

Dégagé Ministries | Allie Edwards

Dégagé Ministries came to Thornapple and conducted a housing simulation. During the simulation, we all received a role. Each person received an annual wage, number of children, and other factors that may be important when dealing with homelessness. The sheer frustration I felt was overwhelming as we cycled through the simulation due to how my character was treated. The simulation was eye-opening to the daily reality and struggles of those dealing with homelessness and the stigma surrounding it.

After the housing simulation, I learned about the GVN program and was ecstatic. I wanted to get involved in Dégagé, but I never knew how. It was the best decision I could have made. The GVN program helps teens get involved in an impactful way.

I was fortunate enough to experience all areas of Dégagé and how beneficial they are. Firstly, I worked in the wellness center, where we offered showers, lockers, and haircuts. While working at the wellness center I saw how much of my daily life I took for granted. Thrift On Div was a blessing to everyone who came to Dégagé. The thrift store was filled with laughter, the latest fashions, and dreams for the future. I also worked in the kitchen where we served 3 meals a day from donations only. I saw such creativity and love from all the cooks trying their best to make sure everyone was satisfied with their food and that their dietary needs were met.

My experience at Dégagé has been phenomenal. I have been met with open arms by staff and patrons alike. I cannot even start to express the amount of love I have for everyone I have met at Dégagé, especially the patrons. Every morning, they consistently make me smile; though it seems small, their kindness is overwhelming, even when dealing with difficult situations. Through their hardships, what stands out to me are their acts of kindness. Such as carrying a tray, getting someone coffee, or just being there for others makes my heart so full. Dégagé has connected me with my faith by seeing the patrons' faith and trust in God. In stressful and painful situations, they would be praising God endlessly.

My experience at Dégagé has shown me how much I take for granted and how many misconceptions there are about those dealing with homelessness. There are a multitude of reasons that someone may end up without housing. Through this summer, I have learned that God can use anyone and in any situation for his kingdom.

Dégagé Ministries | Langston Holquist

This summer I had the opportunity to work in the kitchen at Dégagé Ministries. Dégagé is an organization that serves unhoused people in downtown Grand Rapids. Inside Dégagé people can get affordable meals, take showers, get clothes, reading glasses, and other essentials. In addition to this, they can get assistance with building resumes, finding jobs, getting IDs, and other things that unhoused people may struggle with doing on their own. They also have a women's shelter upstairs. Dégagé's goal is to help people get themselves back on their feet, so they provide lots of jobs that people can do to get money for food and other resources they would want.

While I was working at Dégagé, I was in the kitchen from 7am to 1pm. I would serve breakfast, then make and serve lunch. I really enjoyed working with the people who were working there, they were nice and trusted me to do the right thing while cooking and serving. I was also able to talk to the people we served and get to know them a little bit, and they were usually very friendly. I really enjoyed the work I got to do, I enjoy cooking and being around people, so being able to do that was great. It could also be challenging, but usually it was challenging in a good way. Most of the time, we decided what we were going to make for lunch as we were making it, so if we were making something that would go good with salad, I would have to make a salad with whatever vegetables we had at the time. Sometimes that salad would be just okay, but sometimes the salad would be really good;.I just really enjoyed the problem solving I got to do. However, not everything I had to do was fun. One of the days, we were pretty light on food in the walk in fridge, so we decided that it would be a good day to take all the shelves out and clean the floors. The smell that came from the floor when we moved the shelves is one of the worst I have ever smelled. Cleaning the floor wasn't easy either because there was this thick black substance caked on to the floor which took a lot of effort to scrub out. Thankfully, not every task was that awful, and even when the jobs were awful, it felt good to be helping.

Working at Dégagé was one of the best experiences I've ever had. It was so great to be able to meet and get to know people who live a very different life than me. It felt truly amazing to be able to give my time to a cause I believe in and help people in a meaningful way. I'm so grateful I had this opportunity to help others, and I'm looking forward to doing similar volunteer work in the future.

ICCF | Brandon Baum

The 15-minute drive to work every morning is usually classified by most as a short drive. But in those 15 minutes, I would be transported to a much different world than the one I live in. I have been thankful to be a part of the Glenn VanNoord program because it has been a way for me to see God's work with my own eyes. This was my first time working in a ministry position and I really appreciated having a meaningful purpose for my work, and I loved feeling like I was doing real work for God's Kingdom here on earth.

This summer I have had the privilege of being a part of ICCF Community Homes. ICCF is a nonprofit organization that builds or rehabs houses and makes them available at a more affordable price to lower income families. I did a number of things during the summer, but most of my work was around preparing for, and helping a variety of volunteer groups as they serve the community. We would gather supplies and then help groups with housing rehab projects, such as drywall, building furniture, painting, demo, yardwork and beyond. I enjoyed the physical work, because completing a project is always satisfying and working with groups was fun, just to get to know new people.

By working in this ministry I learned a lot of practical skills, but the impact on my faith journey was seen through a few significant things. First, I was impacted by my supervisor Sheryl Baas. She demonstrated that leaning on the gifts that God gives us, we can have a huge impact. She works many hours serving the poor in Grand Rapids, and I was inspired by her faithfulness and her commitment. I was also very impressed by the many volunteer groups that helped this ministry throughout the summer, their selflessness spurred me to want to be more giving of my time in talents, as I saw how they were used by God to make a difference in the lives of people. I was also blessed when I had the opportunity to meet the people that work moving into the houses that we were working to renovate. The gratitude and thankfulness made the hard work very rewarding. I loved that I got to be a small part of the work that God is doing in Grand Rapids, by providing housing to those less fortunate.

As I continue in my life, growing and growing my faith even more, this experience will certainly have an impact on the way I live. The inspiring attitudes of the people I surrounded myself with along with the care of volunteer groups that work just because they want to help out their neighbor. These aspects all have an impact on the way I want to carry myself in the future because it shows the perfect example of "loving your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) the way God wants people to help each other.

Overall, through a daily short 15-minute drive, but a considerable change in the condition of living. I have learned life lessons, and skills, and have been face-to-face with the work of God. I have understood the blessings I have that may not be accessible by most. And the love and impact people have for one another.

The Other Way Ministries | Mars Steenwyk

This past summer, I was blessed with the opportunity to help those in need living on the west side of Grand Rapids. Through the Glenn VanNoord program, I lent a helping hand to The Other Way Ministries, a faith-based non-profit in downtown Grand Rapids. The Other Way helps guide families in need toward spiritual direction, relationship growth, and economic stability through a diverse range of services, programs, and classes. Their services include a fresh market with flexible pricing for accessible food, a food pantry devoted to supplying food to families in need, low-cost counseling, early childhood education, and other youth services.

My role at The Other Way changed on a day-to-day basis. Typically, I worked at the food pantry. My responsibilities included restocking the shelves, taking shipments, and walking people through the pantry. Every morning, I would arrive at 9am to restock shelves and refrigerators to prepare for the day. At about 9:50, the supervisors and volunteers would gather for a morning prayer which was a great way to start the day. Once the clock struck 10, I would be greeted by a flood of customers, who soon became familiar neighbors to me.

One of the best parts about working at The Other Way was getting to know the people. All of the volunteers and supervisors have amazing stories to share and inspiring faiths. The staff are patient and excellent listeners, who make everyone feel welcomed and loved. Everyone at The Other Way is considered a "neighbor" which creates a sense of unconditional love and support for our community. Another takeaway I had from this internship was vastly improving my Spanish. Most of the staff are bilingual and about 25% of our customers were primarily Spanish speaking so I was challenged to learn every day.

Overall, working at the other way made me feel thankful and fulfilled because I was able to grow my faith and act on what God called me to do. Helping homeless people made me grateful for all the little things I usually take for granted. After arriving home from The Other Way, I would always thank God for my car, warm home, food in my refrigerator, and my cozy mattress. My perspective on life will forever be changed after realizing the luxuries and opportunities I am blessed with. I would highly recommend the Glenn VanNoord Urban Missions Program because it provides an opportunity to help those in need and grow your faith.

The Other Way Ministries | Megan VerMerris

This summer I had the privilege of spending time with the Other Way Ministries Food Pantry. The Other Way is a Christ-centered ministry located in Grand Rapids that focuses on helping their neighbors through a variety of ways, one of which is the food pantry. During the summer at the food pantry, I worked on stocking shelves, sorting donations, and helping neighbors through the food pantry. I grew to love The Other Way and all the people who are there- workers, volunteers, or neighbors.

One of my favorite parts of working at The Other Way was getting to meet so many wonderful volunteers. Everyone who works there is so welcoming and has such a passion for helping the people around them. They are all so kind and willing to take time out of their lives to be stewards of Christ and spend their time with the people of Grand Rapids who may need help and a community. Cecibel, the front desk worker, was someone who I loved getting to know. She is so kind and patient with all the people who come in and work so hard. I loved the times when we would sit and talk about her family, garden, and her journey to get where she is now. I am so glad that I got to spend time with her and all the other volunteers and workers at the food pantry.

I also loved meeting many different people from around Grand Rapids. I learned the names of many of the people that came into the pantry and had the privilege of listening to their stories and talking to them about music, their families, their histories, and more. I really appreciated the diversity that was represented among the neighbors that I met at The Other Way, and I was glad to know that I was a small part in making a difference in their lives. One distinct memory I have from the beginning of the summer was when one woman I was helping around the food pantry turned to me and said that we were a miracle to her and that she didn't know what she would do without us. It is a confirmation that the work that The Other Way does is so important and can really help to change someone's life.

Something that has stood out to me from my work this summer is that there are many people who are struggling, but still take time to give back. For example, some of the volunteers that work there also go through the pantry. Even though they may not have many resources or need the extra help, they still make it a priority to help others and give back. Another example of neighbors giving back is when two very kind women came through our pantry in the morning, and then later in the day came back with baked goods to share with the volunteers and customers who came in.

Another part of my work at The Other Way that I really loved was getting to speak Spanish with many of the neighbors that came in. Many of the people that shop at the pantry are Hispanic, and as a Spanish-speaker-in-training, it was really helpful to be able to practice talking to others in a real world setting and not just a classroom.

I have seen God work in so many ways at The Other Way and it is so amazing to be a part of the mission. I feel that this experience has changed my perspective on homeless or lower-income families because I'm not so quick to judge anymore and now have the urge to help and love others. I have loved spending time with and getting to know so many different people. I am so grateful for the opportunity to do the Glenn VanNoord program and I am very thankful that I got to spend my summer at The Other Way.

The Other Way Ministries | Benji Zorn

Sometimes the best opportunities fall right into your lap, and the Glenn VanNoord program was just that. After completing an interview with Laurie Guikema, for a career exploration class, I found myself set on wanting to teach, but not knowing where to start. She then recommended I apply for the Glenn VanNoord program and the rest was history.

I was set up with The Other Way Ministries, a nonprofit organization in the heart of the West side of Grand Rapids. Their mission focused on community outreach through youth programs, licensed counseling, and a food pantry that services around 900 families a month. This organization has been operating for almost sixty years and after spending my whole summer there, this is no surprise. With a team of over twenty-five employees, improvements are always being made to keep this older nonprofit on the cutting edge of community work.

The role that I played was an assistant to the facilities manager, Chris Parsons. We tackled many jobs from painting entire rooms, building walls in order to separate children's programming from homeless programs, and tackling many hours of landscaping work. While we were always working on jobs, we were always on call, ready to jump in if something went wrong. For example, we had to take care of a flooded basement three separate times.

This internship opportunity really exposed to me the importance of community. While I was there, Chris started up a Wednesday art workshop that aligned with the Mel Trotters shower program. This allowed for unhoused individuals to come shower and tap into their creativity, taking their mind off the constant stress of living on the streets. This program so far has created over 15 different unique pieces of art from these individuals. Currently, I am in the process of trying to purchase one of these pieces of art and get money in the hands of these individuals to help them through their daily lives.

While I worked in facilities, I was able to really understand how the organization was run. The member that stuck out to me was Karl, the community resource manager. Every day, 10 to 20 people throughout the community would come and ask him for assistance and he would always find a bus pass, a tent, or socks for them, always with a smile on his face.

This internship opened my eyes to the homeless population as a whole. While I have never tried to judge, there has always been a level of fear and stigma around them. By being around them more and hearing their stories, you start to understand that this very thing could happen to you. If I had different parents, friends, serious medical issues, or a poor network of people I am close with, I could be in the exact spot. While that is very hard to grasp it is something that I tried to tell myself all the time. By relating, you are able to treat them how you would want to be treated in that scenario. It has given me a greater appreciation for God and Him putting me in this position to help the less fortunate.

With all that I have learned here, I will continue to give as much time and resources to people in need. I have already talked with Chris about my potential return back near Christmas to help out along with my family. The Other Way and the Glenn VanNoord program have really opened my eyes to service and I cannot wait to continue my journey.