

# GREG NESS

## Community Service Award

### Helping Students Find Their Passion

Jonah's involvement with In4All came through a happy coincidence. His wife, through her own job at a local nonprofit, encountered a program manager from In4All, an organization that works to pair businesses with educators to deliver hands-on programs benefitting historically underserved students.

In their conversation, Jonah's wife mentioned that he worked for The Standard, which was a business In4All had been looking to partner with, so Jonah contacted the group. That was in 2017, and he's been involved ever since.

Jonah was drawn to the concept of introducing students to business professionals, especially in the STEM fields — science, technology, engineering and math. Those are areas where race, economic status and especially gender can play a role in determining a child's interest and eventual success in them.

As an actuary in IDI, Jonah knows the effect certain encounters can have in helping people be successful in their career. "Working with math and statistics is my day job, not my hobby," he said. "But In4All's mission resonated with me, and I found I enjoy working with kids. If I can use my experience to give back and create that connection for someone else, then that's great."

In4All was started in 1984 as the Business Education Compact. A group of high-technology leaders decided to bring the business community together to help train teachers, provide internships and channel more resources to the education system, particularly in the STEM fields. More recently, Oregon's low graduation rate has brought even more focus to students who are underserved. The state's high drop-out rate led the nonprofit to rebrand itself and sharpen its focus on engaging K – 12 students across Oregon to imagine a future of possibilities for themselves.

Through the group, The Standard is partnered with Creston Elementary in Portland. In4All's research shows their classroom activities in elementary school can spark an interest in math and science, two subjects that are key indicators of future success. "Engaging students changes test scores and reduces drop-out rates," Jonah said. "It's really a great opportunity for the students as well as a lot of fun for the volunteers."

Jonah coordinates up to a dozen co-workers from The Standard to visit fourth and fifth grade classrooms at Creston several times throughout January, February and March. They break into small teams to lead the students through a series of activities that help them develop and test hypotheses.

He said one example was having students build a ramp and set up a target, then see how closely they could land marbles that came down the ramps onto the targets. "Sometimes we get competition going between the groups, which is fun, but building relationships is just as important as helping them think critically."

Jonah said it's especially gratifying when students ask to take extra materials home to demonstrate the project to their parents.

As with many in-person activities, the pandemic caused In4All to reimagine how to interact with students. "Doing our classroom visit was one of the last normal things I did in March 2020 before everything shut down," Jonah said. "COVID-19 really flipped everything on its head, but it created some changes that might be good carryovers into the future."

For 2021, In4All created STEM kits so students could do the activities at home. Additionally, working remotely has allowed some co-workers to



#### JONAH YEARICK

Director and Actuary  
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participate who were interested in volunteering before but unable to take time away from their desks. "Most of The Standard's volunteers are not in traditional STEM fields," he said, "but they're willing to work with students and make a difference in their lives. I'm lucky that many of our volunteers return every year."

He added that In4All is always open to new volunteers. "Anyone at The Standard who is interested in joining our volunteer team can contact me."

Jonah said In4All's goal is to get back to in-person activities this year, but there may be some balance between that and virtual in the future.

Whichever way it goes, Jonah knows he'll be involved. "I'd love to keep doing it, although I'd be happy to pass the coordinator role along to someone else," he said. "I love interacting with the students and building those relationships year after year. I think it would be great if 10 years down the road, The Standard hires someone who says they were a part of this program at Creston."

"I know how much chance encounters can affect your choice of career, and it would be nice to know the connection you made with a student had a significant influence on their trajectory."

