to do. The life skills of this job were much more than I could have asked. I worked with people experiencing homelessness (serving them food, providing them with someone to talk to, etc.) along with so many small trades work such as plumbing, painting, contracting, and other work. These life skills are something that I will be bringing into my life further on making the work a win-win as I get to serve and learn. Additionally, I learned many spiritual and faith growing skills by seeing the heart posture of my coworkers, building a personal devotion to ministry work and understanding the gratitude of every person even when having next to nothing. These skills were built up through the hours of working there but there were a couple of moments that stood out to me the most.

I believe that the most significant days for me were the Wednesdays at the Other Way. Wednesdays was the day that we did a program called “Recharge”, this program involves opening our doors to the people experiencing homelessness of the westside of Grand Rapids to serve a meal inside while there are shower trucks and other amenities where available outside. While working the Recharge program, I was able to learn a little bit about what the homeless community looks like and even connected with some of the attendees. During one particular Wednesday, a man came in with a very cheery look on his face. This day I was feeling a little sluggish and tired, but I couldn’t help but ask the man how he was doing. The man replied with “I’m doing wonderful man; God woke me up today”. Those words were all I needed to hear to perk up. How can someone with next to nothing be so happy? The answer was right there, God. From that moment on, I repeat those words whenever I’m feeling discouraged or unmotivated. While I could share countless other stories while on the job, this story stuck out to me because it is something that I will carry on into my future going back to school.

This job raised my heart for ministry more as I worked there. Through the gratitude of my neighbors such as the previous story and many other encounters with people in my community, my work felt like I was making a real difference. This was a feeling that I longed for as someone who has worked at pizza places and golf courses that felt monotonous and unrewarding. And as I enter a period of searching for a career building job this is going to be a large focus of mine.

Lastly, through this job I had the opportunity to study the book “Tattoos on the Heart” by Gregory Boyle. This book was an excellent and encouraging book as I worked in the inter-city this summer. This book highlighted the idea of Kinship which was a word I never really thought about. This word simply means the community built just by your presence. The idea that being there for someone is enough to show the love of God. This idea has really stuck with me when dealing with people who might be going through something hard. Overall, If kinship and the spirit of God is all you have, then that is all you need.

Kate Bruining | ICCF

My name is Kate Bruining and I worked at ICCF as an assistant to my boss, Sheryl Baas.

I enjoy reflecting on my encounters with people of all different backgrounds. Whether it was while working at a site or picking up orders; meeting new people gave me great insight on the diverse community in the Grand Rapids area.

On a particular site, me and Dane were painting a handrail when a group of a dozen young children ran down the road near us. After a few more passes, a very young girl started to sing along to the music we were playing. Soon enough, more joined in her singing and two teenagers and a band of young children had been formed.

This was such a memorable experience for me, seeing how easily community comes together and can be formed. I see more love in the world, and more opportunities to create bonds and friendships. This reflects directly to the book we read over the summer, Tattoos on the Heart. The book is a collection of stories based on the author's experience in the gang community. He experienced threats, oppression, push back from the community, and gained so many meaningful relationships with gang members.

I worked at ICCF from June to the end of July nearly every day, and yet it never felt like work to me. I felt welcomed into a family of people purely focused on the goal of bettering others' lives. My experience at ICCF was like no other and will forever be a chapter of my life I look back on with gratitude.

Sam DeJong | Degage

This summer, I had the opportunity to serve in several different areas at Dégagé Ministries. Dégagé Ministries is a women's homeless shelter with two buildings that support both short-term and long-term homelessness. They provide affordable food, clothing, and all other necessities. They also have a retail bakery that sells cookies, cupcakes, coffee, and bagels. On Sundays, I worked in the kitchen prepping dinner for the residents and cleaning up lunch. Monday through Thursday, I worked on maintenance and kept the building clean. I also stocked the bathrooms with paper towels, toilet paper, and soap, and ensured the trash cans were empty. On Fridays, I worked in the retail space where I sold cookies, cupcakes, bagels, coffee, and pop.

I did a lot of different things throughout my time at Dégagé, but some of my favorite moments were when I was working at the food truck. For the food truck, I went with one of my managers to a place that stores donated food, and we loaded the truck with food and delivered it back to Dégagé. When we came back, a cook came out and decided what we would take. After everything was separated, we delivered the extra food to another program called Matthew's House, where we gave them all the food we had left in the truck. This felt very special because I got to see how much the people appreciated the food we brought to them.

I was greatly impacted by everything that happened during this summer at Dégagé. I could see how people were a little bit trapped at Dégagé. Because of how comfortable the housing is, the residents aren't feeling compelled to try and go out and make a living for themselves. I was also impacted by how all of the employees there were happy to be working there because of the work that they were doing. They all truly enjoy working to provide aid to those in need.

This summer, the Glenn Van Noord group read a book called Tattoos on the Heart by Gregory Boyle. I thought that the book was very interesting and inspiring. It showed me that even just one person can make a huge difference throughout their life. I was really inspired by just how much Greg cared and worked to make his area a better place for everyone. I found it very interesting that all of the different gang members could set aside their differences as soon as they got jobs and started working together. I also thought that it was very cool that the different programs came from different needs that the people had.

Throughout the summer, I had many different experiences while serving at Dégagé Ministries, and I learned a lot from these experiences. Working at Dégagé Ministries had a very positive impact on my life, and I learned lessons I wouldn't have if I hadn't been there.

Dane Fitzgibbon | ICCF

Over the summer, I had the opportunity to work for a non-profit organization in downtown Grand Rapids called ICCF. Their mission is to buy old houses around town and flip them to make them into affordable living spaces for people with lower incomes. While I worked for them, I learned about the many different parts of ICCF that help make the organization run smoothly, as well as actually working on the houses with other volunteers.

While working there, one of my favorite parts of the job was getting to see some of the finished houses that we had previously worked on. At the start of my time there, Mrs. Baas took me around to some of the new builds that had recently been finished. When I first saw them, it was really cool to see the brand-new work, but it wasn't as special because I hadn't seen what shape they were in. But, towards the end of my time, I had the privilege of seeing houses that were barely livable to being transformed into beautiful, finished homes fit for a family. Seeing the finished product was incredible.

Another fun part of volunteering for ICCF was the interactions with my co-workers and getting to know them better. One co-worker I enjoyed was a woman who had been a resident of the Alger Heights area where ICCF was located for almost her whole life. It was really interesting to hear how the area had changed over the years and learn stories about different businesses in the area. Through working with co-workers like this and hearing how the area had gentrified, I learned about how hard it actually is right now to either rent or buy a home. When a non-profit like ICCF is invested in a community, it is exciting to see how many people they help.

Overall, my experiences working for ICCF impacted me greatly in terms of learning how many working parts there are in non-profits, showing me how absurdly expensive the housing market is, and also inspiring me to look into a career path similar to some of the things ICCF does. Finally, at the start of the summer, I did not want to do the GVN program, but as I participated, I really started to enjoy it and looked forward to going to work. So, to any high schooler in the future who might be on the fence about doing this program, I would highly recommend going for it! You do not know what God has in store for you.

Jaden Knapp | Degage

This summer I worked at Degage, a women's shelter located in downtown Grand Rapids. My main job there was to sell bakery goods from the Open Door Bakery shop. I also worked in the kitchen on Fridays, preparing lunch and breakfast for the women staying at Degage. On Tuesdays my job was to open lockers and sign in the ladies for their overnight stay. Each of my jobs allowed me to interact with the shelter stay women in a different context and get to know them a little better.

Once I got to know the ladies on a name-to-name basis it was harder to watch them in their lowest of lows. Even still, I enjoyed having inside jokes with them just to lighten things up. One of the women thought that I looked like Napoleon Dynamite and it caught on pretty quick. Having some laughs with them brought some humanity and connection into our interactions.

During my time at Degage I gained humility and respect for the homeless population that I interacted with. I didn't have any strong preconceived notions about Degage or the people they serve but I was surprised by a few things. For example the patrons staying at Degage were very respectful outside a few incidents and the workers operated at a very high level of organization to run the place.

Something I shared at our GVN book meeting was how impressed I was with the full-time workers at Degage. They showed so much compassion and love to the patrons even when they weren't always being treated fairly as employees. Staying at a shelter can be a stressful environment so it is not uncommon for the shelter stay women to have outbursts. My coworkers went above and beyond to make sure the women were safe and progressing in their lives. Another insight I appreciated from the book meeting was that the people in compromised situations such as the shelter stay women at Degage have to want an improvement in their lives; it can't be forced upon them. Because the homeless community is tight knit and it can be difficult to leave a certain comfort in that. Of course that psychology is not the case for everyone but I think there's some truth in it.

My favorite part of the book we read as a part of the program '*Tattoos on the Heart*' was the author's retelling of his experiences as a chaplain in Bolivia. He was sent there right out of seminary to gain experience in the real world. Well at the time he didn't know a lot of Spanish but he had a translation to do mass with. Unfortunately, he forgot this translation when he was doing mass for a mountain village that hadn't seen a priest in over 100 years. He struggled through the words and had a super embarrassing experience but after everyone left an old local man came up and showered him with rose petals, a gesture of respect in that culture. I took two main points away from this. First, not every part of serving will be perfect so we persevere through the mistakes. Next, to pass on compassion, one of the main themes of the book. Even though the priest messed up the old man showed compassion. The priest was able to bring this compassion back to LA where he rehabilitated a community scarred by gang violence.

Lena Reineking | The Other Way Ministries

This summer, I had the honor of serving at The Other Way Ministries, a Christ-centered community development organization located on the west side of Grand Rapids. Although The Other Way offers many different community resources, I spent my summer in their summer childcare program.

Although working with kids daily is exhausting, it's also extremely rewarding. I was nervous walking in on my first day; everything was new and unknown, but everyone immediately made me feel accepted and welcome. One of my favorite memories was our field trip to the Air Zoo in Kalamazoo. This was one of the kids' favorite activities too, they got to ride the indoor rides and see full-size models of old planes. It was fun to see the kids having such a good time learning and exploring.

A few people that I met stood out to me during my time this summer. One was a girl in the summer program who I became very close to. She was about seven years old and was one of the sweetest kids I've ever met. On the first day I was at The Other Way, she told me I looked like her sister, she then told me how much she loves her sister but never gets to see her anymore since she's so much older. I could tell that she looked up to me and trusted me. I am so incredibly grateful that I got to be there for her and was someone she could talk to.

Doing this summer internship has been one of the most world-expanding experiences that I've participated in. You can't fully grasp how narrow your worldview is until you involve yourself in another community. If I had not done this internship, then I would have never gained the perspective I have now. The people I met all had different life stories and different backgrounds. Although I didn't get to meet everyone or hear everyone's story, the ones I did will forever remain a part of my memory, and I will strive to forever see the world through this newfound perspective.

Throughout this summer, we were assigned to read the book *Tattoos on the Heart* by Gregory Boyle. The memoir was like nothing I've ever read. It gave me a glimpse into a world I've never seen before. If not for this assignment, I would have never thought to pick up this book, but I'm very grateful that I did. Reading about Gregory's life made me lose some of my preconceived biases and made me reflect more deeply about the impact Christianity has on people's lives.

Drew Shripka | The Other Way Ministries

I was given the opportunity to work at the Other Way Ministries on the west side of Grand Rapids over the course of this summer. I worked mostly in their food pantry, which is only one of the many programs they have to support the community around the westside. While I was there, I helped neighbors through the pantry, restocked shelves, and helped unload and organize donations. Through all of these things, I was able to grow connections and friendships with both the other volunteers and the neighbors who came in.

While there are many memorable moments, I have a couple of favorites. One is the struggle of the collard greens. I had missed a couple of days due to a football event, and I came in on Monday ready for a normal day, but when I came in and went to the back to start restocking, I was astonished: Shelves upon shelves of canned collard greens, there was even more on pallets in the outdoor storage unit. Normally, this would be fine; after all, I did see the pantry go from a seemingly infinite supply of tuna to not having it at all in only a couple of months. The problem came in that barely anyone wanted collard greens, or at least would rather have some of our vast variety of soup in the same section. But the most memorable part about all of this came a couple of weeks later, when we just got a huge shipment of lots of canned vegetables that I was helping unload. Everything was going well until we got to the back of the truck, where we found another palette full of collard greens, which had me and my supervisor Bethany, and another volunteer Mark laughing and confused about why we were being sent so many.

The most impactful part of my summer was meeting one of the couple of old guys who was a regular at the pantry. He came from a large family of 7, which allowed him to get a lot of things off each shelf, but he picked sparingly, always telling me stories about his past or teaching me a history lesson while he chose his item. But what impacted me most was what came after. I would help him take his reused bags out to his car, walking slowly with him as he struggled to walk. When we got to his car, I put the bags carefully in the front seat (I could NOT break this guy's eggs) and closed the door, expecting to wish him a good day and go back inside. But instead, he gently laid his hand on my shoulder and prayed a blessing over me.

This interaction has stuck with me and has stuck out as the coolest thing that happened to me during my time working there. Not only that, but this experience changed one of my personal prejudices. I've been wary about accepting the differences between Protestants and Catholics ever since I was taught the history of Christianity, but that day it was dissolved. I have since been more comfortable when Catholic people talk about their perception of the Bible because I was given a deeper understanding and sense of connection.

I didn't expect *Tattoos on the Heart* to be a book that I'd enjoy before I started reading it, but that soon changed after forcing myself to pick it up for a couple of minutes, only to find myself well on my way through after a couple of hours. The real stories told in that book seemed almost fake. The way that Greg Boyle was able to submerge himself in that gang community that no one outside wanted to be a part of reminded me a lot of how Jesus was always hanging around the outcasts of society. Overall, I think this summer has given me a new perspective on people who struggle with food and a deeper connection with the Grand Rapids community.