

Jack Levin - Application for St. Vincent's Hospital Youth Award

One Saturday morning in 2023, early in my sophomore year, I volunteered at Grassroots Grocery in the Bronx and it changed my life. I became passionate about working to address hunger and food insecurity. I began volunteering every Saturday morning I could at Grassroots Grocery. As a volunteer, I help rescue over 13,000 pounds of produce a week from Hunts Point Market that would otherwise go to a landfill. I help sort and pack rescued produce and then deliver it to community partners throughout the Bronx who distribute it to 2000 food insecure individuals and families every week. Seeing long lines of people (seniors, children and families) waiting for our food delivery has humbled me and fueled my commitment to fight food insecurity. Food is a human right and I do not believe anyone should go hungry, especially when we Americans waste 30-40% of our food, 130 billion meals a year. I was motivated to become a Student Ambassador and core volunteer for Grassroots Grocery in October 2023. In addition to regular volunteering on Saturdays I work with other core volunteers to help ensure the food sorting, packing and deliveries run smoothly. I also help recruit more volunteers and fundraise to support and expand the impact that Grassroots can have on reducing hunger and food waste. Volunteering has given me tremendous empathy and compassion for my neighbors in Westchester and the Bronx who are facing food insecurity. Delivering food for Grassroots has allowed me to meet community leaders and residents and witness the powerful impact of a community empowerment model of neighbors helping neighbors. I believe in Grassroots' model of partnering with community members to deliver food directly into community centers, public housing and community fridges. This model of "bringing the pantry to the people" promotes dignity and respect for the individuals and communities we are serving. I have volunteered over 72 hours with Grassroots Grocery over the past year.

My volunteer experience at Grassroots Grocery and seeing how many of our neighbors in Westchester and the Bronx struggle to eat, inspired me to start a program to rescue food at my high school. I got the support of our principal and partnered with the Director and staff of food services at the start of school in 2024. I volunteer 2 hours every Friday to rescue excess school food from being thrown away over the weekend and before breaks. I deliver the food to community fridges in the Bronx where people can access food 24/7. I have served over 30 hours rescuing and donating school food this year.

I chose to deliver the food rescued from my school to community fridges in the Bronx because they are only 20 minutes from our school. People in the Bronx are our neighbors but they live in the poorest urban county in America where 40% of Bronx residents and 1 out of 3 children are hungry. I led 2 workshops in May 2024 for my school's Non Sibi Day where I educated my co-students about hunger and food waste and urged them to volunteer, while we made over 450 sandwiches. I delivered the sandwiches to the Coop City Fridge. I was distressed to see the fridge completely empty when I arrived and shocked to see how quickly so many people came to take all 450 sandwiches before I could even unload them. I presented at the Scarsdale Middle School Human Rights Day in 2023 and 2024 to educate kids about food as a human right and the prevalence of hunger in Westchester and the Bronx. I encouraged them to get involved and promoted the value and rewards of community service.

As a member and class President of the LoWest Young Men's Service League, I volunteer with more than 10 organizations and have served over 130 hours in my community over the past year. My main passion is food justice and hunger so I particularly love to volunteer at Feeding Westchester mobile food pantries, the Carver Center pantry and Hope Community Services soup kitchen. I have sorted medical supplies for AFYA and

I have packed hygiene and sanitary kits for underprivileged youth at 914 Cares. I also enjoy cooking dinners for families with sick children at Ronald McDonald House in Valhalla. It is rewarding to help children with disabilities participate in sports while volunteering with Backyard Sports and Miracle League Baseball. Volunteering with Westchester Parks, I have cleaned and revitalized area parks. I enjoy volunteering at The Kensington to play games and do crafts with seniors on the memory care floor. One of my most inspiring YMSL opportunities has been visiting with seniors through Dorot. I have had the privilege of delivering care packages and spending hours talking with seniors in their home learning about their lives and benefiting from their wisdom. Through community service, I recognize the privileges and opportunities that I benefit from and my responsibility to not only help others but to work for equity and justice.