

“You never know what’s around the corner. It could be everything. Or it could be nothing. You keep putting one foot in front of the other, and then one day you look back and you’ve climbed a mountain.”

This is a lot how my year with AmeriCorps has felt. It is sometimes easy to overlook how much of a difference you are able to make until you take the time to look back and reflect. Reflecting on this year at Jewish Family Service of Metropolitan Detroit, I have never been so sure of the positive impact that a single person is able to make in their community. When many of these people join together as a team, the impact increases tenfold and real, positive changes are made. The dedicated staff of JFS has been the purest example of this.

Over the course of the past few weeks, we have drawn many of our year-long projects to a close. Our Person-Centered, Trauma-Informed Care presentations are completed and ready to be put into action, improving the quality of care to survivors. After dozens of script revisions, my Holocaust history video has been filmed and is going through the final editing process. Hundreds of pages of German pension letters have been translated, webinars have been developed, sustainability measures have been implemented, and grant applications have been written and sent out.

It is a great feeling to look back on months’ worth of hard work and see the finished product, knowing you have accomplished something special. However, some of the most impactful memories come in the briefest moments; the kind we sometimes have to stop and remind ourselves to appreciate.

Earlier this year, when a powerful windstorm hit the Detroit area, many of our clients had lost heat and power. The staff spent all day calling each of the individual households to ensure that if anyone needed any assistance from us, they would get it. The next day, I came into the office to find a voicemail from the son of survivors, explaining how grateful he was for our dedication to his parents and the people in our community. This voicemail lasted no longer than a minute, and yet held an incredible amount of power and made me feel grateful to be able to do what I do.

After volunteering every month at Café Europa, where Holocaust survivors are able to get together for an hour and spend time with one another, I had many survivors come up to me on my final day and thank me for my time there. After spending 12 months visiting with this group, it was truly them who I wanted to thank, simply for allowing me to get to know them over coffee and cake and teaching me the words to Hava Nagila.

We have many accomplishments over our year of VISTA service, some big and some small. It is important to take notice of all of them, and remind yourself that no matter how tough the day, when you look back on it all, you will have climbed a mountain.