MAKE IT MAGICAL

AMAZING HOLIDAY GIFTS (TO BUY OR DIY)

How to Party Like a Martha

TASTEMAKERS AND THEIR TREES
Spread the Love

If you want to make a real difference this season, give a child the gift of good health, warmth and comfort, or a wish come true. These 10 charities are striving to improve life for the youngest among us.

TEXT BY SARAH ENGLER

WHEN YOU'RE CAUGHT IN the swirl of holiday planning and gift shopping, it's natural to feel guilty about your own good fortune when others have much less, especially kids. Sadly, one in five children in the United States lives in poverty, and 41 percent are in low-income families, according to the National Center for Children in Poverty. To turn your concern into tangible change for the better, consider the work of these 10 smaller, lesser-known charities that are devoted to helping kids. (For more ideas, go to the nonprofit watchdog websites charitywatch.org and charitynavigator.org, which list hundreds and rank them by financials and how responsibly their donations are spent.) Pick a cause close to your heart, and make someone's season brighter.

WHERE TO DONATE GOODS

Project Linus
Whether knitted, crocheted, or quilted, more than 7 million security blankets—all made by volunteer crafters—have been gifted by this Missouri-based group to children who are seriously ill or have faced trauma. The website features patterns if you need a little inspiration, and lists chapters in all 50 states that accept drop-offs of new handmade blankets and crafting supplies. Contact them directly to see what’s needed, from fabric to batting to thread. projectlinus.org.

Reader to Reader
In 2000, David Mazor learned that the librarian at his daughter’s Massachusetts college hadn’t been able to buy a new book for the school in two years. That compelled him to call the librarian at Durant High School, in Mississippi—which he chose because it’s in one of the poorest towns in the country. When she told him they hadn’t
been able to purchase any in 40 years, Mazor started collecting and shipping volumes from his neighbors to the Durant Library and others like it. Today, his project is a national nonprofit reaching 45 states. “Teachers often spend their own money to keep their libraries stocked, because they are so keenly aware of the difference a classroom full of books can make,” says Mazor, a former film distributor. “We are fortunate to see that difference firsthand.” readertooreader.org.

Newborns in Need
The North Carolina–based charity accepts infant supplies—including gently used hats, booties, clothing, and toys—for premature, sick, or impoverished babies, and donates them to about two thousand hospitals, shelters, and families across the U.S. Get your community involved by holding a holiday diaper drive or “baby shower” event to collect store-bought items to send. newbornsimeed.org.

PowerMyLearning
Partnering with individual schools, districts, and after-school centers across the country, this New York City–based group aims to transform teaching and family engagement with technology through its programs. You can donate wiped laptops, desktops, tablets, printers, and other hardware (like USB flash drives and surge protectors) to help increase access to some technology in the homes of low-income students. Just fill out the form on the website and follow the instructions to ship your gear to (or drop it off at) the organization’s Atlanta or NYC warehouses. powermylearning.org.

One Simple Wish
Working with partner agencies in just about every state, this nonprofit, founded by New Jersey foster parent Danielle Gletow, delivers actual wishes—guitar lessons for a music-loving 9-year-old, tickets to a basketball game for a girl with WNBA dreams—to donors who want to grant them. Scroll through the website to learn about the child behind each wish, and check back year–round. (You can also give a gift on a kid’s birthday, for instance.) “Each month, we get between five hundred and a thousand wishes, ranging in cost from ten to five hundred dollars,” Gletow says. In the past 10 years, One Simple Wish has impacted more than 55,000 children. “Kids are so filled with joy and gratitude, knowing that a person they will probably never meet thought enough of them to listen to their wish and make it come true.” onesimplewish.org.

WHERE TO DONATE MONEY

Children Incorporated
This Virginia–based organization has been helping kids in need of life essentials in 23 countries, including inner-city, rural Appalachian, and Native American populations in the U.S., since 1964. For $30 a month, you can sponsor a child, and the money will help fund her food, clothing, health care, and education. Or you can make a one-time donation to support various programs, which cover everything from mosquito nets to warm clothing to skills training. childrenincorporated.org.

Cookies for Kids’ Cancer
Cancer is the number—one cause of death by disease of U.S. children, but pediatric cancers receive just a quarter of the funding that breast cancer does, and less than half of what’s earmarked for prostate cancer. “No one wants to think about cancer, or consider the idea that kids can get it—but that fear of talking about it part of the reason more money isn’t directed toward research,” says cofounder Gretchen Witt. She and her husband, Larry, started this New Jersey–based nonprofit in 2008 after their 2-year-old son, Liam, was diagnosed with stage-four neuroblastoma. When they learned of the lack of research funding, Gretchen enlisted 250 volunteers to bake enough cookies to raise $420,000. Liam lost his battle in 2011, but the money they’ve raised—through donations, cookie purchases on the website, and people organizing their own bake sales—has funded 100 research grants and 41 new treatments. cookiesforkids-cancer.org.

Shoes That Fit
In 1992, Elodie McGuirk, then a college financial-aid coordinator in Claremont, California, heard from an elementary-school secretary about a boy who was crying because his parents had turned his toes under, to cram his growing feet into too-small shoes. The secretary added that she’d seen hundreds of kids like him. Unable to stop thinking about them, McGuirk posted a flyer at work asking for new shoes. “So much of children’s lives involves running, jumping, and playing,” she says. “When your shoes hurt or obviously belong to someone else, it’s hard to feel good about yourself.” Last year, Shoes That Fit gave more than 120,000 new sneakers in 45 states (a donation of $25 typically buys a name–brand pair). “Shoes and personal appearance are often tied to a child’s sense of self-esteem,” McGuirk says. “For some children we serve, these are the first new shoes they have ever owned.” shoesthatfit.org.

Blessings in a Backpack
One in six American schoolkids thinks of the weekend not as a time to have fun, but as two days of hunger. For some food–insecure children, school meals are the only access to affordable nutrition. This Kentucky–based group has helped feed students in more than a thousand schools across 45 states and Washington, D.C. A $100 donation can send a child home each Friday for the entire 38-week school year with enough sustenance to last her until Monday. blessingsinabackpack.org.

Pajama Program
While volunteering at a New York City shelter in 2001, Genevieve Piturro realized the children she was reading to didn’t have a loved one to tuck them in each night, and often slept in the same clothes they’d worn all day. That inspired her to start the Pajama Program, which has delivered millions of pj’s, as well as books, to kids in all 50 states, plus Puerto Rico. Though the initiative accepts goods, Piturro says monetary gifts go further: The organization can often buy five new pairs of pajamas for the same cost of one at retail. “We believe that all children have the right to a good night,” she says. “A comforting bedtime routine helps them wake up ready to learn and have a great day, and can carry them into adulthood.” pajamaprogram.org.