

IT'S CALLED GOOD DEEDS DAY, BUT THE DEEDS RESONATE LONG AFTER

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On April 7, over 8,000 volunteers mobilized at sites across DC, Maryland, and Northern Virginia for The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington's eighth annual Sara & Samuel J. Lessans Good Deeds Day. More than 50 organizations partnered with Federation to provide nearly 75 sites for volunteers to roll up their figurative and literal sleeves to make a tangible impact in their community.

"Every year, Good Deeds Day brings the local community together to put into practice the simple idea that every single person can be a force for good in the world," said Ruth Lamberty, one of Federation's coordinators for Good Deeds Day.

Good Deeds Day was founded and pioneered by Israeli businesswoman and philanthropist Shari Arison as an international celebration of volunteerism. This year was the 13th annual Good Deeds Day internationally, with volunteers in 108 countries participating; and the eighth year the Greater Washington Jewish community has joined those millions of volunteers in their worldwide day of service. Good Deeds Day in Greater Washington is funded through a gift from Drs. Stuart and Ellen Lessans in memory of Stuart's parents, Sara and Samuel J. Lessans, who were committed to the Jewish teachings of charity and support for others.

"The Federation is committed to strengthening the community in which we live," said CEO Gil Preuss. "The Sara & Samuel J. Lessans Good Deeds Day allows us to turn the idea of doing good into real action, and we welcome all to join us in this effort."



One partner organization this year was FACETS, which offers services and programs for families in Fairfax County, Virginia, facing poverty and its associated challenges. Volunteers from Temple B'nai Shalom helped with yard cleanup at one of the organization's four community centers and planted a community vegetable garden. "It's so important to us to make sure the centers are a welcoming place for the residents," said FACETS Volunteer Manager Lauren Kessler. "The kids will work with our community advocate on tending to the garden, and learn about the vegetables over the season. The residents will get to see tomatoes, cucumbers, and squash grow in their backyard."

At the JCC of Northern Virginia, volunteers also created "Birthday Bags" for FACETS families. Decorated with fun drawings and then filled with packages of cake mix, frosting, candles, and a coloring book, the bags had "everything you need to celebrate at home," said Kessler.

"Many of our clients and parents work two to three jobs to support their families. This leaves little time and energy for celebrations," she said. FACETS provides bags to families they work with when a child has a birthday, making it a bit easier for parents to create special birthday memories.

Lisa Hershey, program director for community outreach at Yachad DC, spoke of the concrete, positive health impacts that beneficiaries of this year's Good Deeds Day project would enjoy. (Yachad DC, an affordable housing nonprofit, is not to be confused with the disability inclusion organization Yachad).

"Student volunteers from three different Hillels helped us remove old carpet to make a home healthier for a family with young children who have asthma," said Hershey. "The project was very demanding, requiring cutting the carpet, hauling it out of the house, pulling out the tacks, and carefully cleaning the dust and debris." This type of project is part of a new DC Healthy Housing Collaborative, a multi-sector coalition seeking to address substandard housing conditions that contribute to health issues affecting District of Columbia residents.

"The highlight [of Good Deeds Day] is always a happy homeowner; and seeing people from different parts of the city, who would otherwise never meet, develop a connection," said Hershey. "Our tagline is 'building bridges by building communities.'"



And in Montgomery County, Maryland, Montgomery Parks Volunteer Services and Community Partnerships Coordinator Henry Coppola said volunteers put in over \$6,500 worth of value-added service in just a few hours. Their simple act of collecting trash from the parks would provide cosmetic, environmental, health, and safety benefits for the parks, park users, and the local ecosystems, he said.

"Miriam Friedman's volunteer group from the Kemp Mill community had over 130 volunteers come out to help this year, which was a really overwhelming turnout. This was one of our largest groups in quite some time," he said. "Good Deeds Day cleanup volunteers always have a dramatic impact on the parks, streams, and their local community."

"Montgomery Parks always enjoys hosting Good Deeds Day projects, and we look forward to continuing to work with the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington and all of our great volunteer groups and leaders," he said.

By Rachel Kohn

Rachel Kohn is editor in chief of Kol HaBiraH.

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