

NDY Interview Questions

1. Why did you start your organization?

I started volunteering on a regular basis while I was a young mom (two children before the age of 20) living in a rural community about an hour outside of Dallas, Texas. It started with giving my time at the small, local library helping with a weekly story time and craft hour for the community kids. It was something I could do while also involving my own children and allowed me to get out of the house and interact with others. Through that opportunity I was asked to teach ESL classes to the predominantly Spanish speaking immigrants that lived and worked in the area. My children would come with me to library and play on the floor while I led classes. While volunteering there I had been accepted into Southern Methodist University on scholarship. The librarian at the library where I had been volunteering- Lori Wright- had, by that time, become a good friend and mentor and she offered to watch my children twice a week so that I could complete my degree. *That singular act of kindness and the accompanying outside validation and belief in my abilities* changed the trajectory of my life.

Tuesday, March 19, 2019

I graduated from Southern Methodist University and received my degree in International Studies and Cultural Anthropology with a focus on Latin America (Magna Cum Laude, no less). Years later, I found myself working for a nonprofit that conducted cultural awareness programs abroad and I started taking my children on those programs while I led groups (starting when they were 5 and 7 years old). Experiencing the impact that these service opportunities had created in my own children opened my eyes to the power of service and experiential education in the development of youth.

What you were doing before you started it?

Before I began the process of founding Bright Light Volunteers I had worked for a series of small nonprofit organizations in the Dallas, Texas area. The financial compensation was never adequate, but the emotional rewards of my work always seemed to make up for the difference. Most importantly, I was able to take and pick up my kids from school and it gave me the flexibility to be present in the lives of my children in ways that simply would not have been possible if I had chosen to take a more traditional career.

Where do you see it going in the future?

To date, I have witnessed Bright Light Volunteers grow and blossom into an amazing organization that is primarily run by a group of women who fiercely believe in the power of education and service to transform the lives of you and provide them with access to opportunities to others. At the very core of our mission is the idea that we can cultivate peace and understanding in the world via global service learning programs. When one experiences the reality and life of another it becomes very difficult to continue to fuel the hate, intolerance, and divisiveness that often – and artificially- divide one group against another. Our work creates an infinity of ripple effects in our community. I feel like the future development of organizations, such as ours, truly has the ability to change the world for the better and better allow all peoples the manner in which to view our shared humanity instead of our differences. Peace and love beget even more peace and love.

2. How has helping others changed your life?

→ Helping others has obviously made an enormous, meteoric impact on my life, but I think I already touched enough about this above in my response to question number one.

Why should others get involved with your organization?

It is through the service that allows us a deeper understanding of ourselves and connectedness in the world. The ability to “see oneself in others” is, what I believe to be, the impetus for creating a more just, peaceful, and compassionate world for all. Our work at Bright Light Volunteers has been facilitating just that and now that our very first program participants are now graduating from college, we have accumulated data that suggests that enabling students to have a global education and experience in service really does correlate directly with their perceived- and actual- ability to become global citizens and proponents of peace and change in the world.

3. What does compassion mean to you?

The meaning of compassion, to me, is the ability that an individual or organization has to see itself in others. It is the ability to understand the world through the mental lens of “us” rather than “you” vs. “me.” The suffering or challenges that others face- whether in our own community or half way across the world- are all really OUR challenges, collectively. Compassion is the means in which we erase the conceptual divide between “us” and “them.”

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4. Do you have any advice for others who are considering volunteering?

My advice to others who are considering making volunteerism a fundamental aspect of their lives is to just jump in and do it. The time is always now. Every individual has talents, skills, or just the time/presence to give for the benefit of others.

Through volunteering in my community- both locally and abroad- I have been blessed with the opportunity to be able to help others cultivate compassion- especially the youth we work with. It is the most rewarding work that I have done in my life and being able to watch the transformation a student experiences on our programs enables me to relive the wonder and grace that I felt as I witnessed the same effect blossom within my own children.

Volunteering and community activism gives us the opportunity to become participants, rather than merely bystanders, in our lives as it relates to others.

Volunteering- the act of doing for others with no expected or anticipated gain for ourselves- humanizes everyone involved in the endeavor, most importantly ourselves- and our ability to self realize our vision for a brighter future. It gives purpose to more than just our lives – it is access to the purpose of everything.

-CG 5/20/19