



free-range THINKING™

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#MyGivingStory

In This Season of Thanks, Stories About Giving Can Do More Than Inspire

In 2012 the 92nd Street Y and several partners launched [#GivingTuesday](#), an annual campaign to encourage acts of giving immediately following the twin orgies of buying, Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Since its inception, [#GivingTuesday](#) has grown into a global movement with hundreds of thousands of organizations and individuals participating, generating hundreds of millions of dollars for good causes worldwide.

In an effort to deepen and amplify the conversation around everyday giving, the 92nd Street Y partnered with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in 2015 to launch the [#MyGivingStory](#) contest. This annual competition, which is part of the run-up to [#GivingTuesday](#), invites Americans ages 13 and older to share stories of why they have given time, money or other resources to nonprofit organizations. "We wanted to support and incentivize a culture that shines a spotlight on everyday givers and the impact they can have," says Abby Graf Subak, an independent consultant who is organizing the contest this year.



Abby Graf Subak

Contest winners can earn up to \$10,000 for their favorite charity, and since the entry period runs through the end of November, there is still time to encourage donors to submit stories about why they support your good work. But whether you win a prize or not, you may also discover that the process of collecting and telling stories of giving can help you see your organization in a whole new light. [Full story](#). Please note: Apple Mail users may need to scroll down manually.

About Us

free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and Celia Hoffman. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

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The [#MyGivingStory](#) contest has evolved over the last three years as organizers have tried to ensure deep and continued participant engagement. As in years past, there are six large prizes (there are two grand prizes in the form of \$10,000 grants given to the organizations named by the two winning storytellers), but unlike before, there are also a number of smaller prizes awarded throughout November. Some of these smaller prizes are in the form of grants (\$500 is given out twice a week to a randomly selected entry), some in the form of media attention (storytellers who recruit 3 or more other storytellers will have their own story featured on [#MyGivingStory](#) social media channels), and some are simply T-shirts which are given out daily to a randomly selected storyteller.

Last year there were 600 stories submitted, and 25,839 votes cast. This year's contest began two weeks ago, and as of yesterday, already there have been 871 stories submitted and 54,228 votes cast. "Overwhelmingly", Subak says, "I keep seeing the same theme emerge in the stories. They all say *I came because I thought I was going to be doing good for this cause, this animal, this person, this community, and what I got out of it was so much more.*"

Many organizations are using the contest as an opportunity to engage their donors and are already feeling the positive effects of participating. Dayna Hilton, Executive Director of the Keep Kids Fire Safe Foundation, a nonprofit that provides free fire safety presentations to elementary-aged students, discovered the contest last year and submitted a small paragraph about why she started her organization. When she read the winning stories from 2016, however, she realized she hadn't grasped what the contest was really about. "I thought: *Oh, this is a write-from-your-heart type of thing,*" Hilton says.

"So this year I made a concentrated effort to really dig deep down within myself to write about how important the foundation was and why I continue to make the sacrifices I make to keep it going." Hilton's giving [story](#) describes a young girl named Angelica who, as a kindergartner, attended Hilton's training. Several months later, to escape a fire in her home, Angelica actually used the lessons Hilton and her canine helper taught her



Dayna Hilton and her helper Molly

and saved both her father's life and her own. "It's a story I think about every day, and I need to make sure I'm always telling it," Hilton adds.

Hilton has used the #MyGivingStory contest as an opportunity to share her story with a broader audience, as well as to ask her donors for stories of their own. "It's been amazing to hear the stories of the people that support us," Hilton says. "Sharing these stories has helped our relationships with our donors, it's brought a deeper connection between our work and their contribution to it. I see our foundation evolving." And because a handful of people have submitted their giving stories about Keep Kids Fire Safe Foundation, Hilton's story earned a feature article in the contest's social media, which means more exposure and more awareness for the organization.

Any nonprofit looking for a new way to engage its donors should take note: asking them to talk about why they give and sharing these stories of philanthropy are powerful ways to communicate about your organization. This contest is an easy way to do just that, and you may win cash prizes in the bargain. There's another small perk as well: "If you are having a bad day, or if you're feeling a little down, just read some of these stories," Subak says. "If you need to have your faith renewed and be reminded that we are all connected and we are all here to take care of each other, this is where to go."

Stories can be submitted through November 30, and votes can be cast through December 7. Winners will be announced mid-December. So submit your stories and cast your votes, but know that the biggest prize of this contest may actually be the stories themselves. The act of writing, sharing, and reading these stories will make you a winner no matter the outcome.

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