

## 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.