

*These reflections have been written by the seven students who served through Thornapple's Glenn Van Noord Short Term Missions Program during the summer of 2018. The first two were written by college-age students and the other five were written by high school students. All the students worked in one or two urban ministries in Grand Rapids, doing different types of work – some behind the scenes, some directly with those being helped, some physical hands on work, and some leading or teaching. The papers reflect a bit about each ministry and how the work impacted each student. The Love Mercy Do Justice team at Thornapple oversees this program. We encourage you to read and be blessed by these awesome students and all that God did through them this summer.*

If you would like to learn more about Thornapple's Glenn Van Noord program go to this link:  
<http://thornapple.org/glennvanoord>.

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## Anna Raisch

One of my favorite authors, Emily P. Freeman, is known for posting seasonal "What I Learned" blogs. These collections of lessons learned throughout three-month chunks provide a look into her current life, while also offering inspiration for my own growth. This summer I had the amazing opportunity to intern at both the Refugee Education Center and Family Promise. I spent my mornings teaching 5th and 6th grade refugee students (many of whom didn't know much English), and I spent my afternoons completing a wide variety of tasks at Family Promise (where families experiencing homelessness are served). To be perfectly honest, I came into this summer confused about why God was calling me back to Grand Rapids, but gradually came to realize that He wanted me specifically in these two organizations. The best way to organize my ongoing reflections seems to be in my very own, Glenn VanNoord version of "What I Learned."

On a practical level, I discovered all sorts of new skills throughout the past summer. I learned how to say hello in Swahili ("jambo", in case you were curious). I learned both how to play Uno with students who don't know English and a new rock game, involving amazing reflex skills which I definitely lack. I learned how to run background checks, organize data, and make phone calls to people I had never met before. I learned how to efficiently pack furniture into a truck and developed some upper arm strength while delivering and unloading that furniture. I learned how to be flexible and say yes to anything.

On perhaps a deeper level, many other valuable lessons were also acquired this summer, now highlighted below.

One: Relationships Matter. People and community are extremely important to God, which is evident throughout the Bible, particularly in Jesus' ministry. If we want to reflect Jesus more and more (which, hopefully we do!), then we should continuously be about building and strengthening relationships. These friendships with people open up pathways for bigger conversations about what it is like to be homeless or how refugee students feel in their mostly white schools. Connection must happen first, and be the priority, over personal and societal change.

Two: Get to Know Your Community. I have lived in Grand Rapids for most of my life, yet have rarely interacted with families experiencing homelessness or refugee students. This changed over the

summer. By being in downtown Grand Rapids and Kentwood almost every day, I met so many people and learned a lot about the many nonprofits which are fighting injustice in our community. I built relationships with lots of new people: those who were white and those who were black; those who lived in a shelter, those who had always lived in Grand Rapids, and those who had lived in a refugee camp; those who thrived in school and those who really struggled in school; those who loved the Lord and those who did not believe in the Lord. These people became my friends, and they revealed to me their own version of Grand Rapids. They opened my eyes to the hardships and aches and darkness in this city which can be falsely covered up by clean suburbs and schools full of white children. No matter where I live, I vow to get to know my community. The whole community.

Three: Stretch Your Comfort Zone. We all love being in familiar settings with people we have known for years. On the other hand, we run away from most things which make us feel uncomfortable or uncertain. Every day this summer I practiced stepping outside of my comfort zone. This looked like initiating conversations with strangers, driving a pick-up truck, and navigating the unfamiliar streets of downtown Grand Rapids. Jesus often works most clearly when we get out of our comfort zones and rely solely on Him.

Four: A Smile and Hug Can Go a Long Way. Sometimes I didn't know what to say to people. And other times I didn't know how to speak a child's language. When words weren't useful, I turned to smiling and often offered hugs. These actions break the barrier of language and help reveal a caring heart. I learned to smile at the homeless man on the street, at the child desperate for attention, and at the coworker who made me laugh.

Five: Show Up and Be Present. This is perhaps the most important lesson of all. When Jesus visits the home of Mary and Martha, he praises Mary, who chose to simply sit and be with Jesus. God invites us to be present with Him, and with His people. I truly believe that one of the most powerful things we can do is to consistently show up. I had the rare opportunity to be at these nonprofits every day, which allowed me to spend quality time with people and show them that I was in this for the long-run. Don't become intimidated with how to serve, but instead pick a place, and practice showing up, every month or even better, every week. People yearn for connection, and we can provide that by turning off our phones, looking someone in the eyes, and just being present.

All of these lessons, though learned throughout the past three months, will continue to inform my everyday life. I want to always be someone who can speak up for and do life with people often ignored and forgotten by the rest of society. I want to love Jesus forever, which physically looks like loving others. I want to encourage people to reflect on how they are learning more about their city and how they are serving their city. I want to always invest in relationships. First with the Father, and then with His beloved people.

## Tim Bennett

This summer from May to August, I interned at Heartside Ministries and Access of West Michigan. I can't thank Thornapple's Glenn VanNoord Short Term Urban Missions program enough for giving me such an amazing opportunity to work for the community while increasing my exposure to Grand Rapid's amazing non-profits and the wonderful Christ-centered approach they take to charity.

I remember my first day at Heartside, I was to meet with their pastor in residence, Rev. Kelly Van Brouwer, but I arrived early and had roughly 20 minutes to wait in Heartside's community room. Even within that minuscule period of time, I connected with three of Heartside's "neighbors" (their terminology for the homeless population they serve) who sought me out to talk to them and graciously accepted my prayers. I was so touched that their community was so open and responsive to any newcomers in their ranks, especially because I didn't think that I looked particularly reputable or like someone who had the means to be solicited for any amount of money. That first day, I really felt like a neighbor, and that feeling lasted all summer.

At Heartside, I ended up wearing many hats. For some, I was the techy guy who could navigate the ministry's archaic computer system and input lost data in a timely fashion. I also tutored in their GED program, helping students my age and older to achieve their dreams of higher education, primarily assisting students with mathematics. These two stood out to me, because I've always felt fairly inept when it comes to technology and math, creating a life-long anxiety in both subjects. To see others value in me that which I had perceived as useless or written off, was truly inspiring, and I felt the hand of God in it all. It brought to my mind this passage from 2 Timothy 1:9, "He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace." I was so certain that I knew who I was and what I was capable of, and God just inverted everything on me. I also assisted in the day to day functions of the organization, eventually running the community room and the art gallery myself so other employees could take well deserved vacations. It was here where I really felt that I was able to make a measurable difference, interacting constantly with those I was serving, and implementing my own style of hospitality and grace.

In contrast, Access was a completely different experience. Access serves a large population through a multitude of programs, including poverty simulations, congregational connections, and good food systems. With my background in personal training and holistic wellness, I opted to intern for the NOW program: Nutritional Options for Wellness, which works to assist low income individuals over 18 who have been diagnosed with Cardiovascular Disease, Type II Diabetes, or Chronic Renal Disease. As an intern, I communicated with clients over the phone, phoned doctors' offices for patient lab results, and used my graphic design experience to rebrand all their promotional and informational materials. I enjoyed the work, and I was really interested to see what it was like to serve from a more behind the scenes perspective, but I think that overall I preferred the one-on-one connections I was able to make with the neighbors at Heartside.

This summer was an amazing opportunity for me to work for others, and solidified my desire to explore social work as a profession. I want to dedicate myself to serving others and spreading the love and joy I've felt from Christ to all those in need. Thank you so much to the Glenn VanNoord Short Term Urban Missions program for making it all possible!

## Madeline Scott

This summer I was given the opportunity to work through Thornapple's Glenn VanNoord program at Mel Trotter Ministries' Kidz Korner. Going in I had absolutely no idea what my summer was going to look like working at Mel Trotter, but I couldn't be happier with the outcome. I personally feel that I've gained a better understanding of homelessness and how prevalent it is here in Grand Rapids. However, I think that the children I met at Mel Trotter had the greatest impact on me.

I was blessed to also get the opportunity to work with two other girls from our church, Mariah Hykin and Skye Fitzgibbon. With them the three of us were able to accomplish a lot, such as playing with the kids, organizing field trips to the children's museum, sorting through clothes and organizing closets.

An average day of work was simply playing with children for two and a half hour time blocks. We would organize crafts and games and just enjoy the company of the children. As time went on the kids started to get more comfortable with us and we started to get to know their parents. I remember one particular day a nine year old girl and I were coloring and she opened up to me about how difficult it is to live in a homeless shelter, and how she missed her neighborhood friends and having her own room. She had all sorts of hopes and dreams, that one day she would be able to become a doctor, live in her own house and one day see her dad again. She told me that her mom was more stressed than ever and expects her to watch her three younger siblings every day. She explained to me that the three of us girls being in Kidz Korner helped her escape the daily stresses and just relax and allow her to be a kid again. After hearing that I realized that the children in these situations typically have to grow up very fast and learn to be very independent. I think Kidz Korner was a great way to help all the children just be kids again and not be overwhelmed with their stressful lives. I also watched three girls come in everyday and their mother would always express how much she appreciated what we were doing and how it helped her and her three girls get through their time at Mel Trotter. We also watched a couple of children find homes such as this one six year old boy who told me his story. He said that he and his mom lived with her boyfriend and her boyfriend was a bad guy. The little boy told me that one day his mom's boyfriend got into a fight and somehow the duplex burnt down. He said that he and his mom left the situation but had nowhere to go. So they were living in a car for a short time and then they found Mel Trotter.

I feel that over the summer God showed me that these people aren't just homeless people but that they all have a long story, they all have hopes and dreams and children happen to be the most innocent yet most affected by homelessness. These children are by far the most creative, innovative, most grateful group I've ever met. I really hope during the school year I can stop by once a week and volunteer with the kids, and hopefully see them all move out and find homes!

I am so extremely grateful to have worked in Kidz Korner. I really miss the kids already and can't wait to go back and volunteer as soon as I can. Kidz Korner opened my eyes to so many things and showed me that God is really present in so many ways, and for that I am so incredibly grateful.

## Mariah Hykin

Summertime for me means carefree, unchecked time where I can do what I want, when I want: I can hang out with friends, go to a movie, or swim for hours. When I decided to participate in the Glenn Van Noord program this year, I won't lie; I was feeling a little disappointed. It wasn't the thought of driving half an hour to work every day, or even the time that I would spend connecting with children living in situations that I have never experienced. No, it was the thought of losing my "Summer Freedom." As much as that says about how much of a view altering experience this has been, it also proves how I have changed as a person and as a Christian.

This summer, I had the opportunity to work at Mel Trotter in the Kidz Korner, a care center for homeless kids living on the third and fourth floor of the Mel Trotter building. Walking into the old (very old) building after a long day at school, I was feeling anxious and intimidated. Madeline gave me a look as a man commented on my blouse: we both knew we were in foreign territory. In this moment of fear, I was unaware that for the next three months I would be experiencing situations that would test my empathy and understanding of the world, and of downtown Grand Rapids. I would learn that kids in my city were the first on the bus in the morning and the last off the bus in the afternoon because they didn't want to deal with the stigma of living at a homeless shelter. I learned that twelve-year-old girls have to take care of their younger siblings because their Moms are trying to find work. I learned that sometimes crafts are the best medicine, play-dough is way too hard to get out of carpet, holding babies for three hours does indeed get tiring, and that we made a bigger impact on these kids' lives than I will ever know.

I remember on our second week into working with the kids, one of the younger girls saw me in the hall and got super excited. I started waving at her and smiling, enjoying how happy she was to see me. When I looked a little closer at the situation, I saw that she was peeing all over the floor and clapping, so overcome with joy to see we were coming! I immediately tried to get her to stop, using elaborate hand motions and the cut-throat signal. She only got more excited and clapped her hands harder, her smile growing wider. Similar situations to this helped us grow closer to all of the kids. As we developed closer relationships, we learned so much about the difference of their lives from ours. We realized that they never truly knew where their next meal would come from, that they didn't know where they would be living next week, and that they didn't know where their source of income would come from next. So dramatically different from our world and our reality.

At the end of our time this summer, we decided to throw a party for the kids. We bought a Costco cake, snacks, and soda for all: we wanted to go out with a bang. We had a dance party, ate way too much, and laughed until our stomachs hurt at the little kids' killer dance moves. When the time came to wrap up the party, the family that had been there the whole summer, from our first day to our last, came up to us. They gave us a card that said some of the sweetest, most heartfelt things I have ever been told. Slowly, we all started tearing up, with the kids joining in until we were all crying, hugging each other and melting down. It wasn't until this moment that we realized how much we mattered to the kids. We all looked at each other and realized that we made an impact on these kids' lives, even when we were tired and not feeling it, just our constant presence for them in their ever-changing world meant enough.

I will never be able to forget how incredibly eye-opening and sculpting of an experience the Glenn Van Noord program has been for me. For this summer and those kids, I am ever so grateful.

## Megan Raisch

I am not a shy person. Not in the least. I have an outgoing side that emerged as I became a teenager. Yet, despite my social ways, I was still slightly terrified of what I would face in my new summer internship. I had never been to Dégagé before, and being told that, "I would love it there," was only as assuring as you would expect. I won't lie, I haven't had much experience outside of my "Forest Hills Bubble" when it comes to people that come from other backgrounds than I do. That is, until now anyway. On my first day of Dégagé, I avoided eye contact, was generally quiet with both the patrons and volunteers, and missed the comfort of what I knew and was familiar with. But, by the end of the week, I had already changed from the timid mindset.

In the past, seeing a homeless person on the street would make me uncomfortable, or scare me, even. I didn't know what to say to them, or whether I should smile or wave. I didn't want them to think that I was better than them, just because I came from a different background. That was one of my fears going into my work at Dégagé: that people would think of me as some fortunate, privileged girl that somehow thought she was better than they were. I quickly learned that, for the most part, nobody thought of me in that way. Knowing this made it a lot easier to interact with people. By the end of my first week, I was easily conversing with patrons, learning names, and quickly falling in love with every aspect of Dégagé Ministries.

As a Dégagé intern, flexibility was key, which meant that each and every day looked different in terms of where I was helping and what I was doing. Some mornings, I would work down in the kitchen, serving affordable breakfasts to the patrons. Breakfast was by far my favorite thing to help out with. Sometimes I would serve coffee, other times donuts. Occasionally, I'd run the cash register and take orders. Most of the time, I would "run" food to people. This meant that I would put the food on trays with everything needed, like silverware, napkins, and condiments. Then, loudly, I would shout the name of the patron and bring their food to wherever they were sitting. One experience that stuck out to me during the first or second time that I ran food was when a few of the male patrons, with voices definitely louder than mine, would ask me the name of the order and shout it for me. I can't tell you why, but this warmed my heart incredibly. They teased me about being too quiet, but were so quick to help and keep things going smoothly. Though not every breakfast was placid and perfect, with the occasional angry or impatient patron, they were, for the most part, the most enjoyable part of my Dégagé experience.

When I wasn't serving breakfast, you could generally find me on the second floor of Dégagé, the Life Enrichment Center. This was a place where patrons could go and rent a locker, take a shower, do laundry, get help with their IDs, bus passes, charge their phone, pick up mail...I could go on. I got to work in the ID Office, Hygiene Desk, and Help Desk, all providing services to the patrons in various ways. The opening times at 8 and 1 were always my favorite to work, because that was when the most people were there.

Though I didn't have the chance to get to know many patrons on a personal level, I got to interact with the "regulars" and have some truly heartwarming conversations with them. It was nice to get to laugh with them. A few that stuck out to me as my favorites, even though they're all my favorites, would be Matthew, Martha, Esther, Becky, Roy, Jason, Andy...again, I could go on. Matthew would always greet me with a smile, call me his "little sis" and tell me that he missed me whenever I

was gone. Martha was always so sassy and unbelievably happy, despite her circumstances. Esther gave all the volunteers two hugs, always two, on certain week days. Becky was always patient and smiling. Roy learned my name before I ever had the chance to learn his, and was understanding and welcoming. Jason was always grinning and flexible with whatever situation was going on. Andy could be heard from a mile away and always wanted his toast burnt. So many people were so kind to me, so welcoming, and were always telling me to smile more, and have fun. It was amazing to see how kind and happy people could be, despite the lemons that life had given them. One day, I was working at the Help Desk, and as people exited the building, nearly all of them stopped by the window and told me to have a good weekend. It's not every day that people take the time to see how you are and wish you a good day or weekend.

If I could pick a few things that I learned at Dégagé, though there were many, they would be these things. The first one being that homeless people generally don't get there because it's somehow their fault. One bad thing leads to another, and so many people end up in trouble by circumstances that they cannot control. One man I met had two degrees from U of M, and was still homeless. The second is that God works in ways that I don't always understand. Though it isn't ideal that some of these people are going through the things they do, all of them changed my life, and all of the lives of the staff and volunteers too. God used them to show his love and protection and provision to all of us. The third is that you can be happy with no money, and you can find contentedness in your life in the midst of having nothing. I met so many kind, and genuinely joyful people during my time at Dégagé, and it made me reevaluate my gratitude and attitude when it comes to everyday circumstances. And the fourth is that attitude is something you decide to change, not something that'll change on its own. Many patrons had good, upbeat attitudes, and other ones had downright terrible attitudes. But they all could control how they interacted with others, and what they said and did. I learned to always have a good attitude, because if the patrons can't, then maybe my good attitude could help them out.

Dégagé provided me with experiences, both big and small, that cannot be described in just words. It is a place that will forever have a space in my heart, and I can't believe how quickly my summer flew by. Going into this summer, I thought having a job would be more of a chore. I realized that Dégagé was never a place I dreaded going, but a place I missed when I was away and couldn't wait to get back to. So thanks be to God for all of the moments throughout my time there that I got to grow closer to him and help others do the same.

## Bennett Guenshe

This summer I had the great opportunity work through Thornapple's Glenn VanNoord program at Habitat for Humanity. Habitat is a non-profit that builds, rehabs, and sells houses to disadvantaged families. Before going in to Habitat, I had some basic knowledge on how to use tools, but I learned so much about things i didn't know existed. At Habitat, they had tools for any situation, anything from prying off trim to fixing pipes. I got to learn how to use those tools and help other people out at the same time. I also had fun while doing it.

Every day I would show up at the warehouse and help load the trucks for their day of work. Some days I would show up for their meetings and learn what was happening in the Habitat community. Then after that happened i would go to the job site. I helped the site supervisor prep the site before every work day, then i would join them for the safety orientation. We would then get to work.

On my first day, we did material recovery. We went to a condominium and met the resident. He was happy to see us there. We got to work ripping off the trim and carefully removing the cabinets off of the wall. We then ran into problems with the plumbing. We had to use our problem solving skills to carefully remove the sink base without flooding the basement. After 3 hours of removing cabinets, we wrapped and put them on the truck. We then drove to the restore and dropped off the used cabinets where they could be sold for extra funds to support the work of Habitat.

On most days I would go help on the job sites. Sometimes I would be put in charge of leading a small group of volunteers and complete a task. These tasks ranged from spreading dirt to installing a fireproof wall. I was taught how each job was to be carried out and then I would teach the volunteers and if we worked well together, we would finish by the end of the work day. I learned how to be patient with others and to respect their level of expertise. The volunteers I worked with ranged from people just out of college to older people who were retired. I loved to hear stories from the retirees. This part of my job was the most fun and intriguing. I gained a new appreciation for other people and their backgrounds.

In conclusion, I both learned new skills and helped others. I also had a lot of fun doing it.

## Skye Fitzgibbon

This summer I was given the opportunity to serve through Thornapple's Glenn Van Noord Short Term Urban Missions program at Pathway Homes at Mel Trotter Ministries in downtown Grand Rapids. Pathway Homes is the product of a merge between Mel Trotter and Family Promise, and contains a three month long program to help homeless families get back on their feet. They provide a room for the family to sleep, meals, and child care in the form of "Kidz Korner" which is where I ended up working.

Coming in, I really had no idea what to expect. I knew I was going to be doing child care, but I expected there to be at most five kids, and in general very little interaction with the other residents at Family Promise. I knew that there were two other GVN interns working there as well, so I expected to be doing odd jobs for most of the summer. My first day at Kidz Korner was completely chaotic and not what I expected at all. I went to my required training at Family Promise, and expected to go home and start work the following Monday. However, my supervisor had other plans. We headed over to Mel Trotter right away, and I worked a full day right then. I remember feeling that there were at least 20 kids (even though there were only about 10). It was loud, hectic, and moderately overwhelming. All the kids were friendly, and I remember being impressed by how mature they were, but that didn't stop the constant fighting and yelling.

As the weeks went by, I began to get used to the stressful environment, and even began to see a fight coming before it started. The other interns and I always had crafts going, and we planned outings to the Children's Museum, a horse ranch, and the small park across the street. Most days I would come home completely exhausted, ready for a nap, but I loved arriving in the morning, seeing our "regulars" and making any new kids feel welcome. I had amazing conversations with the children, and (again) was completely blown away by how maturely they behaved and how well they handled themselves. Talking to them about the situation they were in was really hard, because they were always pretty embarrassed. I had to remind them that this wasn't their fault, and a lot of the time this wasn't even their parent's faults, but it was just bad luck, and being homeless didn't define them. I learned a lot about the social stigmas that surround homelessness, and how degrading these can be for the people who are actually going through it. I remember one time, sitting there in the computer lab with a little boy and watching his favorite YouTube doing a fashion show on roblox. The theme of the fashion show was "hobo" and I remember the YouTube ragging on the winner, saying that they shouldn't have won because homeless people are "dirty and ugly and don't dress nice." I don't think the little boy really noticed, but it was interesting to juxtapose him (a sweet, well-dressed kid) and the way that society sees homeless people. I also never knew how to feel when a family was moving out. I was always so happy for them, because this meant that they now had a house and job, and were doing much better, but it was always sad to see the kids leave.

I never expected the last day to be as difficult as it was. We threw a party, with decorations, party hats, cake and music. When it was 3:00 (closing time) and parents started arriving, the tears were flowing. I had no idea what an impact we had made on the kids, until that very last day. A few of the kids gave us presents and notes, and we handed out goodie bags. I cried, I'll admit it. I'm tearing up writing this. They were such sweet kids, and I am so thankful I was blessed enough to meet them. Every one of them had so much love and kindness in them, and I miss them a lot. I'm super thankful for the GVN program, the other GVN volunteers, and for all the kind people at Mel Trotter who I met. I learned how much of an impact serving can have, and saw firsthand the impact we made, and I'll forever be grateful!