

**Make-A-Wish Volunteers share their
reasons for giving back**



In 2008, Illiana Teran got to see a sight many could only dream of witnessing.

Teran, along with her family, watched as the iconic Rockefeller Christmas tree lit up for the first time that holiday season. For Teran, visiting New York City and watching the sacred lighting of the Rockefeller Christmas tree had been just a dream, until that moment.

This experience had a lasting impact on Teran. The trip would not have been a reality without Make-A-Wish Arizona. The Make-A-Wish Foundation has dedicated the last four decades to granting wishes to critically ill children. The organization believes that these wishes can play an important role in giving children the hope and strength they need to fight off their illnesses and get through their treatments.

For a decade, Teran—who was considered critically ill at the time— savored those moments with her family in New York City and in October of 2018, she decided that she wanted to help play a role in granting wishes of other critically ill children in her home state of Arizona.

Today, Teran does just that as a wish granter. Teran works directly with Make-A-Wish children and their families to help them decide what wish they would like to ask for. Teran then guides the child and their family through the process of submitting their wish. Once a child's wish is approved, Teran herself often gets to help deliver the wish to the child.

“To this day, I still talk about my wish experience, and I wanted to be able to share that joy with other children and their families, as they endure the journey of their illness,” Teran

said in an email. “The best part of volunteering for Make-A-Wish is the smiles and lifetime memories that are made and the connections that are made with the Wish kids and their families.”

Even after being on the receiving end of the wish-granting process, Teran said the wish that has impacted her the most was getting to help a child meet his idol.

“The wish that has impacted me the most was a celebrity meet-and-greet with Russell Westbrook,” Teran said. “My wish kid was able to make it to Houston right before COVID started and was so happy with the treatment that he received from the Houston Rockets and the time that he was able to spend with Westbrook.”

According to Teran, part of the reason that this wish had been so impactful for her was the lasting relationship that she was able to build with the recipient of the wish.

“We still keep in contact with him,” Teran said. “He is doing great in school and still talks about how he felt that it was a dream to meet his basketball idol.”

Teran is just one of the many people responsible for helping to deliver wishes to sick children. Like Teran, many might choose to volunteer because of a personal connection to the organization.

Make-A-Wish volunteer Melissa Stevens was one of these volunteers. Stevens started her involvement with the organization eight years ago after witnessing firsthand the importance of granting wishes as an employee at Walt Disney World in Florida. According to Stevens, she saw wish kids from all over every single day.

“I knew when I moved back to Arizona that I wanted to be a wish granter. I googled Make A Wish and it led me to the Arizona volunteer page. I signed up for orientation immediately!” Stevens said in an email.

For Stevens, the best part of helping to grant wishes is not just watching the impact they have on the critically ill children, but on their parents as well.

“There is no better feeling than taking a step back and watching parents feel a very personal sense of joy as they watch their child experience their wish, a sense of normalcy and magic, even for just a moment in time,” Stevens said.

Just like for Teran, one of the most impactful wishes that Stevens got the opportunity to grant was one where she maintained a relationship with the recipient’s family. For Stevens, this wish had to do with taking terminally ill Anna on a Hawaiian cruise.

“Her condition was terminal, so this was a true effort to create the best family experience for Anna and make lasting memories for her parents and siblings,” Stevens said. “Her family is wonderful and created a program called Baskets of Hope in Anna’s honor, a program I donate to since I signed on to her wish. Every year we reconnect! They made me feel like a member of their family during the wish process and even now, five years later.”

For Stevens, these connections are the biggest reason she volunteers and encourages others to do so as well.

“You are creating memories for more than just the child —the family, the community, and even yourself,” Stevens said. “Volunteering with Make-A-Wish teaches me patience, grace

and brought me closer to my family and friends. I've met incredible people throughout my volunteering journey that I keep close to my heart."