

Make One Change

aRE THERE really such things as soup kitchens?" my 9-year-old son asked after hearing about them on the radio. My answer made me realize how little our family knew about local hunger. It was time, I thought, to find out. I made a quick call to our parish, where I discovered they operated a kitchen once a month for people of all ages, up to 150 at a time—and welcomed volunteers.

Although we had been given a brief summary of the operation over the telephone, my husband, son, and I had no idea what to expect—and we were feeling a bit apprehensive. Our fears were dispelled by the first volunteer we met who welcomed us enthusiastically

and showed us the ropes. Soon we were in the thick of it: hearing stories about the volunteers' children and grandchildren, chopping onions, setting tables, and filling pots. It felt more like a large family coming together to prepare a holiday meal, than members of the community making dinner for people they barely knew.

As the guests arrived, many of the older ones were eager to chat about the weather or how good the food looked. Others remained distant, trying to pass through the line anonymously. Few failed to say "thank you"—a fact that stuck with our son, who now has a new appreciation for food. Our family no longer considers a trip to



Soup's on

Volunteer at a soup kitchen and you'll bond with your community and never take food for granted again.

By GINA ROBERTS-GREY

the grocery store or to a restaurant an inalienable right. And, we've never forgotten the experience of working to serve members of our community.

Thinking of working a shift of your own? Here's how to get started.

Pick a place. Plug your zip code into secondharvest.org to find a soup kitchen closest to you. Or, inquire at your place of worship, park district, or local senior center.

Get the facts. Before committing to a shift, find out the length of each shift, the dress code, if training is offered or if CPR certification is required, and if supplies like hairnets and aprons are provided. Ask about your own eating arrangements. Because of local ordinances, some soup

kitchens cannot allow outside food or beverages to be brought in, but do provide a free meal for volunteers.

Be on time. Meals are served at specific times, which means you need to be prompt. If something prevents you from working your shift, alert the volunteer coordinator so he or she can find a replacement.

Be flexible. Soup kitchens need help in areas besides food service. If you want to volunteer, but can't serve during meals, offer to pick up donations, stock shelves, or inventory supplies. Or, you can set up tables, prepare food, and help clean up. (For other ways to get involved, see "Cooking for a Cause" on page 80.)



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