

The Volunteer GGAT (Greatest Gig of All Time)

By Elizabeth Drury



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I almost missed out on the pure gold of the 2022 NOAH conference. I call it the GGAT—the **Greatest Gig of All Time**—because it’s the very best and most enriching way that I have found to serve within the NOAH community. It almost didn’t happen because I almost made the mistake of saying no.

Don’t get me wrong. It’s not that I didn’t want to volunteer. I had already helped out in numerous ways, and I just finished deciding which sessions I wanted to attend. So when Kimberly Paglia and Tricia Thomas (two stellar volunteer leaders) asked for people to help out in this GGAT way, I almost said no.

And what was this greatest volunteer gig of all time?

Well, it wasn’t the preparation of registration packets, though that gig was fun. Under the expert leadership of volunteer Lee Laughlin, a dozen of us eager NOAH fans had gathered around tables, chatted, and laughed as we helped one

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another assemble nametags and folders. The morning flew by, and it hardly felt like work at all.

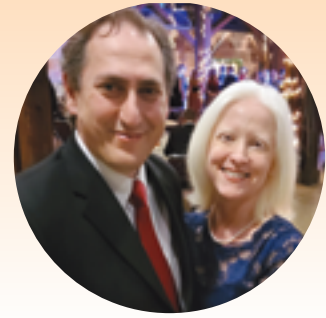
The greatest gig also wasn't meeting and greeting all 800+ smiling faces at the registration desk, though I loved that role, too. My small piece of the task was to pass out the red, yellow, and green nametag lanyards with another amazing volunteer, Diana McCown, as everyone arrived at the conference.

Surprisingly, the greatest gig was not even my longtime favorite role: greeting newcomers. I love reassuring first-time attendees and the parents of newly-diagnosed children that they will find welcome in this unique community. I love extending a hand alongside fellow PWAs (people with albinism) as living, breathing proof that life with

albinism is as full of potential, promise, and zing as these newcomers could ever hope. I love communicating in all kinds of ways, "You belong here!"

The greatest volunteer gig—the one I almost missed—was helping out in the programs for NOAH's youth. I met some amazing teenagers who made me laugh and think fast. They told me interesting stories and shared opinions full of zest and creative energy. We had a fun lunch together, wandered around Disney Springs for a scavenger hunt, and went bowling. Just as had been my experience in the kids' program years before, the teen program offered an outside-in benefit: plain and simple, these teenagers warmed my heart!

I realized as I interacted with NOAH's teens that I vividly remember what it was like to be a teenage girl with albinism.



Even though no two lives are the same, I discovered again and again that I had empathy, perspective, and optimism to offer in the most unscripted ways. I didn't have to present a list of bullet points. I only needed to be myself and be present as a responsible, available adult. They knew that I have been in their shoes (though it was admittedly a loooooong time ago when dinosaurs roamed the Earth), and I think that fact alone was encouraging to them. And what teenager doesn't have struggles and appreciate encouragement from time to time, especially when it comes from a place of genuine understanding?

If you want to enrich others through the treasures of your own experience with albinism and to be deeply enriched yourself, I'd highly recommend serving with the children and teens. It's the GGAT, I am certain!

Do you agree? Got another volunteer role that you consider the Greatest Gig of All Time? Drop a line to info@albinism.org and tell us about it! 🌟

