

donate your time

Gifts and financial donations are certainly welcome this time of year by your local community organizations and charitable non-profits, but nothing may be more valuable than your time. Volunteering is a great Christmas tradition for families to start. Doing so helps set strong examples for young people, teaching them lessons in humanity, good will, compassion and selflessness.

Do you have a few extra hours per month you could give to a local nonprofit organization? If so, start this holiday season by donating your time to the cause. Choose a charity or nonprofit you are passionate about and reach out to see how you can help.

Local soup kitchens may need you to round up canned goods and nonperishable food items from your family members and community. Senior citizen centers may request that you simply come spend some quality time with their residents. Foster homes and child advocacy centers may be in need of the same, as well as Christmas presents for the little ones.

The contribution of your time and energy could help make this a highly enjoyable Christmas for those in need, as well as for those running these organizations. Volunteers are always needed, so make the call today.

You are needed

Only about 25 percent of Americans volunteer for an organization, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. You can help improve that number by joining a group and convincing others to do the same. Grassroots volunteering efforts are the backbone of the country, especially as many human services budgets shrink from state to state.

Your time is more vital than ever to making sure these organizations have the appropriate resources to make a difference in the community. Think of your local military organizations, children's hospitals, nursing homes and large-scale holiday event committees. They all need your creative spirit and hands-on approach to make this Christmas a happy one for their target populations.

So seek out one of the organizations in your neck of the woods and get started on impacting your community in a positive way. Once you start this tradition, you'll never go back.



volunteering

We all know it's better to give than to receive, and that saying doesn't always have to pertain to presents. Your time can be a valuable commodity for community-based organizations this holiday season.

Children's hospitals

Many children will be confined to hospital beds this Christmas season as they battle through sickness, treatments and pain. This can also be emotionally draining for children, especially those who

have experienced the joy of Christmas morning at home.

This is where you can help. Children's hospitals are great at creating special events for their patients around the holidays, especially Christmas. They will likely conduct holiday dances, meals and even trips from Santa Claus.

Contact your local hospital's customer service department to find out their needs and how you can meet them.

Soup kitchens

Many organizations work hard every year to make sure the homeless and underprivileged receive a nice, hot meal for Christmas. You can help by volunteering your time to cook, serve food and clean up.

Groups also offer food services for the homebound, requiring volunteers to deliver meals across town. It is easy to get on a delivery schedule by simply contacting these organizations and offering your time.

Nursing homes

The elderly who are no longer fit to stay in their homes because of health concerns or rehabilitation processes is a group that can use holiday spirit this Christmas. And many nursing homes coordinate numerous events and trips based around the special season.

Nursing homes may also need help with donations, meal serving or other activities, so check in about a month before Christmas to see how you can help.