



**It Takes A Village:
40 Years of Service**

Dear PADS of Elgin Family,

As we celebrate Volunteer Appreciation Month, I want to share a personal story that captures the true power of service—and why volunteers like you mean everything to PADS.

Nearly 40 years ago, my best friend and I met through Interact, our high school's community service club. Multiple times a year, we volunteered at our local PADS—serving dinner, washing dishes, and visiting with guests. Neither of us came from wealthy families, but those evenings gave us something invaluable: perspective, gratitude, and a profound understanding of the power of helping others.

Life moved forward. She built a family while I eventually returned to PADS as Development Manager. Our friendship endured, and though she didn't live in our community, she stayed connected—occasionally preparing meals with me that I'd drop off at the shelter. When she became a mother, she began thinking about passing on the values we'd learned to her own children.

Last fall, she invited me over for a baking day. Together with her daughter, we made desserts for the shelter—her daughter's first step in understanding that not everyone has what she has. A few weeks later, she reached out with a beautiful idea: her niece and nephew would be visiting over the holidays. Could her family prepare and serve dinner for our guests? She saw it as the perfect opportunity to introduce the next generation to service.

On the scheduled day, her family—her daughter, brother, and his two children—spent the day cooking with care and intention. Then they drove almost an hour to the shelter, nervous about what to expect. But thirty minutes later, everything changed. The nervousness transformed into enthusiasm. The kids eagerly dished out pulled pork sandwiches and excitedly encouraged guests to try their homemade hot cocoa bar. They discovered the same truth we had learned thirty years earlier: serving others fills you up in ways nothing else can.

At the end of the evening, she texted me: the kids were already asking when they could do it again. In that moment, I saw the beautiful circle completing itself. The seeds planted in two teenage girls had grown into a legacy of compassion being passed to the next generation.

This is what volunteer service truly is: friends who stay connected across decades, united by shared values. Parents who intentionally teach their children to look beyond themselves. Families who go the extra mile to serve strangers and leave feeling like they received more than they gave. And somewhere down the line, those children will likely introduce service to their own children, creating an unbroken chain of compassion that stretches across time.

To every volunteer who shows up—whether this is your first time or your fortieth—thank you. You are part of this legacy. You are building community, one meal, one conversation, one act of kindness at a time. Your service matters deeply, and your impact extends far beyond what you may ever know.

Ready to join us? Explore our volunteer opportunities at <https://padsofelgin.org/volunteer/>

Thank you for believing in our mission to empower people and families toward self-sufficiency. You make it possible.

With gratitude,

Jen Keller

Development Manager, PADS of Elgin

P.S. Looking to make a monetary donation?
Here's the link for that:
[Donate | PADS of Elgin](#)

