

Why I started volunteering:

*I started volunteering at GraceWorks about a couple of years ago. In the past, I feel like I have always been very consumed with work, always working long hours in jobs. Adding two small children onto that, there never has been much time for other things. Suddenly that changed when within the span of one month, I was fired from my job and personally involved in a lawsuit. To say times were stressful is an understatement. However, I had one thing that I truly had never had as an adult and that was free time. Those of us that are not used to having free time, struggle with free time, so I set out on finding things to do to fill my time. One of the things I had always wanted to do, but never was able to carve out the time for was to volunteer. I researched different organizations and opportunities trying to find one that was a fit. Upon digging further into the BUMC website I found the perfect opportunity - Volunteering at the Food Pantry at GraceWorks.*

*I grew up volunteering at food pantries from time to time, so it seemed like a natural fit. I began working shifts at the GraceWorks food pantry with the purpose of giving back to my community. What I did not realize was just how much I needed and got out of it. I would look forward to going every week. It was always such an uplifting place. I always met new wonderful people, and I always had such a positive feeling being there. It was a contrast that I needed. Sometimes in life we see the darkest sides of people, and in many ways, I was seeing a lot of darkness from people at that time. But having that contrast (my family, friends, GraceWorks) gave me the balance I needed to keep moving forward. Fast forward to a few months later, and I had started my own company and was working full time again. Because GraceWorks was such an important part of my week, I made a point to continue to volunteer at my regularly scheduled shift regardless of what was happening with the business. I found that having a few short hours away from the work a week was very rewarding and a lot easier than I ever imagined.*

Stories while at GraceWorks:

*I once had the pleasure of helping an older married couple with getting some groceries. They were as nice as can be and so appreciative for the help GraceWorks was providing to them. They told me a little bit about their situation. The husband had not had any work in a while. He had been patiently waiting, hoping that work would come soon. Despite the discouragement of not having income, they were hopeful that the next week would bring changes. They asked me to pray for them and that he would have work soon so they would not have to be back asking for more help from GraceWorks. I prayed for them immediately. After that day, I thought about that couple a lot. You often see the same faces you help at GraceWorks. During each shift, I always wondered if I would see them back or if he was able to get work. I am happy to report I never saw that sweet couple again. I am happy because I hope it means they got their wish, and he was able to work.*

Ironically sometimes it is the smaller stories that stick out most to me. I did not have a lot of long conversations in length that stick out to me, but I did have some powerful short ones.

*There was a homeless woman who I would see from time to time. Although her situation seemed so bad, she was always upbeat and encouraging. She never had any shame or hesitation in telling people about her life and her struggles. She even taught me a trick on tying up plastic bags so that they are very secure, but also able to be easily untied and re-used again. It may seem silly and insignificant, but it resonated with me. To this day, I am not sure why I remember her so much. Perhaps it was the*

*juxtaposition of her ability to speak so freely of her own situation compared to my shame of my own issues going on at the time. She was such a positive motivation to me.*

*I helped an elderly woman once who was physically very frail. While I was putting her groceries in the car for her, she was telling me what a blessing GraceWorks was, what a blessing I was, and how wonderful God had been in her life. As I finished the last of the groceries, she gave me probably one of the best hugs I have had and said, "God Bless you for all that you do". Words will not convey why this memory stood out so much to me. It was the feeling I had when I was with her. When she hugged me and when she blessed me, I really felt God there with us in that moment. It was just a warm, joyful memory that she was able to share with me.*