



Sharing Our Time, Energy, and Expertise

DURING THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, our thoughts turn to the spirit of giving. Naturally this can mean tangible gifts, but it also refers to giving of ourselves—our time, energy, passions, and skills. I asked several Academy members, from students to veteran practitioners, to share why and where they volunteer outside of their workplaces or educational institutions, and their reasons for doing so.

Jose P. Madrid, a recent graduate of the University of Nevada—Las Vegas who is enrolled in the dietetic internship at Horizon Specialty Hospital, has volunteered for the past 5 years at numerous Las Vegas-area organizations including Toys 4 Smiles, Opportunity Village, and the CASA Foundation.

“At Toys 4 Smiles, I have had the opportunity to make wooden toys from start to finish,” Madrid says. The toys are donated to nonprofit organizations like CASA—the Clark County, Nevada, Court Appointed Special Advocate Program, which assists abused and neglected children in foster care. “Just seeing the kids smile after receiving their gifts makes it worthwhile to keep volunteering each year,” Madrid says.

TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCES

Lauri Wright, PhD, RDN, LD, chair of the department of nutrition and dietetics and director of the doctorate in clinical nutrition program at the University of North Florida, volunteers locally and internationally. “For Feeding America, I have done everything from sorting food to teaching nutrition education classes for clients and providers. For Meals on Wheels, I have delivered meals, analyzed menus, and helped them start a produce program.”

In addition, Wright has volunteered in the Dominican Republic, Uganda, Belize, Panama, India, and Ghana, primarily in clinics and hospitals treating malnutrition.

“As dietitians, we have skills and talents that we should share with

others,” Wright says “About 10 years ago, I began working with an HIV clinic and learned that the most common nutritional problem they were facing was food insecurity. After I saw the difference we can make, I volunteered for a medical mission trip to a malnutrition clinic in the Dominican Republic.

“Every experience has been so transformational that I just try to find more ways that I can help,” says Wright.

IMPROVE AND ENHANCE LIVES

Jil Feldhausen, MS, RDN, of Tucson, AZ, is the clinical dietitian for a concierge medical practice. She volunteers as a member of several boards, including Imago Dei Middle School—a private institution that enrolls only children from low-income families.

“My professional opportunities have always been in pediatrics and underserved populations,” Feldhausen says. “I had the chance to see situations of great need early in my roles in family medicine, failure to thrive clinics, and child abuse shelters. Once you are more aware, it is hard to not be involved in one way or another.”

NEEDED EXPERTISE

Laura McNally Nelson, MPH, RD, FADA, FAND, has volunteered for most of her life but spent the past decade volunteering full-time since her retirement from the federal government. Her service includes senior positions—among them president—of Women for Women, an organization dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls in Pitt County, North Carolina. “These experiences have provided the expertise that is often much needed in our communities,” Nelson says. “These experiences have also made me feel so much a part of my community and allowed me to give back what I have been given throughout my career.”



Terri J. Raymond

A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

“I know that I am a better dietitian and a better citizen as a result of volunteering,” Wright says. “I hope that I have left the organizations and people that I have worked with a bit better as a result of my work.”

According to Nelson, “Volunteering is the best way to understand your community and share your expertise. It is also an excellent mechanism to promote the skills of a registered dietitian nutritionist.”

Feldhausen keeps a sign on her bulletin board that says: *If not now... when? If not here... where? If not me... who?*

For Madrid, volunteering is especially personal. “I was one of those kids that didn’t get toys during the holidays unless my parents would take me to one of those donation locations,” he says. “Donating your time could make a world of a difference in someone’s life,” Madrid says, “like it did for me.”

As we hear from our members, volunteering is a never-ending path to lifelong learning, understanding, options, and leadership. Members everywhere give of their time and experience to make our world a better place and to grow and expand their horizons, becoming the best that they can be. This season, and throughout the year, take time to share and care: Volunteer!

Terri J. Raymond, MA, RDN, CD, FAND
president@eatright.org

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