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Opinion: Giving back one meal at a time through CT's Healing Meals Community Project

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I once heard someone say that, at certain points in life, you will take—but everything you take, you must one day give back. Giving back had always been on my mind, but I didn't really understand what it meant until the day I tied on my gray apron for the first time at [Healing Meals Community Project](#), a nonprofit in Connecticut that prepares and delivers organic meals to families facing serious health challenges.

What if a simple homemade meal could mean the difference between comfort and loneliness during cancer treatment? At Healing Meals Community Project in Connecticut, [it does](#)—and maybe, just maybe, you could be the one to make that difference.

When I first walked into the kitchen, I was nervous. The name tags sat on the front desk, and mine always seemed to be on one with a blue outline. Stepping past that desk felt like stepping into something bigger than just a kitchen. It wasn't cooking I was worried about—it was the quiet weight of responsibility.

I remember sitting at a table filled with handwritten cards. Each card would be delivered alongside a meal, and every word I wrote suddenly felt important. I realized that these weren't just notes—they were small pieces of encouragement sent to people going through really difficult times.

"The meals have been a godsend to me. Thank you again for all you guys do," a Healing Meals Community Project client wrote back.

Before each shift, all the volunteers gather in a circle to introduce ourselves and answer the "question of the week." My favorite question was: "What's an uncommon food you've tried and actually liked?" Someone once said "chocolate-covered crickets," and I definitely spent the rest of that shift thinking about those crickets.

"Every shift starts with a circle of all staff and volunteers... It's an opportunity to take a breath and to pause and remember why we are here," says Sarah Leathers, founder & CEO

In the kitchen, the rhythm quickly became second nature: wash hands, gloves on, wash again, gloves off, repeat. It might sound boring, but every step mattered because the food had to be safe and healthful for the families who would receive it. It was also where I learned how to cut potato wedges for the first time—a moment that surprised my groupmates, who assumed I already knew how.

I wasn't the only one learning. One youth volunteer I worked with summed up the whole experience perfectly:

"I come here when I'm free because it's fun, and I can do something meaningful at the same time," the youth volunteer said.

And it's not just teens who make this place special. Volunteers of all ages give their time, whether in the kitchen or on deliveries:

That's what makes [Healing Meals Community Project](#) so unique—it's not just about cooking. It's about connection. Every shift brings new faces, and even though we come from different schools and backgrounds, there's an unspoken bond among us. We're all there for the same reason: to give back to people who need it most.

Healing Meals Community Project is more than a kitchen—it's a community. Teens like me prepare every meal alongside supportive adult mentors, learning cooking skills, leadership, and empathy along the way. Each delivery includes a warm, healthy meal and a handwritten card, but more importantly, it reminds people that someone out there cares.

Volunteering here has taught me that kindness doesn't have to be loud to make an impact. Sometimes it looks like a carefully packed container of soup. Sometimes it sounds like laughter shared over a cutting board. And sometimes, it's as simple as tying on an apron and showing up.

If you've ever wondered how you can make a difference, Healing Meals Community Project has a place for you. There's always room for one more apron, one more handwritten card, and one more act of care.

Sabrina Yang is a student at Westminster School and a volunteer with the [Healing Meals Community Project](#).