

Community Service Starter Pack

from Dana Wilkerson, A Novel Companion,
and the "Live well. Serve others." blog

One of our goals is for our readers to be inspired to serve others. This resource will give you ideas for how and where you and your loved ones can make a difference in your families, neighborhoods, communities, and even around the world.

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17 Easy Ways Kids Can Serve the People in Their Communities

Serving others does not have to be a huge undertaking. You can do it right in your own neighborhood or community. Check out this list to discover some of the ways you and the children you influence could start making a difference in the lives of people around you today.

DIY Community Service

Some of you are great planners, organizers, and thinkers. You'd rather come up with your own new project than join in on something that's already out there. We want to help you with that by providing a checklist to jumpstart the process.

Organizations

Not everyone has the time, inclination, or specific talents needed to create a service project or start a non-profit. The good news is there are countless organizations that would love to have you volunteer or donate. We've listed some of our favorites for you to consider.

17 Easy Ways Kids Can Serve the People in Their Communities

1. Teach an older adult how to use a smartphone or tablet.
2. Plant flowers in painted pots and deliver them to neighbors or residents of a local nursing home.
3. Put together “welcome baskets” of treats, books, a houseplant, and local information for new families in the neighborhood.
4. Distribute free bottles of water at a park or local community event. Bonus points for adding a custom label with an encouraging message.
5. Organize a yard sale with some neighbors and donate part of the proceeds to a favorite local charity or a family in need.
6. Volunteer to read books to younger children at the local library or to residents of a nursing home.
7. Write funny cards or poems and send them to local residents serving overseas in the military.
8. Offer to rake leaves, shovel snow, plant flowers, or do other yard work for a single parent or elderly person on your street.
9. Decorate paper placemats for the community senior center, homeless shelter, or nursing home.
10. Clean out the bookcase and donate books kids have “outgrown” to a local shelter, library, preschool, or family with younger children in your neighborhood.
11. Bake some goodies and deliver them to the local fire or police department.
12. Partner with a local hospital to create care packages for kids with cancer.
13. Volunteer to help an elderly neighbor organize their garage, basement, attic, closet, or pantry.
14. Offer to pet-sit and collect mail for neighbors when they go out of town.
15. Invite some older friends over to watch a classic movie or a few episodes of one of their favorite childhood TV shows.
16. Deliver a weekly meal to a housebound neighbor. If appropriate, take the whole family along and eat the meal together.
17. Take a bouquet of flowers to a widow on your street.

Kids, please talk to a parent or guardian before doing any of the projects on this page.

DIY Community Service

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Gather people who want to work together to make their community a better place. This might be your immediate family, a group of friends, a sports team, your class at school, your novel companions, or any other group of people that want to change the world. Note that it can be helpful to have people with a variety of personalities, experiences, and skills in your group.

(Write a list of possibilities here)

2

Choose the area you want to serve: your street, your neighborhood, your school, your city, your county, your state, the entire world, etc.

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Make a list of 6-10 problems you see in the area you chose. They might be large societal issues related to poverty, healthcare, education, racism, transportation, housing, and so on. Or they might be more immediate, practical things like cars speeding through a neighborhood where young kids live, a park that routinely gets trashed on the weekends, a lack of volunteers at the local library, or a large number of elderly people who live at home but can no longer drive.

(Continue writing on the back of this page if you run out of space.)

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4

Pick one of those problems and brainstorm ways to solve it. Anything goes. Don't worry about cost, time, resources, etc. Every idea is valid at this point and should not be discarded. Spend at least twenty minutes coming up with as many ideas as you can. If you want to take a break and revisit this again another day with a fresh perspective, go for it.

(Note: If you wish, repeat the process with one of the other problems.)



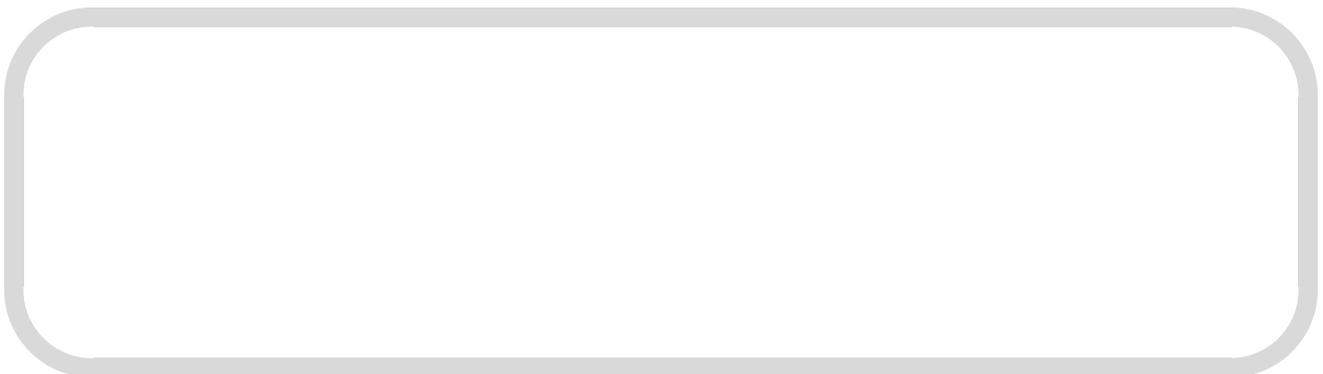
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5 Sit down with your group and look at your list of ideas for solving one of the problems. Mark off the ones that don't seem feasible for your situation and/or don't interest you. (We suggest not marking anything off just because you think you don't have the money or resources to do it. You can always consider doing fundraisers or looking into grants, donors, or investors.) Circle the ideas that pique the most interest.

6 Choose two or three of the ideas you circled and discuss what you would need to do to make them happen: people, time, resources, money, etc.

Note: Before you get too far into coming up with a plan to solve a specific problem, you will want to look into whether anyone else is currently trying to solve the same problem. You can do this by talking to people in the community who have a vested interest in the problem, doing an Internet and/or social media search, contacting local authorities or news agencies, and so on. If someone else is working on it, you might see if you can work together, you might want to choose a different solution to the problem in order to help combat it in multiple ways, or, if the other group seems to have a handle on the situation, you might choose to solve a different problem entirely.

7 After careful thought, communication, and consideration, choose the solution that will work best for your group and your community.



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If you need more help from this point on, there will undoubtedly be people in your community who can help you along the way.

- *Need to raise money but don't know the best way to do it? Talk to someone you know who raises money for another cause and ask for advice.*
- *Need a lot of volunteers? Contact local civic organizations and faith communities to see if they have people who could help.*
- *Need legal advice? Talk to a local law firm and see if anyone will advise you on a pro bono basis.*
- *Wondering if you need permits for your event? Contact your city and county governments.*

There are plenty of resources out there. Use them!

Good luck! We hope you change the world—or at least the part of the world that's in your neighborhood.

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Let us know about your project! Send us a note and tell us what you're doing. We might even highlight your efforts on the A Novel Companion website, the "Live well. Serve others." blog, or our social media pages.

Reach out to us via the "Contact Us" page at anovelcompanion.com OR livewellserveothers.com

Organizations

We know it's sometimes hard to find places that allow volunteers under the age of 13 or even 18. The organizations and ideas below provide volunteer opportunities for children and/or they mainly serve children.

Points of Light

Points of Light is dedicated to helping volunteers find opportunities to serve in their communities. Users can search by issue and location, and the advanced search function allows you to search family-friendly projects that children can do with you.

Website: www.pointsoflight.org

Ronald McDonald House Charities

The Ronald McDonald House provides support and resources to keep families close during a child's illness. Adults can volunteer in multiple ways, and while opportunities for children are fewer, they do exist. Contact your local chapter to find out how you can help.

Website: www.rmhc.org or search for your local chapter

Adopt an International College Student

Most colleges and universities have a program that matches international students with local families. Levels of interaction between the student and family can vary from spending a few hours a month together to hosting the student in your home during school breaks and everything in between. This is a great way for your family to learn about other cultures, interact with people who are different than you, and make a positive impact in the life of someone who is far from home and might be lonely. Contact your local university's International Student Affairs office to find out how to enroll in their program.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

The Imagination Library provides high-quality, age-appropriate books directly to the homes of preschoolers each month. You can donate money to the parent organization or contact your local affiliate. If your area doesn't have a local affiliate, you might consider starting a program.

Website: imaginationlibrary.com

Please note that these recommendations do not constitute A Novel Companion's endorsement of the listed organizations or the information, products, or services they provide.

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Skip1.org

Skip1's tagline is: "Skip something. Feed a child." The premise is that you skip a coffee, a new toy, a trip to the local trampoline park, or even a weekend trip and send that money to Skip1 to feed a child in one of their projects around the world.

Website: skip1.org

Compassion International

Compassion's mission is to release children in poverty in Jesus' name. They focus on holistic child development. Families or individuals can make a long-term commitment to sponsor a child throughout his or her childhood. Sponsorship involves not just donating money but also communicating with the sponsored child on a regular basis, sharing family photos, sending small gifts, and more, which gives children the chance to participate.

Website: www.compassion.com

KaBOOM!

This organization creates safe, community-built playspaces in under-resourced areas. Their goal is to increase playability: the extent to which a city makes it easy for all kids to get balanced and active play. KaBOOM! brings together parents, advocates, and other partners to ensure that kids have the opportunity to play every day, everywhere. Visit the website to find out how you can get involved and make donations.

Website: kaboom.org

Special Olympics

There are many ways to get involved with Special Olympics through both donations and volunteering. Opportunities abound for adults, there are special programs for high school students, and younger children can get involved in various ways too. And people of all ages can attend events. The best way to become a volunteer is to find the Special Olympics office nearest you, which is searchable on the website.

Website: www.specialolympics.org

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