

Teaching Your Children about Community Service and Giving Back *by Heather Grocott*

We all want our children to be successful, purposeful, members of society... We want them to grow up and be “well-rounded little children,” just like grandma used to say. But the truth of the matter is, sometimes it is hard to effectively teach our children how and why they should be active participants within the community around them. How do we inspire our children to become instruments of change, service, and giving back to the community in which we raise them?

The fall and winter holiday months are an excellent time of year to introduce your child to community service and the act of giving to others. The weather gets cold, and they are less likely to play outside. So, load them up in the car and visit a local community service agency. Ideas for places to visit may include:

- ◆ **Local soup kitchen or food bank** – encourage your child to actually collect non-perishable food items from family and friends *before* visiting the food bank or soup kitchen. This will bring true meaning and establish a sense of giving back and responsibility within them.
- ◆ **Local nursing home or assisted living** – often times, senior citizens in nursing homes and assisted living facilities do not get as many visits from family members as they wish. They often feel lonely and sad, especially during holidays. Visit local senior citizen communities with your child. Ask your child to plan an activity or read a story to them. You can even suggest a field trip to your child’s teacher – perhaps your child would be more willing to participate in this type of community service with his/her entire class. What a great way to spread holiday cheer to your local elderly community!
- ◆ **Toy drive** – Encourage your child to save his/her earnings from household chores to purchase a toy for a child in need. Allow your child to pick out the toy, wrap it, and deliver it to the toy drive. It is important for children to be involved in each step of this process.
- ◆ **Donate old clothing** – Before the holidays, spend a day with your children cleaning out your dressers and getting rid of clothes they do not wear. Be sure the clothes are still in good condition, and ask them, “what do you think we could do with these clothes instead of throwing them away?” Perhaps you actually know of a family in need.
- ◆ **Children’s Hospital** – Consider putting together holiday fun packages for children who have to spend the holiday season in a hospital. Allow your child to deliver the packages and visit with the children.

When giving back to the local community with your child, remember it is important to allow them to be involved in all steps of the processes. Journaling your experiences is a nice way to capture memories and remember the acts of community service your child participates in each year.