

40 Creative Ways for Kids to Volunteer this Winter

(courtesy of Online Christian Colleges)

Convincing our children that giving is just as great as receiving is never a simple task. Being a responsible parent, you most likely want your child to grow into a healthy adult with values and morals. Not just in the midst of the holiday season but through the whole year, kids should take the time to volunteer and give back to the community. It doesn't have to be a huge, overpowering project. You can find small but meaningful gestures to include service into your family activities. Here is a list of 40 creative ways for kids to volunteer this winter, as well as show them that they can take action and make a difference in the world.

Creative Ways for Kids to Volunteer in General Community Service

Community service really does create a sense of community. Young people who may not be exposed to how other people live will benefit from some of these activities.

1. **Sponsor a soldier.** – Children can create a relationship with a soldier through several national programs worldwide. They can collect items to send overseas or even write letters to keep in touch.
2. **Organize a toy drive.** – This task can be performed for any organization who gives families and children gifts for Christmas. You can help kids spending the holidays sick or away from home. Put items in tote bags or open boxes decorated by kids.
3. **Help build Habitat homes by volunteering, recycling, or supporting Habitat ReStores.** – Children who construct a lot of forts or buildings with blocks may enjoy helping out a construction organization such as Habitat for Humanity. Older teens can volunteer at one of their thrift stores and little ones can always donate their items as well.
4. **Collect unused make-up, perfume and other cosmetics, as well as clothes and shoes, for a center for abused women.** – This small gesture can mean the world to some of these battered women. They can dress up with the clothes and makeup which will help them feel better for the holidays.
5. **Hold a holiday craft party.** – Have your child invite friends to a craft party. The children can make things such as beaded friendship bracelets, blank journals, and small containers for markers and pencils for children in shelters, hospitals, or anywhere else they would be appreciated.
6. **Try scouting.** – The Boy and Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Brigade, 4-H, and similar groups emphasize helping others along with other fun activities such as sports, crafts, and camping.
7. **Distribute leaf bags during the fall.** – This will encourage residents to clean leaves from their streets and yards. If it's snowing where you are, offer to clean an elderly or sick neighbor's driveway after the snowfall.

Creative Ways for Kids to Volunteer with Animals

If your child loves animals, you can check with your local animal shelter or even with the zoo in your area to see about volunteering opportunities.

1. **Shelters use volunteers to walk dogs and play with cats.** – These pets need lots of human interaction to make them more sociable and adoptable. Take your small children to your local shelter to participate.

2. **Learn about pet therapy.** – Find ways your child can become involved in a local pet therapy program that offers therapy to local nursing homes or child care centers.
3. **Put together a pet holiday photo session.** – Raise money for a favorite pet cause by organizing a pet holiday photo session. You can dress up pets and have dad dress as Santa.
4. **Help clean up or do whatever's needed.** Shelters are always in need of aid. From washing food and water dishes to cleaning up cages, there are many things to do to make the shelter a comfortable, temporary home for the animals.
5. **Pet sit for neighbors, family, and friends.** – Sometimes people travel for the holidays and might not be able to take their pet along. Instead of paying for a kennel, a relative or neighbor might let you watch their pet. You could then donate some or all of your earnings to the local animal shelter or your preferred animal charity.
6. **Find out if there's an organization in your community to help place soldiers' pets in foster homes until they return.** – Many service members surrender their beloved pets to a shelter since they have no one to take care of them.
7. **Start a tradition in your family of giving to a pet food bank.** – Not just at Christmas or the holidays, do this frequently throughout the year. The shelter's website usually has a wish list of supplies that are very much needed.

Creative Ways for Kids to Volunteer with Senior Citizens

Here are a few ways to help the many senior citizens that do not have families or can't be with them for the holidays.

1. **Form a cleanup committee to helping elderly neighbors with cleaning and decorations.** – Round up some friends one Saturday and get in the spirit by cleaning up and decorating an elderly neighbor's house. Many times, it is hard to do reaching and bending and they would greatly appreciate the help.
2. **Go for a walk with a senior citizen in your community.** – Make them laugh by telling them funny stories about your friends and school. They can also teach you some valuable life lessons as well.
3. **Help cook a holiday dinner for an elderly neighbor or relative.** – Find out if they have any holiday family recipes they would be willing to share with you. Or maybe you can share a favorite of your own.
4. **Find out about adopt a grand friend programs.** – This is a great service, especially for children without grandparents and it can be done the whole year round. Search for a local chapter and see what opportunities are available in your area.
5. **Hold a holiday play or caroling night at a nursing home.** – With the help of some family and friends, you can put on a holiday performance at a local nursing home facility. Whether just singing carols or acting out the Nutcracker, you're sure to bring them some holiday joy.

6. Recording the stories and opinions of your senior friends so they won't be forgotten. – This one is for the older kids. You can help them record their experiences with a digital camcorder and make a documentary. A wonderful experience for your child to have this holiday season.

Creative Ways for Kids to Volunteer and help the Environment

Parents concerned with the conservation and preservation of the environment can inspire their children to take action this winter with some of these ideas.

1. Ask you parents for rechargeable batteries. – With all the Christmas presents you will be getting, get rechargeable batteries. You can create a used battery drive in your neighborhood so that they can be recycled.

2. Conserve energy.- Make flyers and distribute them to friends and family. Remind them to turn off the Christmas tree lights when they leave the room.

3. Recycle your Christmas wrapping paper.- Decorate poster boards and start a campaign. Instead of ripping apart Christmas gifts, try to carefully open them so the paper can be reused next year. You can also wrap your own gifts with magazines and newspapers to help.

Creative Ways for Kids to Volunteer in School Activities

Because charity doesn't end at home, keep up the good spirit by trying these creative ways to volunteer in school.

1. Use the school's resources – Conduct a canned goods drive during this holiday season and donate the items to a local food bank.

2. Organize a reading hour for children at your local hospital or library. – This is a great way for kids to share with others. Read your favorite stories to children who are ill in the hospital or organize a group in your local library.

3. Set up a buddy system to match new students with ones who have attended school. – Think about how you felt when you first started school or where in a new place. You and your friends can set up this system to make new students feel good about coming to a new school.

4. In art class, make holiday drawings and Christmas decorations. – Make fancy Christmas decorations and pretty cards in art class with your teacher's permission. You can either take them to a local shelter, help decorate family homes, or send cards to those who are far away.

5. Tutor a student that needs help learning English or another subject. – There are plenty of students that can use a hand learning English or other subjects. Donate your knowledge and time to someone that could really use the help.

6. Set up a walk to benefit a specific charity. – Find local events on Walk for a Cause. Get grownups to sponsor you and your friends and donate the money to your favorite or split it amongst a couple.

Creative Ways for Kids to Volunteer and Help the Hungry and/or Homeless

It is important for kids to worry less about getting an iPod and remember those who are worried about eating and staying warm these winter months. These service experiences will help.

1. **Holiday Cooking Party** – Hold a holiday cooking party with friends and family making bread, soups, and even some cookies for a food pantry or shelter. Have party guests cook or bake together, or make healthy bags of snacks. The kids can tie on bows and handwrite holiday messages.
2. **Help serve at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.** – This might not be too creative, but your kids can see for themselves that other kids and families just don't have the things they have. It will be a lesson that stays with them for a lifetime.
3. **Put together hygiene kits to pass out to the local homeless shelters.** – You can request donation in your community of mini soaps and shampoos and other things like hand sanitizer and tissue. Get your friends and family involved to make an assembly line to get them done faster.
4. **Consider donating your family's old coats for warmth this winter.** – As fast as kids grow, you buy a new coat every year or two. Search One Warm Coat to find a coat drive in your area. You can even get them to help you organize your own coat drive in your school or neighborhood!

Creative Ways for Kids to Volunteer in Helping Other Children, Family, and Friends

Use the below creative ways to help others in need with time and services.

1. **Hold a stuffed animals drive.**- Donate the gifts to your local police department. Patrol officers can keep them in their trunk to give to kids who are traumatized by a car accident, abuse, or other incident.
2. **Help out at a kid's Christmas party.** – Many community associations or non-profit organizations put on Christmas parties or holiday events for children. They often need volunteers to help with games, crafts, and more.
3. **Share the joy of reading with another child.** – if you notice that your favorite books have changed over time, donate your old books. Donate to your local Head Start program, a younger relative, or a shelter that houses families.
4. **Babysit to help a single parent.** – If kids know a single parent, why not offer thier help this winter? You can also do other things like volunteer to help with the grocery shopping. The smallest of favors can mean so much and often is much more appreciated than any expensive gift.
5. **Do you know someone in need of pampering?** – Offer a pedicure, manicure, or mini massage. This is great for little girls who love to use make up and paint nails. Use holiday colors like reds, silver, and gold.
6. **Offer your services at a women's shelter.** – From anything to helping wrap gifts for children to offering child care services, women in these shelters are usually working on trying to better themselves for their family. Offering this help can allow them to search for jobs or other needed information.

Community service doesn't have to be limited to the holidays. There are lots of funways for kids to volunteer all year round by helping others, caring for the environment, and making their communities a better place to live. To find volunteer projects locally, you can visit one of the many volunteer sites online for many more ideas and how to find a volunteer organization in your community.