

Family-friendly service ideas around Utah County

Karissa Neely Daily Herald 1 hr ago



Volunteers assemble beds for the Sleep in Heavenly Peace nonprofit on Saturday, March 25, 2017, at the Lehi Lowe's. The beds will go to Utah children who have none.

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Utah County is known as a very generous place, even garnering national notice — the most recent of which was WalletHub's 2017 World Giving Index, which rated Utah the most charitable state in the country.

Many locals help out with well-known organizations like the United Way of Utah County, Habitat for Humanity of Utah County and the Utah Food and Care Coalition, but there are numerous other nonprofits that also need help this season. And many of them are family friendly.

Service to do with smaller kids

The Mountainland Association of Governments' Meals on Wheels program delivers hot lunches to homebound seniors living around Utah County. Volunteers can sign up for one day a week. Michelle Mulford, volunteer coordinator for the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program that partners with Mountainland, recently explained that this is a great service opportunity for stay-at-home parents with little children, as the children can go along for the ride during deliveries. For more information, visit www.mountainland.org/meals.

Mikarose, a clothing store at University Place, accepts book donations every Thursday. According to justserve.org, the books should be appropriate for ages 3-18, and are then given to Kids on the Move, local schools in need, or to disaster relief efforts.

The American Fork Hospital accepts activity grab bags, pre-surgery bags, nursery goody bags and blankets for its patients. Many of these are targeted to smaller patients, so smaller children can help picking out their favorite things to share. For more information visit intermountainhealthcare.org/locations/american-fork-hospital/giving-volunteering/service-projects.

Service suitable for older kids and entire families

For those vocally or musically gifted families, Beehive Homes of Provo is always looking for volunteers to share their talents in storytelling, speeches or music for the senior residents at the assisted living facility. According to justserve.org, the facility plans these performances for Sunday firesides and Monday Family Home Evenings. To offer service, visit beehivehomes.com/location/provo/about-us.

The Provo Pioneer Village also needs musical families, specifically during the Christmas season. The Village needs volunteer Christmas carolers Dec. 15, 16 and 18. To volunteer, visit provopioneervillage.org.

The Utah Kids Foundation is a local nonprofit focused on helping families who are raising special needs children. Syndi Knowlton, CEO and executive director, started the group in American Fork in 2014 during her own experience raising three children with special needs. Her organization now helps 3,300 parents across Utah with their medical needs. During the Christmas season, Utah Kids is doing its annual Empty Stocking Fund, and families are welcome to help.

"Families can gather individual items needed, but they also can sponsor a child or a family as well," Knowlton said Tuesday.

More information on the unique needs of those in need is available on the Utah Kids Foundation Facebook page, www.facebook.com/UtahKidsFoundation.

To teach children to serve others, while also sharpening their cooking skills, families can donate meals for the Circles Utah Valley Program. The Circles program holds weekly dinner meetings for low-income residents. During the meetings they develop skills to improve their financial, social and emotional situations. The group is always in need of meal donations for its three Utah County sites: on Tuesdays in Provo, on Wednesdays in American Fork, and on Thursdays in Salem. To find out more visit communityactionprovo.org/circles/volunteer.

If your family needs something more active to strengthen its service muscles, the Sleep In Heavenly Peace Lehi chapter is always in need of volunteers. This group makes bunk beds (with mattresses and bedding) for families whose children are sleeping on the ground, and regularly allows all ages of volunteers at its build days. Littler ones can help sanding boards, while older kids can help assemble the beds.

"We love families to show up and help," said Matthew McEwen, the chapter's founder.

The group is holding its next build at 10 a.m. Saturday at 322 E. Willow Springs Lane, Draper. To sign up for a build, or to donate funds to the \$250 needed for a set of bunk beds, visit the group's Facebook page, www.facebook.com/SHPLehi.

Families can also make giving a year-round activity by donating time and money, or gathering items for many other nonprofits such as: Tabitha's Way and Utah Girls Love You. In addition to opportunities listed on justserve.org, there are other local campaigns on GoFundMe, such as Maribel Arrieta Rees' continued Table to Table efforts to relieve suffering in Venezuela.

In addition to helping local nonprofits, families can create their own ways to help others as well. The Pleasant Grove Manila 8th Ward of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints finished up its own holiday service project Wednesday night: gathering hygiene and school kits, along with clothing, shoes and home goods for families in Africa.

Christy Gunther's son is serving an LDS mission in Zimbabwe and after hearing her son's sadness at how poor people are there, the Gunther family decided to help.

"Other families got involved, and wanted to do it, and then the youth got involved and other wards," Gunther said.

The combined efforts of all these groups collected sorted and packaged items Wednesday night, and Gunther said they expected to fill a large shipping container. The items will be shipped via the nonprofit Eyes 4 Zimbabwe.

Local banks, grocery stores and medical offices, like Lehi Vision Care, are also places to get involved. Each offers different types of service opportunities, from donating to "Angel Trees" to donating glasses.

"There are lots of way to give and be involved," Gunther said.

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Pleasant Grove nonprofit makes sure single moms have tools to succeed



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Volunteers help Tabitha's Way set up new warehouse to serve 4,000 hungry people