



All in the Family

Thanks to Marissa Vogel, thousands of kids have learned the true meaning of charity. *By Eliana Osborn*

HELP WANTED

Austin, TX, has a robust nonprofit community. Yet Marissa Vogel, 46, struggled to find volunteer opportunities for her young daughters. It turned out that her friends faced the same challenge. “Like me, they didn’t know where to start, but wanted to teach their kids how to give back,” says Marissa. Her experience in corporate marketing coupled with an MBA provided the know-how to found

a nonprofit organization, Little Helping Hands (LHH), which creates monthly volunteer opportunities suitable for families with children as young as 3 years old.

IN IT TOGETHER

Established in 2009, LHH connects thousands of Austin-area kids and their parents with fun charitable activities. Events range from planting flowers and cleaning up parks to sorting food at a

local pantry. The monthly projects are mostly from nonprofit partners vetted by LHH. “The size of the job doesn’t really matter. If you’re helping, you’re helping,” says Marissa.

Marissa’s team updates the LHH website each month with the latest available opportunities—usually about 50 to 60 options, with more during the summer months and around the holidays. LHH wants to streamline the process for busy families. “You just sign up and show up,” says Marissa. Her group takes care of the rest.

PAY IT FORWARD

While most LHH projects are small in scale, Marissa also offers some bigger events. On Family Volunteer Day last November, LHH coordinated with local families living in affordable housing, offering them a chance to give back to their communities during their annual Thanksgiving lunch. LHH volunteers worked side-by-side with people traditionally on the receiving end of charitable efforts. “We filled rice and bean bags for a local pantry, packed hygienic wipes for the homeless, and made ‘Adopt Me’ bandannas for an animal shelter,” says Marissa.

SMART CHAT

Education is a key part of LHH’s efforts. “Table talks,” as Marissa calls them, are discussion guides for families. They inform participants about the nonprofit they’ll be working with, and can be viewed before and after any event. The guides serve as conversation starters on the larger issues involved—such as homelessness and hunger—in order to familiarize attendees with the cause.

For the Vogel family, LHH has accomplished more than just getting people interested in giving back. Marissa hopes the program will continue to inspire her daughters, now 10 and 12. “I’m teaching them how you have to work hard to get what you want,” she says, “and to dream that anything is possible.”

For more information or to donate, visit littlehelpinghands.org.