

10 Ways to help your community in 30 minutes or less

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From waking up early to put in a first load of laundry to working all day and driving the mom taxi all afternoon, most people have little time to think about volunteering for community projects. But busy schedules do not mean we have to write off community involvement completely. In thirty minutes or less, anyone can make a difference in the community.

Check out the following ideas for ways to help your community in the midst of your everyday activities.

1. **Take a garbage bag while walking through the neighborhood.** Pick up any litter along the way. As a by-product, you can get some exercise built into your day.
2. **Shop with locally owned businesses, saving time and money.** Many locally owned businesses offer services like free gift-wrapping and delivery. And a percentage of your sales taxes go directly to the local community.
3. **Find positive aspects of your community share with other people.** A positive image encourages residents to shop locally, increases the chance new businesses will open in the area and promotes growth.
4. **Attend a local festival or other event.** Many have free admission and activities. Most festivals are actually fundraisers for non-profit organizations who make their money through sponsorships. Since sponsors look at attendance numbers to decide how much to give, your family can add to the number and help increase what businesses give next year.
5. **Write a letter to local elected officials encouraging them for making good decisions for the community.** People work harder when they know they are appreciated. And elected officials seldom hear enough encouraging words.
6. **Put a potted plant on your front porch.** When your home looks spruced up, it makes the whole neighborhood and the community to look better as well.
7. **Take left over dinner to an elderly neighbor.** If you have a family of four, cook enough dinner for five one night and deliver a plate to the widow next door. Your delivery helps you to get to know your neighbors better. And police promote knowing your neighbors as the best way to fight neighborhood crime.
8. **Look for opportunities to give in your community.** Many schools and churches collect items, such as like canned foods, old coats, toys and eyeglasses, for less fortunate families.
9. **Vote.** While the Presidential election comes around only once every four years, elections happen every year. Check out the candidates for local and state elections.
10. **Encourage your employer to sponsor local events, join a civic organization or allow employees to volunteer during work hours.** Many businesses have volunteer programs to reward employees for volunteering. Local news media often cover large volunteer events and having employee representation gives businesses extra publicity.



50 Ways to Better Your Community

Whether it's reconstructing a playground, visiting an elderly home, or clearing trash from a nearby creek, a community service project is an excellent way to bring about change on a small, intimate level. But before grabbing the work gloves, make sure that your project has a specific focus. Here are some ideas to help get the project started.

Neighborhood Enhancement

1. Help people paint and repair their homes.
2. Volunteer to clean up trash around a neighborhood.
3. Create a mural that depicts values of your community.
4. Set up an art exhibit at a local business, sell the creations, and use the money to fund a cause in your community.
5. Collect supplies for persons who have been victims of a fire or other disaster.
6. Plant a community garden.
7. Organize a campaign to raise money for new playground equipment, or reconstruct the playground yourself.
8. Share your skills! Volunteer to teach a class at a community center.
9. When fall comes around, distribute leaf bags and offer to assist neighbors with raking their yards.
10. Campaign for additional lighting along poorly lit streets.

Special Needs

1. Volunteer at a Special Olympics event.

2. Work with kids who have special needs on an art project.
3. Set up a buddy system with the special needs program at your school.
4. Raise money to purchase Braille books, large print books, or other needed materials for the special needs program at a local school or community center.
5. Make gifts with friends for kids in the hospital. Distribute Valentines, Halloween candy, or Christmas treats/toys.
6. Build a ramp for a person in a wheelchair to make their house more accessible.
7. Volunteer to read books or newspapers to those who are visually impaired.
8. Visit a local care center to learn more about those with special needs, and ask how you can help.
9. Recruit some friends or a class to help set up a library at a children's hospital.
10. Create a pamphlet that includes helpful tips concerning the respect of and interaction with people who have special needs.

Senior Citizens

1. Adopt a "grandfriend". Write them letters, call them, and visit often.
2. Gather friends and create a "shop squad" to pick up groceries and medicine for elderly.
3. Deliver meals to homebound individuals.
4. Gather family and friends and organize a summer songfest or play to perform at a nursing home.
5. For the holidays, go caroling, bring (easy-to-eat) treats, or just go and visit senior citizens.
6. Offer to read to people.
7. Provide your local nursing home or library with more large-print books.
8. Teach a senior how to use a computer or the Internet.
9. Call up elderly people who live alone to check if they need anything.
10. Volunteer to do general home maintenance for a senior citizen.

Homeless and/or Hungry

1. Help cook/serve meals at a homeless shelter.
2. Throw a birthday party for children who are homeless at a local shelter.
3. Organize a free, public nutrition awareness campaign.
4. Gather combs, toothbrushes, shampoo, razors, etc. to make "I Care" kits for people who are homeless.
5. Take children who are homeless on outings to a movie, zoo, or other fun location.
6. Hold a book drive and donate the proceeds to the shelter, and then hold a read-a-thon or give a class on basic reading skills.
7. Donate art supplies to the local shelter.
8. Offer to repair or alter clothes for people who are homeless.
9. Campaign to create a nursery in your local shelter, or help maintain an existing one.
10. Always keep a few granola bars on hand!

Environment

1. Clean up trash from a local outdoor space.
2. Organize a hike or nature walk with friends, and bring bags to collect trash along the trails.
3. Have fun with creating homemade paper out of used paper with friends (It's easy, fun, and green!)
4. Grow your own vegetables, fruits, and herbs in an organic garden, and encourage others to do the same.
5. Instead of using the car, choose the healthy route and bike to your next location. Burn energy, not gasoline!
6. Choose a family "energy watchdog" to shut off lights, television, and dripping sinks when not in use.
7. Switch your current Internet home page to an energy-saving one, such as Google's "Blackle", and turn down the computer screen brightness level as well. (It's unhealthy for both the environment and your eyes.)
8. Create a children's nature garden. Create a path, label plants and trees, and schedule guided tours.
9. Purchase recycled products as opposed to generic ones.
10. When buying food or drinks of any kind, it is better to stick to a large jug or tub as opposed to a collection of individually packaged goods.

As you put on those work gloves, keep in mind that SignUpGenius is an invaluable tool that can be used to organize events of any sort. We appreciate your efforts to change the world, one step at a time!