

Gifts for the Greater Good

Written by Written by Amy Strand and Christine Whitton

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Finding the best holiday gifts for everyone on your list can be a challenge—does anyone really need another sweater or tie? This year, think outside the gift box and read on for unique ways to give your time, money and objects, not only to your loved ones, but to those who need it most.

?Giving Your Time:



Donating your time can be just as beneficial as money to underprivileged families. One prominent organization known for its abundance of volunteer opportunities is the Salvation Army, dedicated to providing services for the homeless and poor. The Salvation Army utilizes 4,000 Valley volunteers each holiday season, and Christine Morales, divisional women's ministry secretary for Salvation Army Southwest Divisional Headquarters, notes that most other organizations are similar, relying heavily on volunteers.

The Salvation Army has become known for its Angel Tree program, where underprivileged children's names are hung on trees throughout local Westcor malls and Phoenixians then purchase gifts for those children, allowing the Salvation Army to give gifts to 45,000 kids each Christmas. Besides volunteering at the Angel Tree booths and in the Angel Tree distribution warehouse, Salvation Army volunteers can also serve hot meals to needy families at the annual Christmas dinner or ring a Salvation Army bell in turn for money at various mall stations, among other opportunities. "We appreciate people who are willing to give their time and we could always use more," Morales says. "It's just a great way to give back to your community at Christmas."

In addition to those receiving the help, donating your time can be extremely satisfying to the volunteer as well. "There's great joy in volunteering, especially when you can be a part of making somebody else's life a little better," Morales says. "You very often see people glowing because they're just so happy to be a part of helping people out."

For more information on the Salvation Army or to sign up for a volunteer shift, visit www.phoenixsa.volunteerfirst.org.

Other Ways to Give Your Time:

[Mesa Arts Center Holiday Art & Music Festival](#): This community festival features kids' activities, art for sale, local talent, artist demonstrations and more. Volunteers are needed Dec. 12-13, for shifts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.

[St. Vincent de Paul Family Meal Service](#): Help the Phoenix chapter of this nonprofit prepare, serve and clean up meals for the homeless and hungry on Dec. 21.

[Phoenix Children's Hospital Holiday Art Project](#): Patients in the Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders annually create and sell works of art to raise money. Volunteers are needed for jobs like sorting holiday cards and selling corporate artwork.

[St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance](#): On Dec. 12, volunteer to help sort, pack and distribute food going to other nonprofits and families in need.

[Capri Care Bingo](#): Bring the whole family to this Phoenix nursing home on Dec. 12 for an afternoon of playing bingo, serving refreshments and awarding prizes. 602.944.1574.

Giving Money and Non-Tangible Gifts:



The holidays are full of material gifts—this year, why not give a friend or family member something that will also benefit those in need? One organization that has perfected the art of charitable gifting is World Vision. Working to "fight the root causes of child poverty around the world," World Vision offers a gift catalog, whose items helped about 500,000 people last year. "We have several different categories—about 100 different ways that people can help—and they can choose anything from a chicken to a water well to a medical clinic and they can donate that in the name of a loved one," says Devin Hermanson, World Vision gift catalog national director. While these gifts may not appear to be life changing, the effect such items can have is "mindblowing," Hermanson says. "It's not an exaggeration to say it can affect generations of

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people.”

Regardless of which organization you go through, Hermanson says that this year is a critical time to give back. “This is a time when people’s gifts will mean even more because we are in a situation—and I think a lot of charities are in a situation—where kids will be denied services and things they need more than ever,” he says.

In addition to increasing its giving goals (to help 625,000 people this year), World Vision has launched a month-long campaign called The Spirit of Christmas. World Vision will travel the globe, speaking to children about Christmas—what it means to them and what they’d like to receive—and send video footage back to its Facebook page.

To make a purchase from the gift catalog, visit www.worldvision.org.

Other Ways to Give Your Money:

Childhelp: Each purchase from Childhelp’s Gift of Hope catalog (think backpacks full of school supplies or the sponsorship of a child’s birthday party) goes toward abused and neglected children. \$25-\$5,000.

Habitat for Humanity: A Gift from the Heart from Habitat for Humanity is a tax-deductible way to provide building materials, supplies and support for families in need. \$10 minimum. www.habitat.org. Arizona Humane Society: Present an animal lover with a Humane Society Tribute Gift and the money will go toward animals in need of care. \$50-\$150.

JustGive: The recipient of the GiveNow Card can choose which charity the allotted money goes to. To support a local cause, there’s even a way to select Valley-located charities. www.justgive.org. Ballet Arizona: Each year, Ballet Arizona offers 4,000-plus free performance tickets to disadvantaged families as a part of its Angel Nights program. Dec. 10 features this year’s Nutcracker Angel Night. To sponsor a child to attend the special performance, call 602.343.6520.

Giving Tangible Gifts:



It’s tear-jerking to think of the many pets roaming aimlessly with nowhere to go and no one to care for them. Thanks to The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), neglected or abandoned animals are afforded a warm place to sleep and a hearty meal before bed. “I do believe that people want to do the right thing, they just don’t know how,” says Jo Sullivan, executive vice president of external affairs for ASPCA. “They feel that if they just open their doors [and let unwanted pets go] the animal may have more of a fighting chance than if they end up in a municipal shelter. I think it is a lack of [education and] understanding.”

Headquartered in New York City, ASPCA has several local branches, touching more than 100,000 animals annually, some strays, others battered by acts of brutality. For healthy animals, ASPCA is a temporary resting point before being placed in a new home—which usually happens within 24 to 48 hours. But, for those physically abused, on-site veterinarians provide a safe and stable environment nurturing our four-legged friends back to health—however long the process may take.

This holiday season is no exception to the spike of animals in need of assistance and unconditional love. In lieu of money, donate a basket stuffed with dry foods, treats, toys and blankets that help in welcoming the many lost and found pets rescued by ASPCA each day.

For adoption information or to learn how to donate a gift, visit www.aspc.org.

Other Ways to Give Gifts:

Phoenix Rescue Mission: Change the lives of those in need this holiday season by donating new or gently used clothes, dry goods and bottled water to Phoenix’s downtown family outreach center. 602.233.3000

Toys for Tots: Help the United States Marine Corp. in making less fortunate children smile with a shiny new toy on Christmas morning. Drop off at local Toys “R” Us and Babies “R” Us stores.

Kids Need to Read: Help fight illiteracy with Mesa-based The Kids Need to Read Foundation. This holiday, donate new, exciting books that entertain, educate and advance kids’ minds. 480.227.3471

Homemade Olive Branch Holiday Wreath: Recognized as a sign of peace and goodwill, Lindsay Olives is creating and selling 14- and 18-inch olive wreaths with proceeds benefitting the Meals on Wheels Association of America. 800.765.2029

Desert Sweet Organics: Give the gift that keeps on giving - for 20 years. Southern Arizona’s Desert Sweet Organics Orchard sells individually certified organic apple trees that produce 200 pounds of apples. 815.432.3719

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