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Our world is a scary place these days. It seems that everywhere we turn there is violence, anger and bloodshed. “The world is too much with us,” Wordsworth said, and, indeed, it has been too much with me of late. As so many of us, my allegiances are pulled in many different directions. My kids need me. My husband needs me. My house is a wreck. Work is busy. My mom is getting older and more frail every day. My mother-in-law is recovering from a stroke thousands of miles away. And who has time for the holidays?? Just so many worries! It would be so easy to sink into a rut and just *grind* day in and day out, and I have found myself doing just that a little too often. Every once in a while, though, an opportunity presents itself to get out of myself and give to another.

The Rush Employee Volunteer Program (EVP) created just such an opportunity on November 13, 2019. I signed up to visit the [Chicago Youth Center](#) and do whatever needed to be done to help the facility in its mission to provide a safe place for local kids to “realize their potential and pursue success”. We gathered in the Atrium and packed bags with assorted personal products to help people get through the cold winter months. Like [Lucy and Ethel on the candy line](#), we stuffed lip balms, soaps and shampoos into bags, desperately trying to beat the clock and make it to the busses on time. I’m pretty sure that some folks got two lip balms and no lotion because of me, but regardless, we packed until there was no more to pack, then climbed onto the yellow school busses that would bring us to our destination.



Our fearless leader Jantelle Jackson, shepherded us expertly to the Sidney Epstein Youth Center in North Lawndale; an imposing site with a magnificent door leading into a warm, brick foyer. A line of head-start kids, all of 4-5 years old, bright-eyed and toothless, was just headed to the gym. Most smiled shyly, and some jumped up and down enthusiastically when they saw us.

The center director, Clarence Howard gave us a history, then a tour after which we girded up with cleaning supplies and got to work. Every doorknob, every railing, every bookshelf and toy got wiped down that day by a team of warm, high-spirited individuals. Kevin and I took the outside duty and chipped ice off the sidewalks and ramps surrounding the center. It was bracingly cold and, the whole time I was chipping, I kept thinking about how

lucky I was to be able to participate, to be able to DO something. I felt the negativity and stress begin to melt away with every stroke of my shovel.

What struck me, honestly, was the sight of those kids, so happy and full of joy, in the midst of a neighborhood that I have often been warned about as dangerous. That center, though, it wasn't dangerous. It was a haven! In the words of Hemmingway, it was a "clean, well-lighted place" and it was clear that those kids were loved there. They shone with innocence and purity and they exuded childlike wonder and curiosity. They deserve so much from us, from ***all of us***. Truly, they had no idea what we were all doing there and most of them probably won't remember us after a while. But those kids had an impact on me that I will carry with me always. They showed me resilience in the face of adversity, joy in the face of despair and just the abundant love that children innately carry with them into the world.

Those kids deserve a chance to grow up free from fear and free from the hardships of poverty, hunger and inequity. While I can't fix all of the big problems, I truly believe that every kind action that any one person takes may just make the difference. If we all do what we can, when we can, even if it is something that seems so small, we might find that the world becomes a little brighter for those around us, and for ourselves. I signed up to help clean a youth center. In reality, I gained so much more than I gave and, in this season of Thanksgiving, I am truly grateful for the opportunity to have served. I look forward to the next event with my own newly rediscovered sense of childlike wonder.