

# Young Men's Service League Finds Volunteer Opportunities Through Pikes Peak Habitat

At the Pikes Peak Habitat Volunteer Appreciation Event in April, the Young Men's Service League (YMSL) was recognized as the ReStore Northeast Volunteer Group of the Year. The people who took the stage to receive the award weren't young men, though – they were a group of women!

"Four of the moms walk up, and people are like, uh, Young Men's Service League?" says Karen Farmiga, the Pikes Peak chapter's vice president of philanthropy. "So [the emcee] had to explain that yes, it's moms and sons serving together, and we couldn't invite any of the boys because of the alcohol [served at the event], so it's just a funny story. And the boys get all the credit."



*From left, Eric Stolp, then vice president of the Pikes Peak Habitat board; YMSL moms Karen Farmiga, Laura Boylston, Heather Torrey, and Jennifer Royer; and Pikes Peak Habitat CEO Kris Lewis pose with the YMSL award at the Volunteer Appreciation Event in April.*

The Pikes Peak chapter of YMSL, which has more than 135 chapters in 18 states, was formed in 2021.

Farmiga explains that although the organization is nationwide, "it takes the village of moms locally who have sons in that freshman to senior year of high school to have the audacity and the dedication to spin up the chapter."

Jennifer Royer, who now serves as board president, was key in forming the Pikes Peak chapter, says Farmiga. "She wanted this present in our community," she explains.

When her oldest son started high school during the COVID-19 pandemic, Royer began connecting with other moms who might be interested in helping start a local chapter.

One of those moms was Farmiga, who had been involved in a mother-daughter service organization, the

National Charity League, and wanted a similar experience with her sons.

"I had thought, this kind of stinks; there's nothing...that [my boys and I] can do together and give back to the community in an organized fashion," she explains. So she seized the chance to help start the Pikes Peak YMSL chapter, initially taking the position of assistant vice president of philanthropy.

"At the time, it was, What organizations need the help of moms and young men? What would fit the bill?" she says. "There are strict rules as to who we can serve, meaning it's got to be a nonprofit organization, and it has to be serving people in the community."

The Pikes Peak Habitat ReStores met those criteria. And the minimum age for volunteering at the stores is 12, so high school boys are eligible.

## Working with Pikes Peak Habitat

The organizations turned out to be a good fit.

"Pikes Peak Habitat supports families, and the YMSL has families work together to better their communities through service," says Sarah Buchen, Pikes Peak Habitat volunteer manager. "They help us to accomplish our mission, and we get to educate them about affordable housing and how their service impacts and benefits the community that they live in."

YMSL moms and sons began volunteering at both Pikes Peak ReStores, and after a few months, Farmiga asked about additional volunteer opportunities. That's when she learned that moms and boys ages 16 and older could sign up for shifts on the construction site, too.



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# Young Men’s Service League

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“This is perfect: one organization serving the two components,” she says. “This is part of what I think is impactful for all boys: to get to see the ReStore, what comes in and how money is being generated from that component of the organization, to then go to Build [the construction site] and actually see it put into action, follow that process of how it’s helping the families...It completed the Habitat circle of volunteer support.”

Seeing tangible results is rewarding, Farmiga says.

“At the ReStore site, we’ll come in and organize the furniture, organize the doors or the tiles, and now people can actually find what they’re looking for, and it’s real time,” she explains. “I think that immediate satisfaction is good for boys.”

Plus, they have fun! ReStore tasks include dismantling items we can’t sell and removing metal for recycling. So “boys get to smash things at ReStore, in a very safe manner,” says Farmiga. “We don’t let them do that at home!”

“They’ve been phenomenal,” says Dusty Last, ReStore volunteer coordinator. “They come in, and they get the job done, for sure.”

Between the stores and the construction site, they’re also learning how to use various tools and developing skills they might not learn at home.

“It’s active,” she says. “They’re constantly doing something; there’s always a need.”

And participating in the organization allows them to interact with peers from across the city.

“A lot of times, boys and moms may only meet people within their school district,” Farmiga says. “We have probably at least half a dozen school districts that are represented within this chapter.”



## Growing Through Service

Last, who has worked with YMSL since they began volunteering with Pikes Peak Habitat, says, “It’s been fun watching them grow. I think it builds leadership skills for them as the new kids come in and see the senior kids lead by example.”

“Our group loves both ReStore and Build!” says Farmiga. “The volunteer program is well-run, period. There’s always a need. Safety comes first, so if people are apprehensive about being on the build site, you’re not going to be made to do anything you’re uncomfortable doing or use any tools that you’re uncomfortable handling, or you’ll be trained.”

Pikes Peak Habitat staff voted on the volunteer award, and Last and Buchen agree that YMSL deserved the recognition.

“Whether it’s on the job site, whether it’s here or at the North store, they’re dedicated, and they all make a commitment to a certain number of hours a year,” Last says. “So they have to coordinate with their parent, which I think is perfect. I think it creates a real good bond between the parent and the child. And that’s definitely good for the community, and it’s good for their teamwork skills and their leadership skills.”

And receiving the award provided valuable affirmation not only for teenage boys who are serving the community – but also for the moms who have volunteered their time in getting the Pikes Peak YMSL chapter up and running.

“We were ecstatic,” says Farmiga. “We were tickled pink, because...we all felt the immense pressure of building a new chapter, and then [it was affirming] to have given back to the community and be recognized for the hard work.”



## How YMSL Works

Farmiga says the YMSL aspires to sign up 24-26 boys per class, plus moms. “It is a commitment, because we are all part of this village to create this impact together, so every mom has a job,” she explains. “There’s a bunch of different committees in addition to the board [and] we ask everyone to serve a role.”

The boys don’t just volunteer; they also develop leadership skills and attend meetings about topics ranging from changing oil and tires to financial planning.