

## DAILY POINT OF LIGHT

### CALIFORNIA TEEN REUSES HOTEL LINENS TO GIVE BACK

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THE WANG SIBLINGS (FROM LEFT: JOHN, 12, VIVIAN, 17, AND MAY, 20) DONATE HYGIENE KITS ALONG WITH NOTES OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO GIVE TO HOMELESS FAMILIES AS PART OF THEIR LINENS N LOVE DELIVERIES. /COURTESY VIVIAN WANG

For hotel owners and managers, towels, blankets and sheets that have slight stains or rips can mean dissatisfied guests. But for people who are homeless or staying at shelters for protection or because of an emergency, fresh clean linens mean comfort and warmth. Thick, soft towels and maybe even bathrobes are an added blessing when the opportunity to take a shower is offered.

For dogs and cats in rescue shelters, gently used linens mean a soft bed and a way to be dried after a much-needed bath.

Vivian Wang, 17, along with her volunteer organization, [Linens N Love](#), has been collecting linens from hotels and distributing them to various shelters since 2014. To date, Linens N Love, with mostly

teenaged volunteers, has donated more than 16,000 linens internationally and received more than \$15,000 in grant funding.

The positive environmental impact isn't lost on Vivian, either. "Hotels can't keep too many linens in their inventory, especially if they don't meet the hotel standards anymore, so they would otherwise end up in landfills," says Vivian. According to her research, some 17 million tons of textiles are dumped in landfills each year.

But perhaps best of all, Vivian says she and her fellow volunteers have grown in compassion and awareness of the less fortunate by donating linens. She makes it a point to request a tour of each facility upon bringing donations.

For example, Vivian, who attends Valencia High School, an international baccalaureate school in Placentia, Calif., says she and other student volunteers were surprised to discover a teen orphanage near their school. "You could cross the street and walk to it in just one minute," she said. "But most of people at my high school didn't know about it. After we organized a delivery there to donate linens, we listened to a Q & A session and got a tour. It was super eye-opening."



CO-FOUNDED BY TEENS VIVIAN AND MAY WANG, LINENS N LOVE IS A VOLUNTEER NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION THAT COLLECTS GENTLY USED LINENS FROM HOTELS AND DELIVERS THEM TO HOMELESS SHELTERS AND ANIMAL SHELTERS. /COURTESY VIVIAN WANG

Vivian was only in 6th grade when she and her older sister, May, then a high school freshman, founded Linens N Love. The girls' father works in the hotel industry, so they knew that towels and bedding are continuously discarded.

Vivian admits they at first planned to make a one-time delivery of linens to satisfy a school assignment.

"No way we thought this would be an ongoing thing," said Vivian.

They chose to donate the bedding to a local animal shelter. “It was crazy to see what it was like,” recalls Vivian. “It was an outdoor shelter and this was winter. The dogs were shaking with cold. It was hard to see that.”

Vivian and May began to wonder how a lack of linens might affect humans. “We thought about teens, orphanages, veterans,” says Vivian. “My sister realized that high schools are the perfect platform to recruit volunteers to join clubs, so she started the first chapter of Linens N Love.”

Today, now that May is in college, Vivian coordinates Linens N Love chapters at several high schools.

Samantha How, 17, a family friend, started a chapter at Canyon High School in Anaheim, Calif. “I really like this cause,” says Samantha, who feels the leadership skills that she and her classmates are developing are as important as the donations. “Vivian really advocates for teens to be leaders of the next generation – we are going to be the adults. It’s important for young people who have benefited from their community to give back and also prepare the community for the next generation.’ Reusing linens represents a “green mentality” of protecting resources, she added.

Shweta Shah, 16, who is Valencia High School’s current Linens N Love chapter president, says her fellow students often ask when the next delivery will be, despite their busy schedules. “They consistently want to be involved,” says Shah, noting that students like the “double-edged” benefits of helping people in need and also saving the planet. Shweta has gotten her younger brother, Vivek, 15, involved with Linens N Love, saying it’s strengthened the bond between the two while helping him prepare to take over after she graduates.

Haley Cooper, development manager at HIS House in Placentia, Calif., praised Linens N Love for regularly donating fresh bedding that the transitional housing shelter would otherwise have to buy. “We have 54 beds, and whenever a family moves in, we provide all new linens, which they get to take with them when they transition into their own home,” says Cooper, adding it’s one less expense for families struggling to buy food and pay rent.



VIVIAN WANG (HOLDING SIGN, THIRD FROM LEFT) AND HER LINENS N LOVE TEAM DELIVER 300 GENTLY USED LINENS TO AN ANIMAL SHELTER IN CALIFORNIA. /COURTESY VIVIAN WANG

“We had a family recently that had moved out of our program and because of COVID-19, lost their jobs and were unable to pay rent, so they had to return,” said Cooper. “For someone who is homeless, just having a bed with clean linens is a huge relief if they haven’t had that for days. They are just so thankful.”

Cooper says she’s impressed that someone as young as Vivian was so “innovative to see what could have been waste and use it for the greater good.”

Speaking of COVID-19, Vivian reports that she’s holding her student leadership sessions online while schools are closed. In addition, although Linens N Love is temporarily suspending deliveries of linens, they’ve jumped in with a new pandemic-related initiative.

“We are instead partnering with Peace First,” says Vivian. “We are planning a rapid response initiative to donate new face masks to our local community. Our hotel partners graciously provided us with these donations of face masks.”

*Do you want to make a difference in your community like Vivian? [Find local volunteer opportunities.](#)*