

## 34 Ways You Can Help the Homeless

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*"You have not lived until you have done something for someone who can never repay you." ~John Bunyan*

1. **Understand Who the Homeless Are** - Help dispel the stereotypes about the homeless. Learn about the different reasons for homelessness, and remember, every situation is unique.
2. **Respect the Homeless as Individuals** - Give the homeless people the same courtesy and respect you would accord your friends, your family, your employer. Treat them as you would wish to be treated if you needed assistance.
3. **Respond with Kindness** - We can make quite a difference in the lives of the homeless when we respond to them, rather than ignore or dismiss them. Try a kind word and a smile.
4. **Develop Lists of Shelters** - Carry a card that lists local shelters so you can hand them out to the homeless. You can find shelters in your Yellow Pages.
5. **Buy "Street News"** - This biweekly newspaper is sold in almost every major American city and is intended to help the homeless help themselves. For every paper sold, the homeless earn five cents deposited in a special savings account earmarked for rent. What an impact!
6. **Bring Food** - It's as simple as taking a few extra sandwiches when you go out. When you pass someone who asks for change, offer him or her something to eat. If you take a lunch, pack a little extra. When you eat at a restaurant, order something to take with you when you leave.
7. **Give Money** - One of the most direct ways to aid the homeless is to give money. Donations to nonprofit organizations that serve the homeless go a long way. Find one that's right for you.
8. **Give Recyclables** - In localities where there is a "bottle law," collecting recyclable cans and bottles is often the only "job" available to the homeless. But it is an honest job that requires initiative. You can help by saving your recyclable bottles, cans, and newspapers and giving them to the homeless instead of taking them to a recycling center or leaving them out for collection. If you live in a larger city, you may wish to leave your recyclables outside for the homeless to pick up -- or give a bagful of cans to a homeless person in your neighborhood.
9. **Give Clothing** - Next time you do your spring or fall cleaning, keep an eye out for those clothes that you no longer wear. If these items are in good shape, gather them together and donate them to organizations that provide housing for the homeless. You can also check organizations that accept donated goods.
10. **Give a Bag of Groceries** - Load up a bag full of nonperishable groceries, and donate it to a food drive in your area. If your community doesn't have a food drive, organize one. Contact your local soup kitchens, shelters, and homeless societies and ask what kind of food donations they would like.
11. **Give Toys** - Children living in shelters have few possessions --if any-- including toys. Homeless parents have more urgent demands on what little money they have, such as food and clothing. So often these children have nothing to play with and little to occupy their time. You can donate toys, books, and games to family shelters to distribute to homeless children. For Christmas or Chanukah, ask your friends and co-workers to buy and wrap gifts for homeless children.
12. **Volunteer at a Shelter** - Shelters thrive on the work of volunteers, from those who sign people in, to those who serve meals, to others who counsel the homeless on where to get social services. For the homeless, a shelter can be as little as a place to sleep out of the rain or as much as a step forward to self-sufficiency.

13. **Volunteer at a Soup Kitchen** - Soup Kitchens provide one of the basics of life, nourishing meals for the homeless and other disadvantaged members of the community. Volunteers generally do much of the work, including picking up donations of food, preparing meals, serving it, and cleaning up afterward. To volunteer your services, contact your local soup kitchen, mobile food program, shelter, or religious center.

14. **Volunteer Your Professional Talents** - No matter what you do for a living, you can help the homeless with your on-the-job talents and skills. Those with clerical skills can train those with little skills. Doctors, psychiatrists, counselors, and dentists can treat the homeless in clinics. Lawyers can help with legal concerns. The homeless' needs are bountiful -- your time and talent won't be wasted.

15. **Volunteer Your Hobbies** - Every one of us has something we can give the homeless. Wherever our interests may lie -- cooking, repairing, gardening, photography -- we can use them for the homeless. Through our hobbies, we can teach them useful skills, introduce them to new avocations and perhaps point them in a new direction.

16. **Volunteer for Follow-Up Programs** - Some homeless people, particularly those who have been on the street for a while, may need help with fundamental tasks such as paying bills, balancing a household budget, or cleaning. Follow-up programs to give the formerly homeless further advice, counseling, and other services need volunteers.

17. **Volunteer at Battered Women's Shelters** - Most battered women are involved in relationships with abusive family members. Lacking resources and afraid of being found by their abusers, many may have no recourse other than a shelter or life on the streets once they leave home. Volunteers handle shelter hotlines, pick up abused women and their children when they call, keep house, and offer counseling. Call your local shelter for battered women to see how you can help.

18. **Tutor Homeless Children** - A tutor can make all the difference. Just having adult attention can spur children to do their best. Many programs exist in shelters, transitional housing programs, and schools that require interested volunteers. Or begin your own tutor volunteer corps at your local shelter. It takes nothing more than a little time.

19. **Take Homeless Children On Trips** - Frequently, the only environment a homeless child knows is that of the street, shelters, or other transitory housing. Outside of school -- if they attend -- these children have little exposure to many of the simple pleasures that most kids have. Volunteer at your local family shelter to take children skating or to an aquarium on the weekend.

20. **Teach about The Homeless** - If you do volunteer work with the homeless, you can become an enthusiast and extend your enthusiasm to others. You can infect others with your own sense of devotion by writing letters to the editor of your local paper and by pressing housing issues at election time.

21. **Publish Shelter Information** - Despite all of our efforts to spread the word about shelters, it is surprising how many people are unaware of their own local shelters. Contact your local newspapers, church or synagogue bulletins, or civic groups newsletters about the possibility of running a weekly or monthly listing of area services available to the homeless. This could include each organization's particular needs for volunteers, food, and other donations.

22. **Educate Your Children about the Homeless** - Help your children to see the homeless as people. If you do volunteer work, take your sons and daughters along so they can meet with homeless people and see what can be done to help them. Volunteer as a family in a soup kitchen or shelter. Suggest that they sort through the toys, books, and clothes they no longer use and donate them to organizations that assist the poor.

23. **Sign Up Your Company/School** - Ask your company or school to host fund-raising events, such as raffles or craft sales and donate the proceeds to nonprofit organizations that aid the homeless. You can also ask your company or school to match whatever funds you and your co-workers or friends can raise to help the homeless. Contact JustGive.org for more information about company matching.
24. **Recruit Local Business** - One of the easiest ways to involve local businesses is to organize food and/or clothing drives. Contact local organizations to find out what is needed, approach local grocery or clothing shops about setting up containers on their premises in which people can drop off donations, ask local businesses to donate goods to the drive, and publicize the drive by placing announcements in local papers and on community bulletin boards and by posting signs and posters around your neighborhood.
25. **Create Lists of Needed Donations** - Call all the organizations in your community that aid the homeless and ask them what supplies they need on a regular basis. Make a list for each organization, along with its address, telephone number, and the name of a contact person. Then mail these lists to community organizations that may wish to help with donations -- every place from religious centers to children's organizations such as Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts.
26. **Play With Children in a Shelter** - Many children in shelters are cut off from others their own age. Shuffled from place to place, sometimes these kids don't attend school on a regular basis, and have no contact with other kids. Bring a little joy to their lives by taking your children to a local shelter to play. Plan activities such as coloring, playing with dolls, or building model cars (take along whatever toys you'll need). Your own children will benefit too.
27. **Employ the Homeless - HELP WANTED** General Office Work. Welfare recipient, parolee, ex-addict OK. Good salary, benefits. Will train. That's the way Wildcat Service Corporations' Supported Work Program invites the "unemployable" to learn to work. Best of all-the program works! More than half the people who sign on find permanent, well-paying jobs, often in maintenance, construction, clerical, or security work.
28. **Help the Homeless Apply For Aid** - Governmental aid is available for homeless people, but many may not know where to find it or how to apply. Since they don't have a mailing address, governmental agencies may not be able to reach them. You can help by directing the homeless to intermediaries, such as homeless organizations, that let them know what aid is available and help them to apply for it. If you want to be an advocate or intermediary for the homeless yourself, you can contact these organizations as well.
29. **Stand Up For The Civil Rights Of The Homeless** - In recent elections, for example, volunteers at shelters and elsewhere helped homeless people register to vote . . . even though they had "no fixed address" at the moment. Some officials would not permit citizens without a permanent address to vote.
30. **Join Habitat for Humanity** - A Christian housing ministry that builds houses for families in danger of becoming homeless. Volunteers from the community and Habitat homeowners erect the houses. Funding is through donations from churches, corporations, foundations, and individuals.
31. **Form a Transitional Housing Program** - One of the most potent homeless-prevention services a community can offer residents who are in danger of eviction is a transitional housing program. These programs help people hang on to their current residences or assist them in finding more affordable ones. The methods include steering people to appropriate social service and community agencies, helping them move out of shelters, and providing funds for rent, mortgage payments, and utilities. For information, contact the Homelessness Information Exchange at (202) 462-7551.

32. **Write to Corporations** - Some of the largest corporations in America have joined the battle for low-income housing. Through the use of the tax credit or by outright grants, they are participating with federal and state government, not-for-profit and community-based groups to build desperately needed housing in Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and dozens of other cities. Contact various organizations and ask them what they are doing.

33. **Contact Your Government Representatives** - Our legislators rarely receive more than three visits or ten letters about any subject. When the numbers exceed that amount, they sit up and take note. Personal visits are the most potent. Letters are next; telephone calls are third best. Housing issues don't come up that often, so your public officials will listen.

34. **Push For State Homelessness Prevention Programs** - While states routinely supply aid for the poor and homeless, many do not have programs provide funds and other services to those who will lose their homes in the immediate future unless something is done. Homelessness comes at great financial and human cost to the families who are evicted or foreclosed.

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