



**Goodman**  
Community Center

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## “Are we rich now?”

*Supporting the Goodman Community Center is a way to support each other.  
(And we could use that right now, don't you think?)*

By Kristin Groth, GCC Communications

Do you think of yourself as rich? I don't think about it much these days, but I remember back when I was in 5th grade our family moved from a small town here in Wisconsin to the big city of Niagara Falls, New York. My dad, who worked for a paper company, had just been promoted and we were having a modest, but brand new home built for us. We were also living within miles of one of the seven natural wonders of the world. How cool. I was sure we must be moving up in the world.

So, one Saturday afternoon, as we were driving up to see the falls, I hung over the front seat of our old Rambler station wagon and asked, “Dad, are we rich now?”

He thought for a minute and said, “Yes.” (Pause.) “But we still don't have very much money.”

*So how do you measure your wealth?* Here at the Goodman Community Center we know we are rich, too, not because of our financial well-being (just ask our finance director), but because we see people's lives enriched and transformed by this place and through the relationships that happen here.

### **A morning Ray of sunshine**

The other day as I came in to work, I stopped to say hi to Joanne, our morning receptionist. All of a sudden the main entrance door burst open and Ray, one of our preschool boys, flew in running full speed to the preschool door. He's not tall enough to open it himself, so he stops and stands there — smiling— and waits for his mom to help. As she opens the door, he turns around, waves to Joanne and says to his mom, “Bye!” That's their morning routine. Ray's mom just smiled and said, “He can hardly wait to get here every morning.”

*Teachers that make learning a joy. That makes us rich.*

### **A place to laugh, and sometimes grieve. But never alone.**

Marlene, our Older Adult Program Manager, came into my office last summer laughing. An older gentleman who religiously attended Sarah Watt's gentle exercise class, Rex, raised his arms to

stretch and the class watched his pants fall to his feet. Everyone had a good laugh, including Rex. Then, weeks later Rex showed up with flowers — one for each of the ladies — and made their day again. Sadly, not long after that we heard that Rex died. His daughter called us and said, “Dad was only able to come to the Center one day a week, but that made it his favorite day of the week. Thanks for being so good to him.”

*Seniors who love and laugh. And feel loved. **That makes us rich.***

### **A refuge from violence**

Last weekend, Dustin, our Ironworks Café Manager, found Damian and Isaac just hanging out in the storage room behind the Ironworks Café. Neither one of them were scheduled to work, so he said they’d need to head out. They said, “You know that guy that was shot this week? He was a friend of ours. Can we just hang out here and talk?” Dustin softened, “Sure.” And they did.

*Kids whose lives intersect with violence know that this is a place where they can restore, regroup and be heard. **That makes us rich.***

### **A safe place to be vulnerable**

Tori, a teen who has been cooking in the Ironworks Café for more than a year has mastered the menu, but kept goofing up special orders. Kiley, the lead chef, had been working side-by-side with her for a while. One day Kiley gently asked, “Tori, can you read?” She replied, “I have a learning disability. I don’t read well. Can you help me?” So Kiley took the extra time to help Tori with her reading and made a point of making sure she got comfy cooking new items before rolling out a new menu.”

*Meeting people where they are instead of blaming them for not being where we’d like them to be. **That makes us rich.***

### **A chance to grow, and grow up**

In our Seed-To-Table program, teens prepared their garden, planted seeds, weeded, watered, harvested their vegetables and then learned how to cook some of them and how to preserve others. As the veggies became bountiful, the teens said, “Hey, why don’t we sell these? We could build a cart and sell them to people along the bike path.” So staff helped them do just that.

*Teens who learn the value of staying with something and see the fruits of their labor, which taste good. **That makes us rich.***

### **A place to learn about work**

Sierra joined our Youth Corps last summer. Early on, she was not famous for her strong work ethic, but our staff worked with her through the summer and eventually helped her find a job at the University of Wisconsin cleaning after special events. Keith, our TEENworks Manager said she came back to visit after working there a few weeks and said, “All these other people, they don’t know how to work. They just stand there with their broom. They don’t get it that you actually have to work.”

*Teens who get that you have to show up and actually work if you want to get paid. And feel proud of yourself. **That makes us rich.***

### **A place to learn and play**

Rachel was in third grade at Emerson Elementary when her teachers became concerned. She was a cool kid, but she was below grade level in both reading and math. They suggested to her mom, a working, single mom, that she explore programs at Goodman so Rachel could have both academic support and enriching activities after school. So the mom signed her up. And Rachel ate it up. Rachel joined Music Makers, science club, Inner City Outings, summer camp — everything she could. Her grades went up and she was soon at grade level and thriving.

*Kids who reach their potential for learning while expanding their joy. **That makes us rich.***

### **A place to discover what you like**

When Anna first joined TEENworks, and was invited to work in the Ironworks Café, she said, “I don’t want to wait on people. That’s slave work.” Staff encouraged her to try it, and she surprised herself. She caught on quickly and developed a warm rapport with customers. Last week, one of her favorite customers brought his dad in to meet her. She will be starting at UW-Milwaukee next semester. Just last week she emailed Dustin to ask him, “Do you know any good cafés in Milwaukee where I could work?” She discovered something she’s good at.

*Helping teens discover they are good at something. That people value them. **That makes us rich.***

### **Isn’t this our common wealth?**

These are just a few illustrations of why we count ourselves as rich here at the Center. And honestly, I believe our whole community is richer because of stories like these. Don’t you? We all benefit when kids do well in school, navigate their way to satisfying careers, stay out of trouble, and want to give back, don’t we?

### **“But we still don’t have very much money.”**

Okay. This is our reality, too. The Goodman Community Center’s budget has grown to more than \$3.5 million dollars. It probably sounds like a whopping big budget to you, but the reality is, that money has to go a long way in what’s become a pretty big organization. That budget provides more than 50 staff who bring skills as diverse as the needs of the people who come here. It enables us to offer the core materials for our effective programs. And just like the old days when we were on Atwood Avenue, we still seek out grants, in-kind donations, and volunteers to help make every dollar go as far as possible.

### **You can count on us. Can we count on your support?**

There is a world of uncertainty out there right now, but the Center is a stable organization that will be here for our community. For you.

If you are in a position to support the work we do here, we would be grateful for your gift. Gifts from people like you make up more than 30 percent of our budget. So we are hopeful that everyone who *can* give, will.

**Wouldn’t it be great if we could all get “richer” in the new year?**