

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Welcome to *12 Degrees*, the podcast that offers real life strategies for nurturing full-spectrum wellness. I'm Lindsey Whissel Fenton.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I'm Christina Lightner.

DESHNA NAGAR: And I'm Deshna Nagar.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Together, we explore the 12 areas of wellness that influence how we feel and function.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: We share our own personal experiences and the research-backed strategies we find helpful and give thoughts for how you can adapt them for your life.

DESHNA NAGAR: We want to empower you to make informed choices across the full spectrum of wellness. In this episode, we're going to be looking at the service degree of wellness, and what we can do both at the individual level and the community level to support it. Christina, get us started. How does service relate to wellness?

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I'm so glad you asked, Deshna. When we give our time, energy, or resources, we foster empathy, build social connections, and experience a greater sense of purpose. Service wellness focuses on contributing to the greater good through intentional acts that support others and also strengthen our communities. Service nurtures well-being for both the giver and the receiver, so it creates that ripple effect of compassion and care.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah, volunteering makes an immeasurable difference in people's lives and in ours. Research shows that volunteering can boost our mood, lower stress, and even reduce the risk of depression and chronic illness. For older adults, it can also improve life satisfaction and extend longevity. It also gives us purpose and opportunities are everywhere. Giving our time in meaningful ways builds confidence and teaches valuable skills. And perhaps most importantly, it brings us together.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah, and there are a lot of great organizations out there in need of volunteers. And thanks to technology, it's become easy to search and find service activities. There are even apps that will help you do so. This is not an endorsement, but there's [dosomething.org](https://dosomething.org) and VolunteerMatch. But I know for a lot of folks, the idea of taking on one more thing, like a commitment to volunteer with an organization, can feel daunting, if not impossible, and can block our efforts to engage in service wellness. And because on *12 Degrees* we're focused on wellness and real life, let's focus for a minute on one-off activities or small things that we can do on our own time.

DESHNA NAGAR: I appreciate how you're highlighting how intimidating volunteering can sound, especially if you already have a full plate. A lot of us are associated with really big commitments, but it's helpful to know that even small, one-time actions can be really meaningful.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, I can totally relate to that feeling of overwhelming when it comes to one more thing on our plate.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Definitely. And I once had a therapist challenge my idea of what service is, and this really stuck with me. So, I want to share what they told me. I used to think acts of service only,

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air quotes, "counted" if it was some formal activity. But this therapist said that it could be as simple as showing up for a friend who's going through a hard time or shoveling a neighbor's driveway.

DESHNA NAGAR: This is such a helpful reframe, because I think I also thought of service as I'm signing up to do this activity every Saturday from this time to this time. And as you said, that can be daunting. Not because I don't want to serve, but because at this chapter of my life, I really just don't have the time to take on anything else. So now I'm thinking of these small gestures I could do. What's coming up for you two?

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Well, in our environmental wellness episode, we talked about cleaning up litter and river cleanup. And this is something that I do with my daughter. We have an area of woods around our house. We try to keep that area cleaned up, as well as areas when we go hiking. One of our favorite things to do, and I mentioned this in our environmental episode, is to make a game out of it. So, each grabbing a bag and seeing who can fill up their bag the most. My daughter usually wins. Not because I let her, she's really good at it.

DESHNA NAGAR: That's so creative. I love that.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: This can also be as simple as picking up trash in the moment when you see it, like walking down the hall at work or even down the street, just taking that extra second to grab a piece of litter off of the sidewalk.

DESHNA NAGAR: It also doesn't always have to be about fixing what someone else left behind. Sometimes service is just being mindful in the moment, like choosing not to litter in the first place, or being the person who puts the grocery cart back instead of leaving it in the parking lot.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. Whenever you do take the shopping cart back and the person that is collecting them sometimes will genuinely thank you, like, oh my gosh, thank you because I don't think everybody really does that. I think more people just leave it stashed away than we think.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah, that's a great example of just an in-the-moment thing. I will try to do that. If I see a spare cart and I'm able and have the time to just put it back, even if it's not mine. So, you mentioned the word "mindful," Deshna. Some of that can just be staying mindful to our surroundings and thinking of ways that we could be of service. For me, I've been thinking of things that don't require us to even leave the house. So, if we're housebound or schedule doesn't allow us to go out, there's still things we can do to be of service. And one of the first things that came up for me was actually leaving reviews for things. And there's so many different contexts for this. My bestie and I will joke when we're shopping for clothes online, like, oh, God bless the people who take time to leave reviews or post pictures of what things look like on real bodies, because that is so helpful and it does take time. Another thought I had was taking a minute to rate and review content you like, whether it's a song or yes, a podcast. And I promise this is not a bid for you to leave us a review.

DESHNA NAGAR: Although we won't be mad if you do.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: No, we definitely won't. But seriously, as someone who's spent their career as a creator, those things make a really big difference. And it can also be taking the time to send a note to someone who created something you've enjoyed or found helpful. I did that once for the author of

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my favorite fiction book, and she wrote back and said that she printed out my email and was going to use it for motivation when she was feeling stuck. It was pretty cool.

DESHNA NAGAR: I love that.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, I'm sure that just made her whole entire year.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah. And as a creator, I've been on the receiving end of that too, where people will send messages about something I've made that's been meaningful for them. And it really does mean something and matter. So even if your act of service is just sending a note to someone to express appreciation, that does count as service.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. And I buy a lot of handmade things like off of Etsy or other online sites, and I always like to leave them a review and let them know your product is really good, or giving them that feedback so that it encourages them to continue on because I know sometimes those people who are hand-making things are competing with larger markets.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: That's a great example, Christina. I'm also thinking of service providers. For example, I used movers for the first time ever this fall. And they were very clear about it would really help us if you could leave us a review. They were just getting their business going. And so those are the types of things that can be so easy just to overlook or think they don't matter, but can really make a difference for that person, just to take a few minutes and leave a thoughtful review. And I think especially with reviews, people often only leave them when they're upset about something. So maybe a strategy could be challenging ourselves to leave reviews when we had a positive experience, not just a negative one.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, I love that challenge.

DESHNA NAGAR: I'm also thinking of other examples that might require more commitment but can still be done from home. This might be things like volunteering for some type of skill sharing. For me as a counselor, volunteering for a crisis support line is something that I could do from home. So, it's still service, but it's on my own terms.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I like the skill sharing, highlighting the skills that we're good at and helping others with our skills and our gifts. And there are also opportunities for things like online tutoring or mentoring. And I'm thinking about how if we're passionate about a cause, we could work on fundraising for that cause online.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I'll also put my grief educator hat on for a moment, and say, acts of service can be an incredible way to support someone who is navigating a loss. I recently wrote a blog post for Penn State outreach around the idea that people think you have to be a, quote, feelings person to support someone who is grieving, but that actually there are so many ways you can show up through actions. This could be things like mowing the lawn, running errands, or helping with childcare. Those can all be huge.

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DESHNA NAGAR: We also, in our social wellness episode, talked about being the first person to say hi or even smile. So, an act of service could just be making a commitment to yourself that I'm going to smile at everyone I see today.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, I love this, and I love to make a game out of it and see how many people I can get to smile back at me. And that might seem silly, but we know from research that when we see someone smile, mirror neurons simulate our own smiling, and that matters. In the 1980s, psychologist Paul Ekman discovered that just making a sad face triggered physical changes in the body, the same kind of changes that happen when we're actually sad. Our facial expressions literally change our nervous system. But the good news is that the opposite is true. So, making a positive facial expression, like smiling, can improve our mood. So, to put this all together, when we smile at someone else, not only do we benefit, but mirror neurons mean it's likely that they will be unconsciously prompted to smile, which will help to improve their mood as well.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And on the flip side, letting someone cry can actually be an act of service as well. Again, I work a lot in the grief space, but this could be any time someone is going through something difficult. We live in this culture of toxic positivity, and people often don't get a lot of space to just cry before they get shut down. So, whether it's crying or some healthy venting, showing up for that and just holding space can also be considered an act of service.

DESHNA NAGAR: That's so important. Just asking them, do you need a tissue, a snack, or someone to ugly cry with? I got you.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah. Or asking, like, do you need me to respond, or do you just want me to listen can be a really helpful way to let someone feel like they have the space they need to feel all of their emotions.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, and sitting with someone and being quiet is OK, too. So, if they prefer that, no response.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: That's so important, because sometimes just the act of presence can be all the comfort we need. A lot of times words do fail us.

DESHNA NAGAR: That's something I've been training my boyfriend to do, and he's gotten really good at it.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I like the idea of you training your boyfriend. [LAUGHTER] Yeah, I think a lot of times when we speak in those situations, it's more to alleviate our own discomfort. I learned a tip from a grief educator who I think, learned this tip from one of her mentors, but the acronym was WAIT, Why Am I Talking? So, to ask yourself, why am I talking if you feel the need to fill one of those silences can be a good strategy.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I love that acronym.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah, especially for me, when someone starts speaking, I'm just like, I need to respond now. So just taking a deep breath and just a pause.

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LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah, definitely. And I want to go back to the idea service doesn't have to be a formal thing. Other acts of service that don't have to be formal could just be, again, staying mindful and looking for those everyday moments of service that we could perform, even holding the door for someone or letting someone go ahead of you in line.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. And these were both things that were commonplace growing up. So, I still hold the door for people. It's just a habit. But as far as letting to go ahead of us in line, this is especially common growing up when the person behind us only had one or two items. My parents would role model that all the time and say, oh, you go ahead. And so that's still something that I do. I carry that forward. So, if somebody's behind me and they only have one or two items and I have that giant cart, I'm always like, oh, go ahead. And so, I love that tip.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Well, and going back to where our social wellness episode about nurturing weaker ties and those little moments of connection, that can also prompt a moment of connection where there might not have been one where if you were just standing in line, nobody would have interacted with each other. But I'm relating, as you say, that I'm like, oh, I've done that. And there is this moment where they appreciate it, and you just talk for a second and it feels really good. Or like with the door holding, especially when it's someone pushing a stroller, or they've got like an arm full of stuff and you can run a little bit and get in there and hold the door for them, it does just create this moment of connection that just feels really good. And so now we're getting out in the world with door holding and going in line. But one other type of thing I just wanted to mention that can be done from home are different types of letters writing activities. This was actually something I learned from my mom. My dad used to call it her card ministry. She just always had a big box of cards for every occasion. And whether it was a birthday or someone was going through a hard time or made some achievement, she would have a card in the mail before you could even blink. And that's something I've carried on. I like to send snail mail. And so, years ago, I signed up to write to soldiers who were deployed. But this could also be things like I once read of an example where someone would commit to sending two thank you notes every week. And so, whether that was they would remember the name of a nice clerk at a store or send it to a friend or a colleague and just acknowledge and express gratitude for whatever act, even if it's small, that person had done. I've also done a program that was run through Centerpiece, which is a local organization in Pennsylvania called Cards for Inmates, where you would decorate cards that would get sent around the holidays to inmates. And this was kind of fun. I think it was more meant for little kids because you would decorate the cards. And I'm not an artist, and so I would do my best. But then on the inside, it was just like a line for your first name and then your age. So, I always got a kick out of them, opening up this very child-like drawing, thinking that they were going to see a 5-year-old did it. And instead, it was me in my 30s. But that was a fun program. And then actually, that could be a social wellness thing too, because one year, I tried to get some friends in on it. And you have to complete them well in advance of the holiday season so they can get vetted and sent out. So, I had a bunch of friends over in August and put on Christmas movies and had hot chocolate and things like that, and we decorated these cards together.

DESHNA NAGAR: And just from working at the center county correctional facility, I know that your cards are really appreciated because the people that I've worked with will bring it up in our sessions and it brings them so much joy. And I think it gives a lot of people hope and some connection to the outside world.

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LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: That's nice to hear that side of it too. So maybe search and see if your community has a program like that. Or as we always talk about, if there's not one, maybe you could be the one to create it.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. This reminds me of around the holidays, we have lots of opportunities. And our nursing students made cards for members of a senior living community. And I know we've been talking about things that we can mostly do from home, but I also want to share some other acts of service that do require leaving the house, but that don't require an ongoing time commitment. One of the things that I do is I donate blood. I'm a universal donor with the type O negative blood, so everybody can use this type of blood. And it's often used for emergencies when the blood type might be unknown. But all blood types are needed. So, I encourage you, if you're a healthy individual, to donate blood. And you do have to be 17 and be in good health but find a local blood drive in your area. Another option is to volunteer for the blood drive. So, like volunteering with the snacks or whatever you might feel comfortable with.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Christina, I want to sincerely thank you for this, because blood donation is a step removed where we don't get to see the benefits of our service in that capacity. It can be easy to lose sight of the good we're doing. My mom had a rare type of blood cancer and required several transfusions toward the end of her life. So as someone who has experienced the benefit of this act of service, please know that it really does make such a big difference.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: That's such a good reminder. That even if we don't witness the benefits of our act of service, it still matters. And with blood donation, each donation can actually help up to three people. So, our gift of blood is an act of service that can have a big impact.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I also liked that you mentioned that you could volunteer to drive, Christina, because I know there are many reasons people may not be able to be donors.

DESHNA NAGAR: It just makes me uncomfortable just listening to you talk about needles. So, I don't know if that's going to be me.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, maybe passing out the snacks would be a good volunteer opportunity for you, Deshna.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: We're not trying to shame anybody into donating blood. It is not for everyone. So maybe we can talk about some other things we could donate.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Another thing that I do is I donate hair. And so, this is something I've done since I was a teenager, and I'm inspired to do this for my mom, who has alopecia. And she experienced hair loss when she was a late teen young adult. So, I donate my hair, and I am in a routine of growing it out and cutting it. But even just doing it one time, if you grow your hair out once, this is beneficial. So, I encourage you to find a nonprofit that provides the wigs free of charge to the people in need because some do charge. So, pay attention to that when you're donating your hair. And they often need at least 12 inches of hair. Your hair has to be clean and dry, no chemicals, so no perms or color. And something that I always thought would be a problem isn't. So gray hair is OK, so I'm starting to get a few grays, and I was worried about that. But it's OK. And oftentimes when we go to the salons that participate with hair donation, they offer discounted services or free services for those who are donating their hair.

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DESHNA NAGAR: That's pretty cool. Another fun way to engage in service is simply paying it forward, like pay for the coffee of the person behind you in line or taping change to a vending machine.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, I love this, and I've heard about that at coffee shops as well. And one thing I just saw was a pay it forward board at a local restaurant, and there was a prompt that said, would you like to buy a drink for someone? Ask your server for a card. And there were cards pinned to a cork board. There were several pinned up there. One said, "A drink for someone who's visiting for the first time." and another said, "A drink for a first responder."

DESHNA NAGAR: I love that so much. I think I'd put something like, for a student who just turned in a 10-page paper at 11:59 PM.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I love this idea. I've never seen that. That is so cool. And that could be a good example of community wellness too. So, business owners, take note. I've seen a similar idea, but without the cards at a local ice cream shop in Buffalo where I grew up, where they have a sign that's like can contribute to-- I forget the name of the fund, but it's a fund to where they will pay forward an ice cream cone to someone who needs it. I'm wondering, I'm like, do we really need ice cream? But yeah, we do. I think we need ice cream.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yes, we definitely need ice cream.

DESHNA NAGAR: We definitely need ice cream, Lindsey. And the word "need" makes me think of the difference between helping, fixing, and serving and also unlearning superiority in service and saviorism.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Can you say more about that?

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah. When we're supporting other people, it's important to be mindful of the motivation behind it and also how we perceive the help we're offering to people. For instance, something that I've been taught in classes as a counselor is to be really mindful of the language I use with my clients. So, it's always I am supporting my client or I'm aiding my client, rather than something like I'm fixing my client.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. And the concept of helping, fixing, and serving is beautifully summarized by Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen. She says, helping, fixing, and serving represent three different ways of seeing life. When help, you see life as weak. When you fix, you see life as broken. And when you serve, you see life as whole.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: That's such an important point. None of us like to be pitied or made to feel less than. And I think in the context of service, that is a dynamic to be mindful of and just our intention and how we are showing up for people. On the flip side of that, I believe it is also an act of service to allow people to support you. Or maybe not an act of service, but an act of kindness. When you see someone, you care about going through something hard, it is such a powerless feeling when you know you can't really make it better for them. So often when we find ourselves in that support role, we are so desperate to find anything that we can do to just show up and help them feel like they're a little less alone in what they're going through. And it feels really good when someone trusts you enough to allow you to support them or show up for them. And it's not always easy to receive that. None of us like to feel like a burden, so we can put walls up around ourselves when we actually do need to be supported.

So, it does seem counterintuitive, but being open to kindness directed at you and being open to that support can weirdly also be an act of service.

DESHNA NAGAR: I didn't think of the flip side of that, because now that I think of it, there are so many people in my life that when they really need support, they won't ask for it. But just letting someone take care of you can also make such a huge difference for both people.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And staying open to being supported involves, I think, a certain level of awareness or mindfulness, if we do find ourselves resisting that and getting curious about why we might be resisting that help. Another aspect of self-awareness that goes into service wellness is knowing yourself in terms of where your natural, I guess, aptitudes lie. So, aligning your service with things that come naturally to you. Because if you try to do something that doesn't align with your values or your personality, it's easier to get burned out. So, in our social wellness episode, I shared that I'm an introvert. And in my 20s, I remember trying a few different service activities that felt very much geared toward extroverts. And so, the time would come on the weekend for me to go do this service activity, and I would just be dreading it and feeling so drained. And then I would beat myself up and think, that negative self-talk of, oh, are you too selfish to give some of your time, or you don't want to help people. And then realized, oh, wait, no, it's not that I don't want to serve, it's just that it's the end of the week. My social battery is already drained. I would love to serve, but what would feel much more aligned with me is to do so through like a physical act of service, like cleaning or building a house, or picking up litter where maybe it wasn't requiring as much social interaction. That just better aligned with me and what came naturally to me. And so, there's no shame if one thing or the other appeals to you. But paying attention to that, because finding that alignment will impact the sustainability of your service practice over the long term.

DESHNA NAGAR: I'm so glad that you pointed that out, because now that I really think about it, I would force myself into a lot of volunteer work because that's what I thought being a good person looked like. And it would really drain me. And now I have a very different definition of service wellness of different things that I can do that won't deplete my energy.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. And we talked about setting boundaries in the emotional episode, and that's something that I have to be aware of too myself is saying yes too much. So, setting those boundaries. And for me, I'm trying to work more on evenings, like I mentioned, and I try not to do a whole lot on the weekends unless it's something I absolutely love and something I absolutely want to do. And Lindsey, I like that you were talking about all of the things that come natural to us, and I like to call those our gifts. So whatever gifts you have, get those out into the world. So, to serve with your gifts.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah. And that also makes me think of burnout. Because you need to know what your limit is, like you said Christina.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Absolutely.

DESHNA NAGAR: Because you can't pour from an empty cup.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Deshna, what you said really resonated with me when you shared, oh, I'm supposed to volunteer because that's what good people do. And I think we can feel a lot of pressure to live up to our values. And that, as we always say, it's not this one-size-fits-all way to do that. And so



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there always needs to be that balance of service, and we need to make sure that it's done in a way that is sustainable, so we can continue to support our overall wellness.

DESHNA NAGAR: I think this would be a good time to transition into community-level wellness.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Agreed. This would be a good time to talk community service. And I just had a very recent example of this pop up where I moved to a new community, and I just got my community mailer around activities for the year. And they do a community service day where at the start of the nice weather, they invite everyone out both to nurture that service wellness, but also to tend to the land that we all enjoy.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Oh, I love that. So, we talked about skill sharing online earlier when we talked about individual wellness. We can also skill share in community settings. For example, I attend an environmental festival that encourages attendees to share their skills or their gifts in a workshop format. So, one of the recent workshops was on gardening, and they focused on the start. So, from planting the seed, the whole way to finishing, so harvesting and then even preserving, so canning and things like that.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Yeah. And teaching is one way that you can utilize your skills. You can also just utilize your skills. I'm thinking about my dad who's super handy. And he'll often use those skills for people or for him, it's his church, but it could be another organization in your life, where you offer a skill that you're good at for free or for a reduced rate. And find service in something that, as we've talked about, naturally aligns with you. And as we're talking about service wellness, some of our past conversations are coming back up to me. We talked about creative wellness being about thinking outside the box and coming up with solutions to problems. In the creativity episode, we talked about a firewood collection and donation program that a community had come up with. So simply being present and observing might generate ideas for ways that we could engage in service in our community.

DESHNA NAGAR: We've been talking about skills a lot. I'm also thinking, what are things that I'm not maybe skilled at, but I love doing? I was thinking about volunteering at the Centre County PAWS, because I love spending time with dogs and cats. Gods, so that's also something to think about.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: One idea that just came up-- this is a hard one because service to me inherently implies community. So, I feel like we've been talking about community a lot. But I guess sort of an individual and community strategy for service wellness is if you live in a community where there is a more prevalent population of people experiencing homelessness. Sometimes people are uncomfortable or concerned about giving out money. So, a practice could be carrying food or water with you, so that you have that on hand to give someone something to eat or drink.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, and I've definitely done this. Like, you stop at a red light and there's somebody that needs something and you just hand them the bottle of water out the window really quick as you're driving through the red light.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And I love that because that is, again, one of those things that doesn't take a huge amount of time or an ongoing commitment. It's just gone buy an extra case of water or water, some energy bars, or makeup bags that you have available in your car to hand out as the need arises. I'm also thinking of something we talked about, I think, in our emotional wellness episode about just

leaving notes for someone to find. And since we've done that episode, my gym for I think it was International Women's Day, they had a basket out with a pen and paper, and a sign that said, leave a nice note for someone. And I walked into the locker room and every single locker had a note taped on it, and all of the stalls had notes taped on them. Just inspirational messages that just stopped and made you smile. So, service can be creative, playful, fun, and also that simple. Just leaving an unexpected note for someone.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, I love the unexpected note. And I actually got a note left on my car recently with a little message that made me smile, and it a little picture of a flower on it.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: It was you, Deshna? Wasn't it?

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: If it was, she was totally stalking me because it was in Lewistown. [CHUCKLES] Another thing that comes up for me is the community yard sales that offer free items, or that are totally free. Either they have a box that are these items are free, or a table that's free, or sometimes the whole entire yard sale is free. So, if you need something, feel free to come and grab it.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: That's really cool and simple, that in some ways can also help you get some time back because you can just put it out there. It saves you having to figure out what to do with it. And maybe not only could someone get something they need, but it's kind of a fun treasure hunt to go to something like that and just see if there's the thing that you need there.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: It's like a win-win situation.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah. We were also talking about this in the environmental wellness episode on how it can help us declutter our house, too.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Absolutely, yeah.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Oh, another one I just thought of actually could be both community wellness and ties back to something we were talking about that people could do remotely, which is doing something kind for caring professionals, or I guess it could be any professionals. But I'm thinking of when my mom was a nurse and sometimes one of her patients' families would just out of nowhere send pizza or some other food or cookies or something to the staff, just as a way to say thank you. I've also heard of people doing that for veterinarians or other people who provide care for us or our furry companions.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. Actually, I just experienced this, this past week. We had a family who brought in Starbucks for the whole entire staff at the hospital. So, all of the nurses and everybody. So, it wasn't just nursing, it was also the people who were helping to clean. And I've also been on the recipient end of a care package. So, we had a family bring in little baskets. They were individual baskets, and each one had like note cards and pens and ChapStick and little personal care items in there. And it's always so appreciated and puts a big smile on your face and just makes you feel good.

DESHNA NAGAR: It really does. I also have a client who is Indian American, and so they'll bring me home-cooked meals, and that always makes my day.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I feel like we saw a lot of this during the pandemic, where people were finding ways, especially to bolster our health care workers or other essential workers. And it's making me think that one, I guess if you could say benefit of COVID is that for a lot of us, we found ourselves with more time and a little bit more space. So going back to that whole mindfulness component, I think some of this is just clearing enough space in our heads in our days, to be able to be observant or to think and follow through on these activities.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah. And something that just came up for me when you were saying that were all of the yard signs that came up during COVID. Like, thank you to our health care workers. Thank you to our first responders. And they were all over the community, and also, when you came up to the hospital, there were a lot of signs at the hospital as well. So, I hope to encourage and say, hey, we really do appreciate the work that you're doing.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: I remember those signs. And I don't know if this qualifies as a community level, but at an employer level, I know some organizations will give people time off that they can use to engage in service activities. So those are ways we can think about more broadly how we can make this part of our collective culture. Also, when I was in school, I don't know if this is typical. So, I went to a Catholic school, and we had a service requirement. I don't know if this is something that is allowed to be done in a public-school environment, but for us, we had a service requirement each year and it got larger each year. And what I loved about that it was this scaffolded way to develop the habit of service from a young age. So that's something also to consider at a community level.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Yeah, I love that. And there wasn't a whole lot of opportunity for that where I went to school. So that was unique for your schooling. And I love that.

DESHNA NAGAR: For me, actually, we had different volunteerships that you could sign up for. And the volunteership that I signed up for was raising money for people living in senior living homes. And the student that raised the most money would get a certificate and a medal and stuff. And so, it also would boost our self-esteem. And I always took part in that. And I think I also won once. It was really cool.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: Oh, that sounds like a lot of fun.

DESHNA NAGAR: Yeah.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: And I think maybe that's a great place to wrap up for this week. That's it for this episode of *12 Degrees*. To learn more can visit [wellness.psu.edu](https://wellness.psu.edu). Also, be sure to and follow this podcast so you don't miss any of the upcoming conversations that will help you adopt healthy habits. I'm Lindsey Whissel Fenton.

CHRISTINA LIGHTNER: I'm Christina Lightner.

DESHNA NAGAR: And I'm Deshna Nagar.

LINDSEY WHISSEL FENTON: Until next time, we wish you good progress on your wellness journey. *12 Degrees* is produced by WPSU in collaboration with the Penn State Ross and Carol Nese College of Nursing. This podcast is intended for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified

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health care provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical or mental health condition. Please consult your physician or other qualified health care provider immediately if you are experiencing any suicidal thoughts. If you're in crisis, help is available for free 24/7 in the US by calling or texting the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988. More information is available at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).

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