

We are nearing the last leg of our road trip. But before we say goodbye in the next episode, we need to talk about one more activity that fandoms engage in as a community. You may be surprised that a number of fandoms are actually very engaged in... charity.

Star Trek has the Trek Federation, a non-profit that follows Roddenberry's mission to "go places and help people." The Lord of the Rings cast reunited on Zoom in 2020 as a fundraiser to provide school lunches to children during the pandemic. Fans donated \$80K to the mission.

Even Star Wars, which despite its widespread appeal, is notorious for its toxic fandom, has the 501st legion: A group of fans who dress as stormtroopers who gather for charity or volunteer missions, such as costumed walk-a-thons or blood drives.

So what about Supernatural? Not to be outdone by the other fandoms as usual, Supernatural has a wide breadth of missions they support and ways they give back to the world outside fandom.

Frankly, there's more charitable work being done by Supernatural fans than I could cover in a single episode, but I'm going to try and at least hit the highlights. We'll start with work that began with the fans themselves, before talking about initiatives driven by Supernatural cast members and how fans expanded that work into something much larger.

Let's get rolling!

[music either starts or ends here]

Script Hunt

We all wanted to read scripts, we couldn't afford them at auction because some of them... well, Tombstone went for an unholy amount of money. Red meat went for an unholy amount of money.

This is one of the admins for SPN Script Hunt. It's a group of fans who *initially just* wanted, as we just heard, to get access to copies of the original scripts of Supernatural episodes. These original copies, coming either from private collections or the Warner Brothers vault, are up for auction on a pretty regular basis. Script Hunt is an online group where fans can pool resources to communally bid for these scripts, instead of competing against each other.

Script Hunt

But it was a lot of people who are transformative works that were nerds and wanted to read it people who were into how the sausage was made

The people on the script hunt server range from fanfiction authors who read the scripts to add accurate details to their stories, to tv production nerds who like to see how script drafts change across the process, to even those trying to break into show writing and who want to learn from the scripts.

At last count according to their twitter, the group has collectively acquired 156 scripts from 141 episodes of Supernatural.

However, pulling together a group of fans to all contribute money towards bidding on the scripts to share can be a fraught experience, both in terms of getting people to commit as well as making sure that they aren't breaking any copyright regulations.

Script Hunt

Because we weren't trying to resell them. We just wanted to read them in turn. So that would arguably be fair use for educational purposes. A lot of people want to learn a little bit more about how shows are made. And also just want to read them because they are just generally fic writers and things like that.

Copyright rules can get a bit tricky, especially when sharing a script online across multiple individuals without a single clear owner, but the Script Hunt group is careful to make sure their members don't run afoul of the law.

But once SPN Script Hunt won a good selection of scripts and were able to share them with their members, the original hard copies remained. Rather than letting them sit in a box in someone's garage, gathering dust, the admins thought: Why not use these scripts for good?

Today, SPN Script Hunt hosts raffles where fans can donate to a cause and be entered to win one of these original scripts, which are often even signed by some of the cast members!

Script Hunt

we're not auctioning it's a raffle. So that way, we don't have to touch any money. No money goes through any of us, it goes directly to the Trevor Project

Trevor Project was the first charity Script Hunt worked with, in 2022. The Trevor Project is a non-profit focused on suicide prevention efforts amongst LGBTQ youth.

During that first campaign, they raised nearly \$7k for the Trevor Project.

The team has also raffled off scripts to raise money for World Kitchen, a group devoted to providing meals to people in the wake of natural disasters. And they're currently running a campaign in conjunction with other fans to help remove land mines from Ukraine and support Ukrainian relief efforts. Fan artists from across the community are running mini art raffles or offering other prizes for those who show proof of donating to the cause. Similar to Script Hunt who offer their scripts in their raffles.

Script Hunt has also raised money for the next group I want to highlight. Let's meet Trendy Kitty Kat, or TK, who along with her fellow fan who goes by the screen name Onboard the Impala, lead charity fundraisers through their group, SPN Family Giving.

TK Kitty

we all come together, and at the end of the day, we need more positivity in the world. And one of the things that I have always found absolutely incredible about what we refer to as SPN family is that when we come together to support a cause, we can do amazing things. There's so many of us.

Trendy Kitty and her partner were inspired by the SPN community to be a part of that positivity in the world. And while charitable campaigns can tackle serious issues, that doesn't mean the campaign itself can't be goofy fun. Take the the #GrumpyJensen campaign from SPN Family Giving.

TK Kitty

We also do a card art contest, where we encourage all the artists in the fandom who are interested to submit their artwork around the theme. And we'll pick the winner and that winner's art will go on the front of the card that we're going to turn over to the guy in question the next time we see them at the con. And so this one was, occurred for Jensen, the theme was grumpy Jensen. And then every time we receive a receipt from someone, or they're involved in the auction, or they donated a prize item, they are invited to send in their signature on a piece of paper, which is then going to go on to the card. So Jensen just got a card that had, I want to say there were 48 signatures. And original art on the front.

Trendy Kitty made sure to check in with Jensen about his birthday campaign, asking which charity or foundation they should give the proceeds to. Jensen chose to support his co-star Misha Collins' non profit: Random Acts.

Don't worry, we'll hear from the folks at Random Acts later in this episode. One of the main focuses of the non-profit is to encourage one-off local acts of charity. They accept proposals from people to fund their random acts of kindness, up to \$500 per act.

TK Kitty

We raised over \$3,700 for Random Acts. [Sadie: Wow.] Which are our best our best campaign to date prior to this was 1750.

Random Acts put that money toward funding more proposals for acts of kindness.

Trendy Kitty

We just had the opportunity to sponsor no less than seven at minimum random acts of kindness. If they all run at \$500. That to me, seven, seven instances will keep real people's lives will be impacted in some positive way. That to me is amazing. I can't believe I had the opportunity to facilitate that, you know, and it's all that cycle of positivity, which is what we've been about and what we're trying to do here.

I also really liked that Family Givings approach centers the SPN community as well. For instance, for each person that donated to #GrumpyJensen, their name was entered into a raffle for prizes, including art made by those in the fandom.

TK Kitty

these artists all agree to have them printed up on stretched canvas. And then they went into the auction. So it's celebrating the fan artwork as well.

It all ties back together! Fans supporting each others' creative endeavors while also helping people who haven't even heard of the show!

And, Trendy Kitty says, the more the merrier:

Trendy Kitty

If anyone has an idea for us about a future events, or they're thinking about doing something, and they don't know if they'll be overshadowed by what we're doing? Listen, I have strength in marketing aboard the Impala has strength in web design. That doesn't mean you shouldn't try to do something yourself. And please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

Whether you're looking to get involved with an on-going project, or trying to start something new altogether, Trendy Kitty wants to see the SPN family continue to support and uplift each others' efforts.

Trendy Kitty

we're not here to compete with each other over who can do a better job raising money for charity. This isn't a contest. This is about inspiring community to feel good about doing good

So far, we've been looking at initiatives started and driven from within the fandom community. But the cast and crew of Supernatural have also been giving back. In fact, sometimes there can be a surprising synergy between fan-initiated and cast-led projects, like one that started at a Supernatural convention back in the mid 2010s.

Karla Truxall

I asked if I could have a table. I said, I don't have a thing to sell, I just have a conversation I want to start. And I didn't know that Jared was going to launch always keep fighting. He didn't know there was going to be any kind of Mental Health Suicide Prevention presence in the vendors room. And so the energy in the room that weekend was incredible.

Karla Truxall says she really didn't know what she was getting herself into or that she and her husband were going to end up starting a non-profit. Her original plan was much smaller in scope.

Karla Truxall

We decided that we were going to create a website to shine a spotlight on resources, because I had to work way too hard to find help, after losing my nephew to suicide, so that was our our motivation to get started.

I chatted with Karla at the 2023 Supernatural Chicago convention, hence the noisy audio of the vendor's room. But it was Karla's tabling at the Chicago Supernatural convention in 2014 that happened to line up with Jared Padalecki's launch of a campaign called "Always Keep Fighting," or AKF for short.

According to the Supernatural Wiki, the campaign officially launched in March of 2015 with a shirt featuring the slogan. It was sold to raise money for several charities for mental health and suicide prevention. When sales of the shirt began, a movement started on Twitter and spread across social media, where fans purchased t-shirts for other fans who couldn't afford them, particularly those struggling with mental health issues.

Jared's first campaign reportedly raised \$250k for the charity, To Write Love On Her Arms.

Shontill, another fan whose voice you've heard in the previous two episodes, was especially inspired by the campaign.

Shontill

I'm like, somebody's actually talking about mental health and like, being honest and open about it and not trying to hide it and telling people, it's okay to feel not okay, you know, that just, it spoke to me personally.

Shontill wears her dedication to discussing mental health challenges openly.... Literally! She took the Always Keep Fighting slogan, written in Jared's handwriting, to a tattoo artist and had it inked onto her arm.

Shontill

So I kept saying, I'm gonna get it, I'm gonna get it. I'm gonna get it. And my daughter was like, Mom, we should go, I want to get my ears pierced. And I was like, That's it. That's the time.

It serves not just as a reminder to her, but also as a conversation starter with others.

Shontill

And it's something, like, I look at it every day. I'm looking at it right now. I look at it every day. And it's just like, it's just something that just makes me feel better. And I, I like being able to that's something I can talk about if somebody sees it, you know, open up a conversation.

The official AKF campaign has since had multiple iterations with different t-shirt designs benefitting different charities. One of the biggest moments with regards to AKF was at the 2015 San Diego Comic con.

A Supernatural fan named Anne organized a thank-you gesture for Jared's work. With help from Random Acts, she made 1200 tealight electric candles that were handed out to the audience in the massive Hall H of SDCC. They included instructions that following the main Supernatural panel when Q&A started, that they should be turned on and held high.

It was a massive gesture that clearly moved Jared. He later posted a thank you note to his facebook page, saying in part

"Sitting on that stage in Hall H, I initially mistook all of the lights for cell phone cameras. It's difficult to discern specific shapes and faces with all of those stage lights shining on you (and, it's quite intimidating up there, sitting in front of 6,500 people!!). Then, when I had a light given to me with an explanation of what it was and what it stood for, I was (and am still) gob-smacked.

Thank you. From the very bottom of my heart and my soul, thank you so much. I will never forget this day. I will never forget the love that I felt, and still feel.

And, to everybody who held a light for me, please know that I hold my light for you. Though I happened to be the one sitting on stage, I am but one small light in a sea of thousands. TOGETHER, we can and will make a difference!

Keep letting your light shine. I will do the same.
And, keep fighting.
Always Keep Fighting."

[music ends]

But let's get back to Karla and the surprising synergy of her and Jared launching mental health projects at the same time.

Karla Truxall

because most people don't have opportunities to talk about struggles and mental health related. And so the fandom was just like, yes, please, we want this, we need this. And I went home knowing that we had started something way bigger than my husband and I imagined, and it was a matter of us now trying to catch up to it felt like the train had left the station and we were running behind trying to catch up.

So what started as just a table and a place for conversation with the fandom, turned into a full blown 501 C3 non profit, called SPN Survivors. The goal of the website and numerous resources they've created is to create educational and support materials focusing on mental health.

Karla Truxall

So we gradually, over time, have figured out a curriculum for mental health that we can do to teach basic mental health education to people of all ages.

And while this started as aimed at educating just those within the fandom, it has since started to move outside the SPN Family borders to broader audiences. For instance, they now offer Battle Buddies, which are animal mascots - each with their own motto and backstory.

Karla Truxall

As we try out different ideas, we see how well those go with our battle buddies, the success of those has been incredible. The fandom gave us feedback on how they use them, teachers and mental health professionals were taking those, not just back home, but to work and using them with their students and their, their clients and then giving us the feedback on that.

SPN Survivors is a growing project, and keeps Karla plenty busy. When I met her in the vendors room of the Chicago convention, so many people were stopping by to speak with her, and look through the resource cards and books at her table, that it was hard to pull her aside to chat.

But that's just a sign of why this work is so needed and important.

Karla Truxall

there's this one story that my husband likes to tell that the daughter was at our table first. And she took it all in, and then she left and she came back with her mom. And she's like this, this is why the show matters. This is what's important to me. And I did not witness this, but my husband says that the daughter said, told her mother, she loved her. And they left and the mom came back in complete tears and told my husband that she couldn't remember the last time her daughter said, I love you. And so she thanked us for us being here and creating that opportunity for that interaction to happen, so.

We can talk about the money raised by AKF and the number of people that have donated to support mental health campaigns, but it's the stories of individuals that really end up leaving their mark.

Karla Truxall

I like to say mental health is a big complex topic. We like to break it down into bite sized pieces, wrap it in loving kindness and deliver it in a way that's that meets people where they're at and is easy to understand.

[music]

As we saw with SPN Survivors, there's a positive feedback loop between the cast of Supernatural and the SPN Family, especially when it comes to helping others. An actor might start a project and serve as the face for it, but it's the fans who really take the work and run with it.

And boy, do we know how to run with projects... Let's just say, this next project has been notorious for overwhelming systems because of how engaged the fandom is.

In fact, my actual day job is at a math institute, hosting a podcast called *Carry the Two*. And in April, I did an episode on community science and how participants in this project *broke* a university website because of too many people trying to sign up as participants in a math study!

That's right, we're talking about GISH!

Formally known as GISHWHES, which stands for Greatest International Scavenger Hunt the World Has Ever Seen, it's the brainchild of actor Misha Collins. It started back in 2011 with a much smaller version that was originally called the Rhino hunt or Rhino puzzle. It's a whole, absurdist story about Misha making a joke that if fans got *Supernatural* on the cover of TV Guide, though voting in an online poll, he would mail each of them a piece of a rhino.

His tweets read, "Warner Bros. just called & they'll give me a live rhinoceros if the three guys wearing earth tones win this poll." Followed by "I can't do this alone & I'm not one to hog winnings, so if we win, i'll carve the rhino up & mail little dried pieces of it to each of you."

Yes, I know how that sounds. But when fans "redeemed" Misha's offer and sent in their mailing addresses, they were instead rewarded with the first challenge of what turned out to be a puzzle hunt. That's often considered to be the primordial soup from which GISH was born. Because after the Rhino puzzle,

Tricia

And then Misha put out this mysterious video of an eyeball. And random words. I don't know if you are in in fandom at the time, like 2011-2012.

Clearly, after seeing how excited and engaged the fans were from the Rhino hunt, it seems Misha had no choice but to create an annual tradition. Hence, GISHWHES was born.

Tricia

It became a point of pride with me that I did every hunt. I even did the mini hunts.

And this is Tricia, a fan and GISHer who I absolutely had to ask what the early years of GISH were like.

Tricia

And we were always breaking the website, first thing. And we would break any website they sent us to. It was, like, a sense of accomplishment to do that almost.

And as participants from the 10 years of GISH know... well it was a chaotic mess every year, with the online portal regularly crashing due to the overwhelming traffic. But that didn't stop

participants from signing up all over the country, and the world! That first year included over 6,000 players from 65 different countries, forming over 600 teams to compete.

And the items? Well, they were as weird as their creator.

They ranged from the absurd:

- Create a portrait of [Jensen Ackles](#) entirely out of skittles doing his pouty “[Blue Steel](#)” look. Must be AT LEAST 2 feet by 2 feet (38 points)

To the adventurous:

- Create a Rube Goldberg machine that includes “Eye of the Tiger”, an image of John Travolta, a toilet plunger, and acorns, among other things (91 points)

To the inspiring:

- Have a tea party with a special needs child or pediatric cancer patient dressed as a character from “Alice in Wonderland.” (46 points)

To the civic-minded:

- In partnership with Random Acts, Legacy of War, and EMERGENCY, help ensure that humanitarian aid can be rendered to the most innocent of victims of war by creating a team fundraising page and receive at least 10 donations of a minimum of \$10. (239 points)

Honestly, if you were to go through some of the previous years of GISH items, you’d be stunned by the breadth of items and weird activities that teams committed to doing over the week-long scavenger hunt. And you’ll see that some of them are silly, while other items require participants to contribute something meaningful to society. GISH centered charitable acts by making charitable or civic-minded items worth some of the most points.

Tricia

One year, it just so happened my family vacation with my sister's family was on Gish. So we were in the Jersey Shore. And there was an item that said instead of holding up a free hugs sign, hold up the sign that says hugs \$5. And I went to the Jersey Shore boardwalk and did that.

Somehow, Tricia basically managed to get her whole family into it!

Tricia

my mom is really into it actually. She like is gung ho would help me with anything. for a couple of years, she ~~was~~ happened to be visiting during the beginning of Gish, and would help me out with like with the bean dress, and she wore the watermelon on her head, one year.

Over the course of 10 years, GISH broke at least 8 Guinness World Records. And if you have listened to *Carry the Two*, you’ll also know that one of the items ended up as a published academic paper with Misha listed as a co-author!

But its real impact seemed to be bringing people together, fans and non-fans alike, and building community.

Tricia

And it also helped me learn about my neighborhood, in my community that I'm in right now, because you'd have to go out and do stuff.

For two years, forget 2013 and 2014. I was in a homeless shelter. And it helped me get to know the people living there with me. Actually use them for a couple different items. You know, there was one that was like you had to find a homeless person and ask them what they're favorite meal was and then get them that meal. So I asked this little boy, what do you want to eat for dinner? You know, I made him noodles. It was really cute.

I got to participate in the 2022 GISH with a lovely team of my own, the Off-Grid GISHERs. We were a collection of twitter mutuals who didn't even all know each other, but we all wanted to participate.

We were also, as the name implies, all off the grid to some extent. Many of us were traveling or located somewhere with spotty internet connection. I was in the midst of traveling from Chicago, IL to Ithaca, NY to Austin, TX and then about to head out on a trip to the Bahamas.

Still, we didn't let that slow us down. We crafted book jackets (like, a literal jacket on a book with sleeves, zippers, the whole shebang) and drew absurd art and wrote fanfic crossovers to earn points. We did puzzles and embroidered insects onto living tree leaves.

My personal favorite item was to have a video of you being served by a mer-maid and a mer-butler. Since I'm a diver, I got some scuba friends in on the fun and we made a video of us 30 ft under water in Lake Michigan during a gear check dive right before our Bahamas trip. With me lounging on screen as they "served me."

They had never heard of GISH and didn't totally understand why I wanted to pull this silly stunt, but they supported the excuse for some fun. And it's a memory I'll treasure for a long time to come.

My team was also really dedicated to completing the service-oriented challenges as well. I made sandwiches for the local soup kitchen that I volunteer for, using a microgrant I applied for with Random Acts. For another item, we all worked to get at least 10 people registered to vote in the next US election.

But it was our de facto team leader, fanfic author Northern Sparrow, who really led the charge on fundraising items. Working with activist Giles Duley and his non-profit, Legacy of War, the goal was to try and get at least 10 donations, each with a minimum of \$10.

N. Sparrow

All seven of us together might have been able to scrape up with just the seven of us, I don't know \$400 worth of donations. We raised 2500 in that week. So we just somehow fanned out to our friends and family. And I don't know that the energy of the competition made us more effective at raising more money than we would have if we'd had much more time but hadn't been part of the competition.

That's Sparrow, who you also heard in episode 2.

It turned out that my first GISH, in 2022, was to be the last. At least for a while, with no plans to organize a new scavenger hunt on the horizon.

As for Sparrow, she had done previous hunts and while she likes the crafty items and clever puzzles, she's felt most inspired and motivated by the charity aspect of gathering support for the Legacy of War Foundation - an international charity providing support to civilians affected by conflict.

She actually got the opportunity to ask Misha what would happen to the fundraiser without GISH directly, at a meet and greet event at a convention in Rome called Jus in Bello, or JIB for short.

As an aside, the Creation Entertainment conventions we have here in the states have rules about not disclosing what actors have said during meet and greet events. But JIB doesn't have that rule, so Sparrow was able to tell me about it.

N. Sparrow

My question was, what's going to happen to the legacy of war fundraiser? Is there any way we can keep just that part going?

Misha responded that he would still be supporting the Foundation that his friend Giles started, even if it wasn't as part of the scavenger hunt. A scavenger hunt, which we came to find out was partially funded by Misha directly.

N. Sparrow

then he spontaneously just kind of went on talking more about Gish, even though I hadn't asked anything else. And he just spontaneously said, 'By the way, this has been running in the red every year, and I've been subsidizing it.'

I was both surprised and somehow not at all shocked to hear this. From the start, GISH always seemed too cheap to register for it to make sense as a money-making endeavor, especially when you take into account all the silly swag we got as part of the registration.

N. Sparrow

It's clearly always been a labor of love, you know, and, and a fondness for the community that kept him doing it. The other thing he said, though, that did surprise me, I had always pictured

that, that Misha probably had sort of handed off the reins of GISH to a large extent to the various other GISH people.

But the impression I got was that he was doing a lot more day to day than I realized, and probably a lot more prep in the weeks before. And like, judging and follow up and stuff in the weeks after like a probably, I don't know, I have this, like wild guess that it probably like eats up three months out of the year, I dunno.

From the sound of it, Misha Collins was handling more of the actual organization for the event himself than participants may have realized. Or at least, even if he wasn't running logistics, his direct presence in it was key, and a lot of work.

Even though GISH had nothing to do with the show of Supernatural, it was really the SPN fans who were the most into it. And when you have one person who this all rests on... yeah, that would have overwhelmed me waaaaaay sooner than 10 years in.

N. Sparrow

And clearly his name and his persona was still really associated with Gish. Like the, the prizes tend to still be like your prize is that you get to hang out with Misha Collins or talk to Misha Collins, or get a postcard from Misha Collins. So clearly, like his, his fandom and their desire to meet him, are sort of the driving force in some way, for the full enterprise keeping going. He tried and tried to step back a couple of times. And he tried to hand off large parts of it. And he said, he just he kept getting pulled back in and it just couldn't function without him.

[Sigh] So am I bummed that I only got to participate in one GISH? Hell yes! I was ready to commit and try to be on a competitive team this year!

But I get it. Sometimes you have to let one project go in order to have enough energy to take on something new.

GISH will have a special place in my heart and in the hearts of many fans who were affected by it. And while this chapter is closed for now, the massive amounts of support that GISH raised for various charities like Legacy of War prove it's had a lasting impact.

[music here]

Ok, now for the organization we've all been waiting for. Let's talk about Random Acts!

Random Acts is a 503c3 non-profit that was founded in 2010 by, again, Misha Collins after the massive earthquake hit Haiti. What started as a one-off fundraising effort by Misha eventually turned into the international organization it is now.

Jennifer Willis Rivera

This is 100% volunteer organization. No one at the organization gets paid.

That's right, Random Acts has volunteers all over the globe and every single one of them is exactly that - a volunteer. No one is paid, not those on the board, nor the fine folks running programs both large and small.

Jennifer Willis Rivera

I think that the behind the scenes work of the people on the ground is just stunning, the amount of hours that are put into this organization, volunteer wise. It's, it's stunning.

Jennifer Willis Rivera was part of Random Acts for many years, most recently serving on the board before she had to step down due to increased workload at her day job during the pandemic.

Jennifer Willis Rivera

It's made a profound effect on my life. It's affected how I talk to people. It has affected how I understand my own way of being in the world.

Talking to Jennifer, as well as many others volunteering with Random Acts, I quickly realized that "profound effect" was an oft-repeated phrase!

Rachel Miner

I can still try to make this world different. And it has a profound effect on you know, there's amazing number of staff members who also have disabilities and all sorts of things. And we're, we're figuring this all out together.

I was especially grateful to speak with Rachel Miner, who is the executive director for Random Acts. If you're a Supernatural fan, then you'll recognize her as the actor who played the demon Meg from season 5 onward.

Rachel Miner

so I was working with Misha, I was always admiring, I thought it was a brilliant way to kind of channel. I've always been interested in how we channel energy. And like, there's such a need for connection and group activity, and whatever, but why not use it to like, create the most good in the world. And I also see the most change in people, when they're like, shown their own power to do good and affect change. And they get to live that and experience that and be reminded of that.

Rachel says Misha asked her to take on the role of Executive Director of Random Acts because she was a "charity nerd" who liked to engage deeply with how to make the best possible impact on the world around her.

Rachel Miner

I was looking for somewhere to channel that.

Misha, he was looking for someone to take on this job. And we were doing conventions together. And so he thought of me and the minute he even kind of floated it very tentatively, because he's

so doesn't like to force anything on anyone. He just like, Would you maybe be interested? I was like, yes. Absolutely. And and hit the ground running.

And boy, did Random Acts really take off! Their first major project was to help build an orphanage in Haiti to house up to 80 children in a safe and nurturing environment after the earthquake. They followed that success by then building a free high school in Nicaragua to provide education for those who hadn't been able to access it: like women with children or adult learners.

And it's easy to see these big projects and think that's the main thrust of Random Acts' work. But really, these big projects were brought to Random Acts by locals who knew what their communities needed. Random Acts facilitated the work, but they don't presume to know what's needed within these local communities.

Rea

we always worked with local people who have visions, and because they know how it is effective, and they know what is the best for those kids, we wish to help

That's Rea, who we'll introduce in a minute.

Jennifer Willis Rivera

They didn't need me to come in and make their lives better. They were the ones making the choices. Again, we were facilitators, right? They were the ones who had to really make the choices and the sacrifices and and put in the work. We were the facilitators

Rachel Miner

And for us to really create change, we need to remember the narrative, the fact that nothing gets done like that nothing gets there isn't really a hero narrative of like, one big push, and I and this lone person saves the day! It's more like all of us putting energy in all the time, that slowly keep shifting, and then we take a couple steps back, and we take some more and we keep pushing, and then eventually we get a little further and, and and that's how change happens. We're lucky we have the most incredible group of volunteers, amazing human beings, every one of them is just a star, a bright point in the world in their own right. And I'm constantly saying no, you're my boss when it comes to this area. Because I might I might be able to add this perspective. But like, they're the ones who, like, are on the ground, talking to whatever community and I think the only way that this work has a real positive effect is it comes out of listening, and really hearing, where do people need support? And how would do they need to be supported, as opposed to, you know, walking in and prescribing, how we think things should be helped.

Although the big international trips are the flashy headlines of Random Acts, they're not even close to the full story. Where Random Acts really excels is in their "Acts Program."

Jennifer Willis Rivera

I think is just one of the coolest things where the way I describe it's like, you kind of write a mini grant for funding to go do an act of kindness for somebody.

Called "acts of kindness," Random Acts funds proposals up to \$500 for anyone to use to make a difference in their local community. Whether it be buying materials to build a lending library in your neighborhood, helping stock the food pantry with nutritious food items, or even helping a neighbor in need.

Everyone I spoke to about Random Acts had done their own Act of Kindness that ended up really impacting them much more deeply than I think they expected.

Jennifer Willis Rivera

I did an act for our local nature center. And one of the things that they needed was a little outdoor pen for the rabbit, right? Because, you know, nature centers have the little animals. And, and, and it's it's not the rabbit, that then the pen, that is cool. But when we go there in the summer, because obviously in the winter, putting the rabbit out. [laughs] but in the summer when we go and it's out and the little kids, right, the four year olds are like, oh bunny!, and you know, and and it's cool, because I know without Random Acts, that rabbit might not be outside and have the ability to to interact nature with the kids.

Even I've received an Act of Kindness grant. I used it to supply the local community kitchen where I volunteer with bags and bags of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I knew the kitchen regularly supplied lunches to children during the summer when they didn't have the food assistance program to depend on and I just wanted to help out.

It was a small action that I knew was going to help my local community, and that really mattered to me.

Rachel Miner

it changes you inside more than anything, to know your own power. To just create difference in one person's life even and never underestimate that.

You can't actually say like, I was the one who saved 10,000 lives. And that was me. It's like no, you usually were working with a group of people that maybe we're able to achieve that. But you don't know, maybe it was the smile you gave to someone on a bus that actually over time ripples out and creates their dynamic change in the world that really ended up saving humanity or something.

And like Rachel said, all those little actions do have ripple effects. Especially when you're an organization with international reach.

Jennifer Willis Rivera

that's the cool thing about random acts is that you have these facilitators, literally all over the world. And that makes the impact bigger

In fact, I got to speak with one of those international facilitators, though technically her title is Random Acts historian these days.

Rea

In 2013, I became the regional representative for Germany. I stayed that for like, five years 2018 I became the destination project manager which was being responsible for this project and Haiti, Nicaragua and everything. And since 2000, of wait that's 2021. I'm the historian

Rea has been involved with Random Acts almost since inception, and told me how working with Random Acts taught her not just how to support her community, but also how to fund that support.

Rea

I do fundraising trainings these days, because I learned so much about it,

She's literally taught seminars to others at Random Acts to share the knowledge and help build a stronger funding base so that they can sponsor even more Acts of Kindness.

Rea

I just like to be supportive and help those who start new and make it a little bit easier for them. Because when I talk from from random acts perspective, every dollar you raise is \$1 we didn't have without you. And this is super important and amazing.

Everybody can be kind. everybody can make a difference. And you can come to us and yeah, apply for an act of kindness and we give you the funding for it, which our supporters gave. So it's like a wonderful circle.

Of course, if you heard the first episode of this series, you'll know that I got into Supernatural and the SPN family during the pandemic. A time that was notoriously difficult to feel connected to your community or really any part of your life. Even though it was a time when so many people needed help, it was really hard to figure out what systems were in place to provide that help.

Rachel Miner

we were able to get random acts create, like a COVID program right away. And we were had everyone scanning their areas for the small organizations and people who are doing the most and effecting the most change and helping their communities and funneling money to those, and, and trying to make a difference. And I think we all needed that place to put our energy

And yea, my volunteering at the community soup kitchen started because of Covid. I knew they were still providing meals to go for anyone who needed one and I knew I had to be a part of helping out in whatever small way I could. Even though by late 2020, I was struggling under the burden of job hunting, volunteering, and trying to recapture some sense of community while physically distanced.

So **while the rest of us were** all burnt out and struggling, the volunteers at Random Acts continued to find the places on the ground doing the hard work and found ways to fund them. And as we started to sort our way, sort of, out of the pandemic, Random Acts saw a massive growth of interest in the organization.

Rachel Miner

we had to watch because we started to bloom so much in terms of volunteers that we We then have to it's for volunteer jobs, being a manager of that many volunteers is a really heavy lift. So we had to look at structurally what's realistic for us to, you know, thrive.

Where we do keep growing, is in our regional reps, who are like to meet such a heart of what we do, which is they're out there, you know, again, like pioneering and bringing things to communities all over the world, and bring and working with those communities. And then also been the touch point communication point between us and the communities and doing acts themselves, and constantly being example of like, look at all the amazing acts you can do in this just diversity of places in the world. And there's nothing that can stop any of us.

And Rachel, as executive director, continues to seek out ways that Random Acts can keep growing in a sustainable manner.

Rachel Miner

I want to then expand in our ability to really be as inclusive as possible to I would love to see Random Acts, you know, all of our materials available in every language of every country that we're working, we're really working toward that,

I would love to see just basically as many people's lives touch for the better as possible. That's that's the goal.

Skeptics might argue that doing small acts of service aren't enough to make the big changes we need in our world. But I think that kind of misses the point. As Rachel said earlier, the hero narrative of a 'great man of history' is exactly that - a story. Real change is made by many people pushing and making the small changes that they can to better the world.

Rachel Miner

And I don't want us to ever to be performative. I think that, to me, that's like the point where what's, you know, what's the point of us doing what we're doing? I don't want us to out there being kind, because that's just silly. So we're constantly looking at what is kindness? How do we support each other?

Rea

people often think they have to go out and do something huge to make a cut so that it counts. But even small things make such a big difference. This is what I love about random acts that you can go out and make a difference.

When I asked Rachel (and Jennifer and Rea) for a final message for listeners to the podcast, all of them mentioned the Acts of Kindness program

Rachel Miner

anyone listening, we're genuinely want to just give you money to do good. We're not, there's no strings attached.

So if you're feeling so inspired, I'll have a link to the application in the show notes. I'm certainly already cooking up ideas for ways to support my community with a random act!

[music here]

Plenty of fandoms have developed their own charitable arms or organizations. But the SPN Family really seems to have gone above and beyond in scope and depth. Whether it's fans who initiate their own good works and the rest of the fandom supports them, or through organizations started by cast members that are then carried forward by the fans.

Seeing folks who were actually involved with Supernatural, starting campaigns or organizations that then truly take on a life of their own through the fandom: I think that's beautiful!

I think we tend to have this stereotypical view of fandom as being very inward facing and property focused. Thinking that fans only care about the actors and the merch and maybe each others' fan art. But that's not what I see in the Supernatural fandom.

I see a community who looks out to their community and asks, what can I do to help? Whether it be helping a fellow SPN Family member with a go-fund-me campaign or volunteering with Random Acts or spearheading their own donations program for a cause they see in the world. SPN family looks after their own, sure. But they also try to look out for others in the world, whether that be local or abroad.

For example, I'm sure SPN fans have seen the recent posts of actor Misha Collins' recent trip to Ukraine and specifically Kyiv to see the efforts to de-mine the region in person and become an official ambassador for President Zelensky's initiative, United 24.

United 24 is a Ukrainian government run platform that was launched last May to help raise money for efforts in the Russo-Ukrainian War. Specifically, funds go towards three main areas: defense and removal of mines, humanitarian and medical assistance, and reconstruction of Ukraine.

When I put this episode together, SPN family had already raised over \$87k of the \$150k goal for demining efforts. And that was just within the first week! You can still donate to help the Ukrainian people, and I'll be including the link for donating in the show notes.

So let's show them why SPN Family earned the reputation for doing good in the world by helping United 24 reach their \$150k goal!

[outro music continues]

Before the credits, I wanted to make a quick reminder that you can support the show by rating and reviewing it on Apple Podcasts. Your review goes a long way in helping other listeners discover the show and I would be eternally grateful!

Editorial support was provided by Dr. Anna Funk.

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Cover art was designed by Liz Hand. Who, I will note, is also a volunteer graphic designer for Random Acts!

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In Defense of Fandom was made possible through an unhealthy obsession, and your support via ko-fi. If you're not already supporting the show and you'd like to, you can find a link in the show notes to our ko-fi. Your support is deeply appreciated.