

Get Involved!

20 great ways your family—even the littlest members—can volunteer together

WRITTEN BY CATHRYN BERGER KAYE, M.A.

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Volunteering as a family shows your kids the value of helping others and lets them see how they can make a contribution. While donating money is important, a hands-on service experience provides your kids with tangible evidence that “I can make a difference!”

KIDS HELPING KIDS

BIRTHDAY IN A BOX Create a birthday party for kids at a homeless shelter by volunteering at a party, stuffing goody bags, or holding a gift drive. For more information, visit birthdaywishes.org.

KNIT ONE, QUILT TWO Knit or quilt blankets to donate to ill or traumatized children via projectlinus.org.

SWEET THOUGHTS Cook up some goodies and host a Great American Bake Sale, greatamericanbakesale.org, held annually from October through January, to benefit needy kids across the country.

WELCOME BASKET Send stuffed animals to childrentochildren.org, which distributes soft toys and duffel bags to foster kids who may arrive at new homes without comfort items of their own.

PLAY BALL Kids and grown-ups can sign up to volunteer at Little League Challenger Division Baseball, littleleague.org/divisions/challenger.asp, where kids with physical or mental disabilities are paired with a “buddy” in their own league or an adult volunteer.

ANIMAL FRIENDS AND THE GREAT OUTDOORS

TALK TO THE ANIMALS Ask your local animal shelter for a wish list, and have your child help you gather newspapers, old blankets and towels, and bake dog biscuits (seegourmetsleuth.com/recipe_dogbiscuit.htm for recipes) for delivery.

LITTER BE GONE Keep America Beautiful, kab.org, offers simple suggestions for your family to help clean up your community.

GO GREEN Learn about the environment via interactive games on screen, join an environmental kids' club, and click on any icon or “Game Room” for kid-doable projects at epa.gov/kids.

SPEAK FOR THE TREES Join a tree planting event, or ask about “tree tagging,” where you and your kids help document what trees are where. Contact your local parks department or visit arborday.org for information.

ON THE WILD SIDE At the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Kids Corner, fws.gov/angered/kids, learn about endangered animals and other wildlife and how to help them by building homes for birds and bats, and more.

HEY, NEIGHBOR

AUTHOR A STORY Create an original storybook—with your child's illustrations—to donate to an emergency waiting room, pediatrician's office, homeless shelter, or preschool.

RANDOM GIFTS OF KINDNESS Enlist your child's help in choosing a library book or bouquet of flowers for an elderly or housebound neighbor, and deliver your gift together.

TURN WORDS INTO ART Choose a meaningful saying (visit abcdbooks.org/curriculum/quotes.html for ideas) to write and illustrate as a family on posterboard or fabric, and donate your work of art to a senior center or convalescent home.

PUT ON A SHOW Gather props or puppets and conduct a story hour at your local library with your kids. Bring precut strips of paper and crayons, so participating kids can make bookmarks as a gift to the library.

HOW YOUR GARDEN GROWS Beautify your neighborhood with a garden in containers, a yard, or a community lot. Visit kidsgardening.com, a program of The National Gardening Association, for ideas and resources to get you growing.

PARTY FOR A CAUSE Have a birthday party with a service theme. Ask kids to bring a gently used book or toy to donate. At the party, kids can make flowerpots with real or artificial flowers, one to keep, one to donate to a convalescent home.

GET WELL SOON

IF LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS... When a national or global cause requires donations, such as hurricanes Katrina and Rita, kids want to help, and taking action can make them feel safe. Few neighbors can resist a lemonade or hot cocoa stand, especially with a homemade sign saying where the money is going. Be sure to post a sign the next day saying the amount of money raised and thanking customers.

WALK THIS WAY Contact a national organization regarding an issue your family cares about and ask if there are any walkathons planned. For example, visit sarnet.org to walk for autism research or diabetes.org to take a step toward preventing diabetes.

BOOK IT The national program Reach Out and Read, reachoutandread.org, distributes books to children at pediatric checkups. Host a party where children dress as their favorite characters and ask each child to bring a book to donate.

VISIT ACROSS GENERATIONS Well-planned visits between children and elders provide joyful moments and satisfying relationships. A child's drawing left behind is a sweet parting gift. Check with your local senior center or residence for opportunities.

Cathryn Berger Kaye, MA., is the author of *The Complete Guide to Service Learning* (Free Spirit Publishing, 2004) and a national speaker on service and volunteerism.

Cathryn can be reached at cbkaye@aol.com and through her website, www.abcdbooks.org.