

Community

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People & Places

Unsung Hero

Artists lends talent to SOS Children's Villages

BY JENNIFER SHAPIRO-SACKS
Special correspondent

Name: Ethel Gittlin
Residence: Boca Raton and New Jersey
Birthplace: Newark, N.J.
Family: Children, Gail and Adam; grandchildren, Alex, Spencer, Shelby and Hunter

Career: Artist
Organization: The Boca West Community Charitable Foundation identifies and funds projects to assist children and their families at risk in the Boca Raton and South Palm Beach County areas. The foundation started in 2010 as a way for the members of the Boca West County Club to give back to the Boca Raton community. The foundation has funded different programs from 13 charities including the Boys and Girls Club of Boca Raton; the Wayne Barton Learning Center; Boca Helping Hands; the Florence Fuller Child Development Centers; Jewish Adoption and Foster Care Options; the Caridad Center; Boca Raton Police Athletic League; Gift of Life Bone Marrow Foundation; the Giving Tree through Temple Beth El; SOS Children's Villages - Florida; SCOPE; the Youth Activity Center of Boca Raton; and the Unicorn Children's Foundation.

Gittlin volunteers at SOS Children's Villages.

How long have you been volunteering there?

It will be two years in May.

Why do you volunteer?

I try to help empower young women through painting. It's something they might really love to do and something that would be good for them. It gives them another interest and dimension, and they may use this in some way in their life.

Why did you choose this organization?

It's in our area and was



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Victoria Underhill, left, and Jamie Hotson, center, of SOS Children's Villages, greet volunteer Ethel Gittlin.

perfect because there were kids this age who had this interest who were needy and it seemed like a perfect fit. Every week I'm there.

Describe your volunteer role.

I brought them supplies to paint, canvasses. I help them with whatever they want to do. I just guide them. I'm there for them. Sometimes just to talk and make their day better. Sometimes they don't know how to mix a certain color or get a certain effect. I guide them with painting and give them ideas. They are very original with what they do. I motivate them and give them positive feedback. It's really wonderful. I just figure a little TLC is good.

What are your goals when you volunteer?

Just to help these kids to gain some confidence so they feel they can be successful, and stick with it and be creative and original. It's all by choice and they are the boss of their painting. It makes them feel good and happy.

What challenges have you faced?

None really. It's pretty low key. They are there because they want to be and the really appreciate that I come. They are good kids.

They are good, sweet girls. They are all pretty positive. It's a place to come and feel good for a while.

What does your organization need?

It's my gift. I do the field trips. They sold almost every painting, and we have some money left in reserve for field trips.

Are any special events coming up?

We're planning art show on April 10 in Coconut Creek in the community center at SOS Children's Villages from 4 to 6 p.m.

Is there a specific memorable moment that stands out to you during your time volunteering?

At the luncheon, spirit of home was the theme and that was also the theme of their work. It was a beautiful moment when their piece was sold and they were so proud. It really was a beautiful moment for them. I was so excited and proud. They were so overwhelmed that people were looking at their work and they were crying. They were so thrilled and I was, too. I leave every week and I feel so good about them and they are enjoying this. They seem so happy. It's some really good down time for them and they are great, sweet kids, but their lives are very different.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I think it's a very special place for these kids and it's as rewarding for me as it is for them. I look forward to it. I get texts from them, 'are you coming today?' One girl is in college and she said, 'I'm drawing,' and sent me a picture. I felt so great. The fact that they are happy makes me happy.

Visit bocawestfoundation.org or call 561-488-6980.

If you know a Palm Beach County resident who deserves recognition for volunteer work, email tan90210@aol.com.