

TIME  
FOR KIDS

**HAND to HEART**

# Improving Communities

Jessica Cohn

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### Teacher Created Materials

5301 Oceanus Drive  
Huntington Beach, CA 92649-1030  
<http://www.tcmpub.com>

**ISBN 978-1-4333-4866-2**

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# Take Time

*Littering. Pollution. Natural disasters. Poverty.* Each one is a problem in our world. Some of these problems can't be avoided. Others are caused by humans. We can't stop a **tsunami** or a hurricane. And we can't stop an earthquake from turning a city to rubble. Those problems are out of our control. But we can decide how to respond to natural disasters. We can come up with a plan to stop litter and pollution. And we can help people in need.

How do we solve these problems? We work together. Problems may be big or small. They may be global or local. Either way, we can help solve them.

The writer and **activist** Booker T. Washington once said, "If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else." That's what **volunteers** do. They spend their time helping others. They solve problems. So, what time can you take to lift someone up?



**THINK  
LINK**

- Why is it important to help people?
- How can you improve your community?
- In what ways do time, money, and raising **awareness** help people?



**Volunteers collect supplies after a flood.**



**Volunteers clean a pelican after an oil spill.**

**More than 60 million people volunteer their time every year.**

# Volunteer Spirit

Can you spot a volunteer? They may be in schools, parks, or the neighborhood library. Some help children learn to read. Others pick up trash from the beach. They work together to solve problems in the community. Most people don't volunteer to be famous. They simply see a need and want to help.

Do you spend time helping out at home, at school, or in your community? You might be a volunteer! But if you haven't volunteered before, don't hold back. Longtime volunteers will tell you that it's best to jump right in. By volunteering, we show the world what we believe in. We show that we will stand up for what is right. And there are so many ways to get started.

## Franklin Fires Back

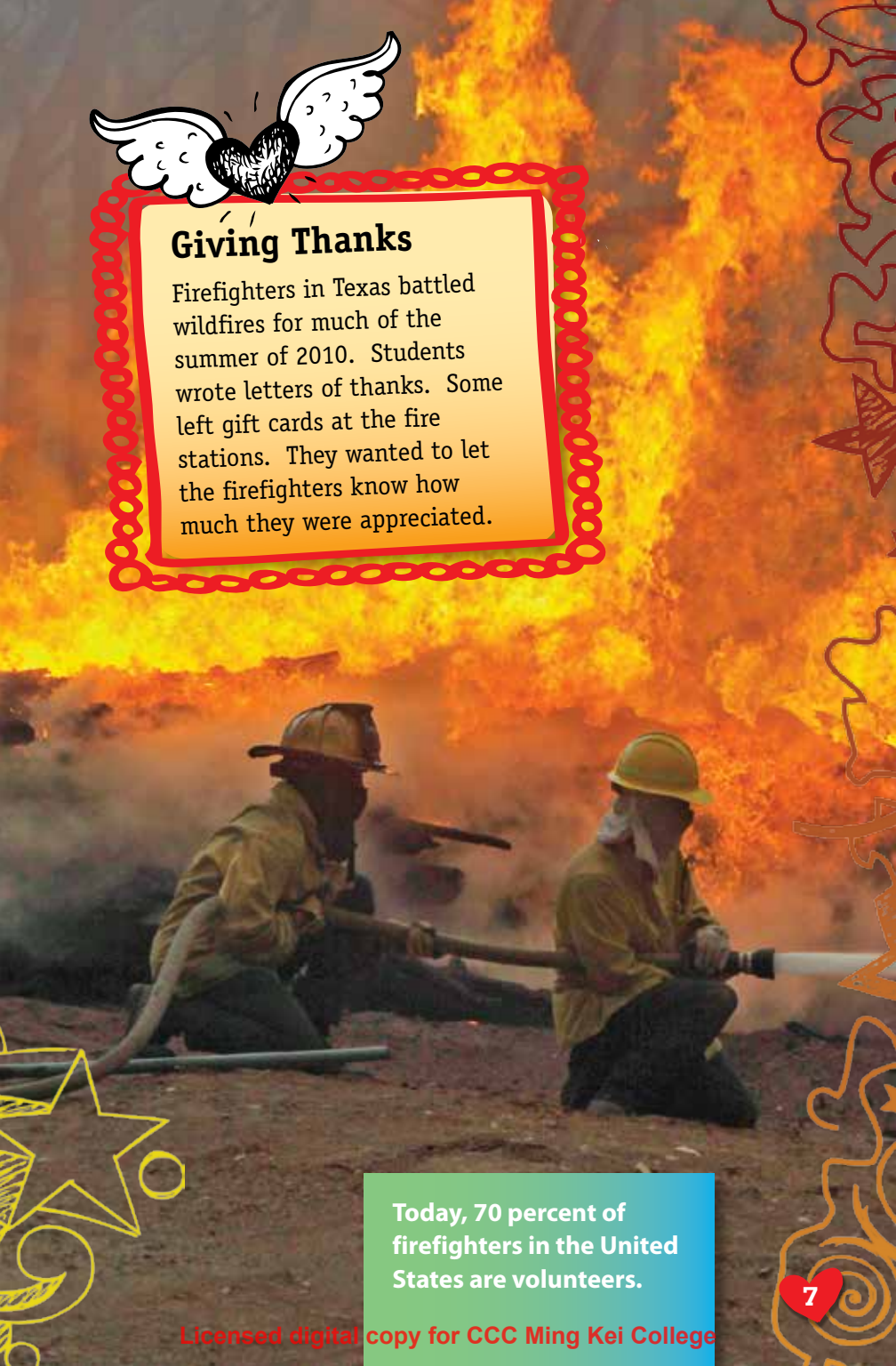
Volunteering played a large role in American history. In early America, the city didn't pay for firefighters. Benjamin Franklin thought everyone should receive help during a fire. Today, many towns have volunteer fire departments. It was Franklin who started the first one.





## Giving Thanks

Firefighters in Texas battled wildfires for much of the summer of 2010. Students wrote letters of thanks. Some left gift cards at the fire stations. They wanted to let the firefighters know how much they were appreciated.



Today, 70 percent of firefighters in the United States are volunteers.

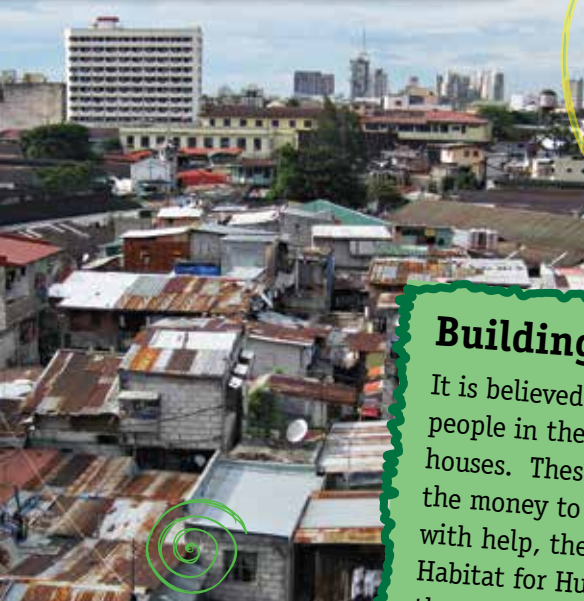




# Youth United

Are you between the ages of 5 and 25? If so, you can join Youth United. It is a Habitat for Humanity program run by kids. The team works together to build houses for people in need. Members also learn leadership and teamwork skills. The younger members help get the word out about the program. Everyone helps to build new homes—as well as hope.

As many as 100 million people worldwide are homeless.



## Building a New Future

It is believed that nearly two billion people in the world live in unsafe houses. These people may not have the money to buy a new home, but with help, they can build one. When Habitat for Humanity builds a house, they put everyone to work—including the people who will live in it.



Habitat for Humanity has volunteers working in over 80 countries.



# Doctors Without Borders

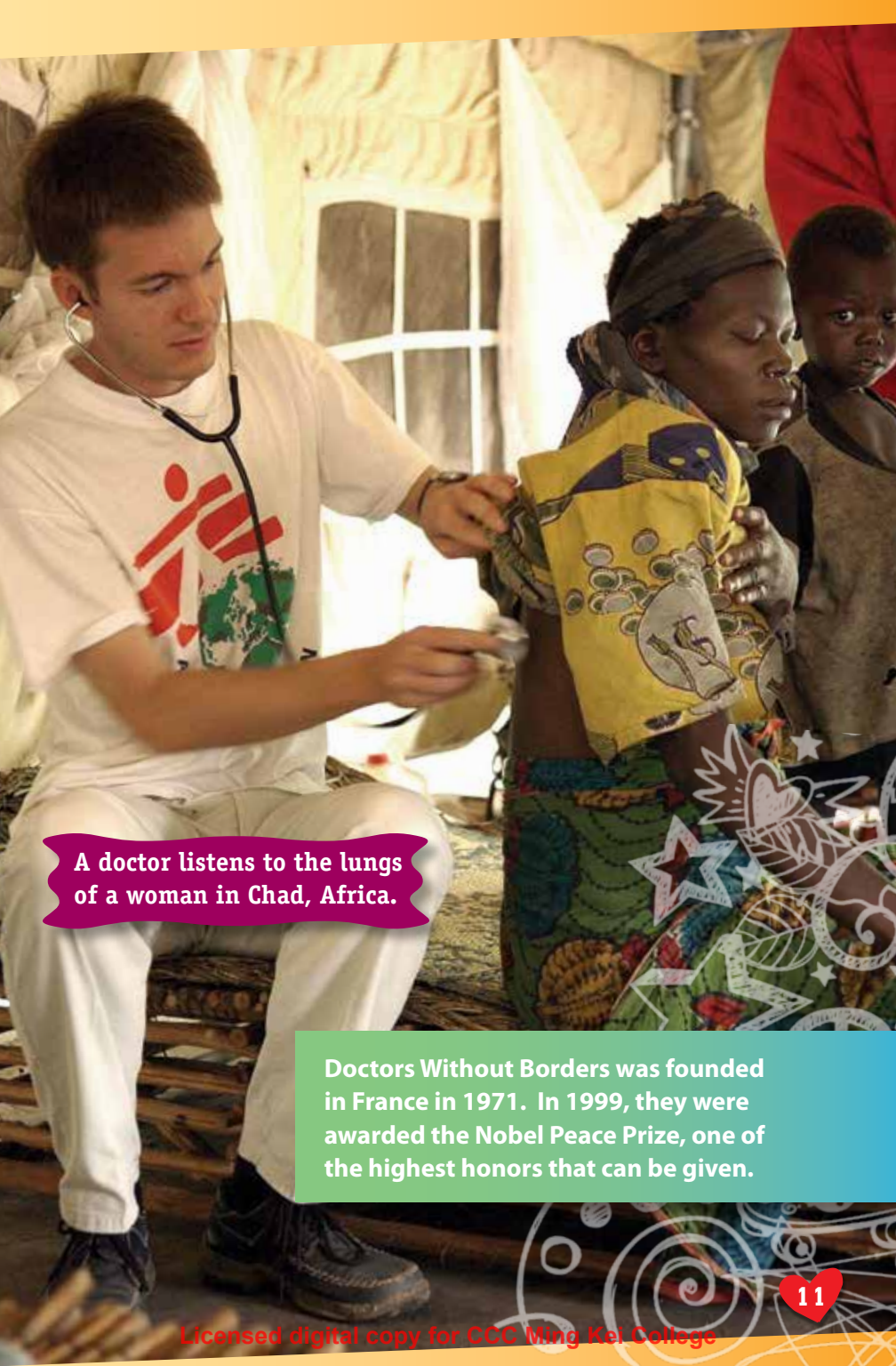
*Ayuda* is Spanish for *help*. In French, it's *aide*. When helping in other countries, it's helpful to know more than one language. Doctors Without Borders **operates** in almost 70 countries. Doctors and other volunteers travel to places that are in **crisis**. They respond to disasters like earthquakes and floods.

Each year, Doctors Without Borders offers **internships**. Selected students work without pay for a short time. But they get something in return. These students gain experience that will help them with their future careers.

## Heal the World

Each day, nearly 27,000 volunteers around the world offer medical care to people in need. They provide health care, clean drinking water, and shelter. Some of these volunteers work in small hospitals or simply a tiny room. But they all make a big difference.



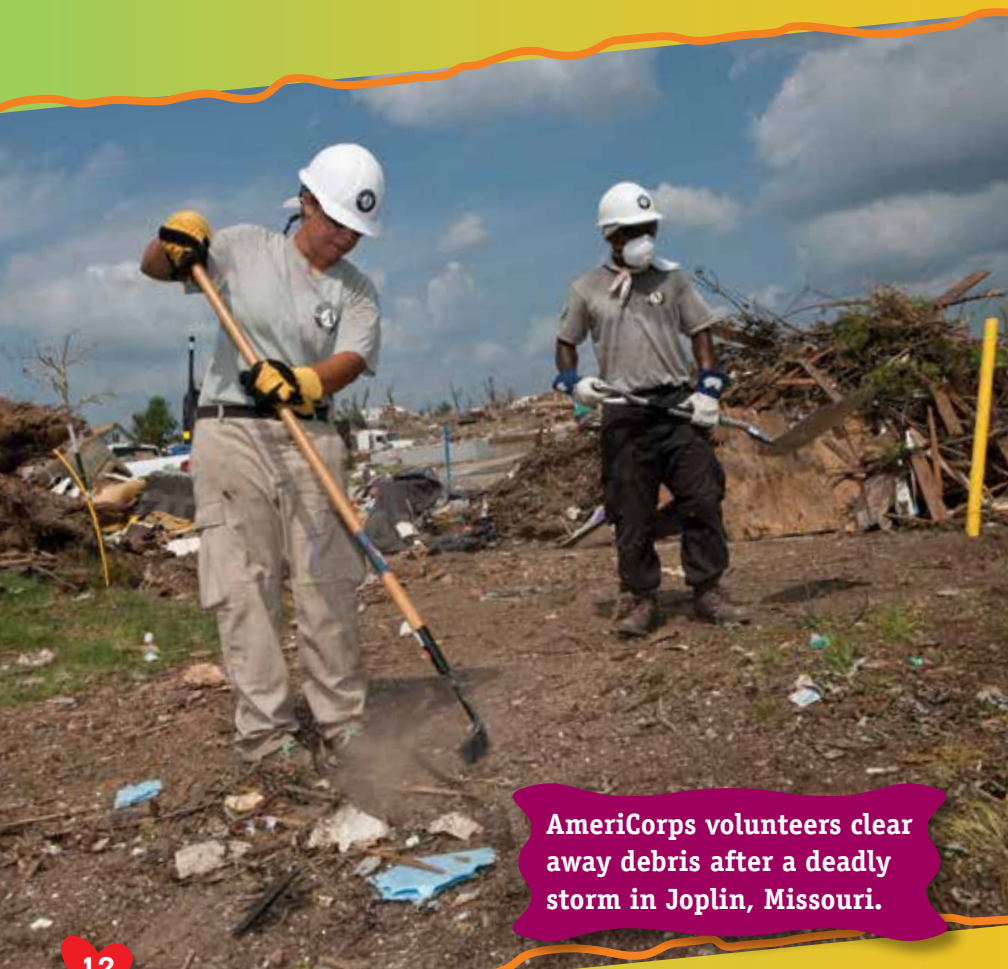


A doctor listens to the lungs of a woman in Chad, Africa.

Doctors Without Borders was founded in France in 1971. In 1999, they were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, one of the highest honors that can be given.

# Hands-On Help

Every **organization** is looking for volunteers with lots of energy. AmeriCorps matches volunteers with programs. Much of the work they do is hard physical work outdoors. Volunteers clean up parks. They work to clean streams and other waterways. When there are disasters, AmeriCorps sends people to clean up the mess.



AmeriCorps volunteers clear away debris after a deadly storm in Joplin, Missouri.



Calling all builders, writers, artists, and cooks! Really anyone and everyone can volunteer their talents.

## Scouting for a New Place

A town in New Jersey had 13 green acres that were undeveloped. An Eagle Scout decided to change this. With the city's approval, the Eagle Scout and his friends made a short trail. Then, other Scouts built another trail. Later, Scouts made a bridge and benches. A park was born. Eagle Scouts are famous for the many ways they help their communities.



# Money Matters

★ Have you ever run a lemonade stand? It takes money to buy the ingredients. You need lemons, sugar, water, cups, and ice. Then, people pay you for the lemonade. The money you earn covers your expenses. And there is even a little money left over for you to keep. The money left over is called *profit*. Some organizations are **nonprofit** groups. They don't keep their profits. Instead, they raise money so they can give it away to people in need.

There are many types of nonprofit groups. Some work in education. Others are **religious**. They may have a simple goal. Maybe they just want to build a park. They can earn money by asking people for it. Or they may plan larger **fund-raising** events. Collecting money for a good cause takes a lot of time and hard work.



## Sells Well

There are so many ways to raise money.



◀ Some places host talent shows and charge for tickets.



▼ Many groups create art and hold **auctions**.



▲ Some groups sell gift baskets. Other organizations sell coupons, cookbooks, candles, and candy.

People also pay to have their names carved on items such as benches or bricks. ➤



## Happy Help Day

Instead of asking for birthday presents, you can ask your friends and family to donate money to charities. Gifts can go to any cause that is special to you.



# When Disasters Strike

A deadly hurricane hit New Orleans in 2005. Hurricane Katrina killed nearly 2,000 people. It damaged \$81 billion worth of property. Thousands of people no longer had homes. Many could not go to work. And others were separated from their families.

When disasters strike, the news often shows sad pictures. There are fallen buildings. People are shown sleeping in shelters and lining up for food. In response, many viewers give money. More than two billion dollars was raised after Hurricane Katrina.



An article was printed in the *New York Times* about Talia's work. It was titled "Talia for President."



## Making a Difference

Talia Leman was 10 years old when Hurricane Katrina devastated the southern United States. She wanted to help the survivors of the hurricane. Her nonprofit organization, RandomKid, has worked with 12 million young people from 20 countries.



**Thousands of New Orleans residents wait for buses to take them away from the damage.**



**“Let us not be satisfied with just giving money. Money is not enough. Money can be got, but they need your hearts to love them. So spread your love everywhere you go.”**

**—Mother Teresa**

# Hungry for Help

During a disaster, the needs of the people in trouble are clear and sudden. But many other people have needs that are ongoing. They can be harder to see. One of the most **persistent** problems is hunger. About one in seven American homes is **food insecure**. These people are not sure how they will buy their next meal. Each year, many children go without meals because their families can't afford food.

Food pantries collect food to give away. And soup kitchens cook free meals. Young people can help at both kinds of places. Another way to help is to raise funds for supplies. The Empty Bowls Project does just that. Decorated bowls are created and used for a soup dinner. Guests keep the bowl for a small donation. The money that is raised is given to a group that fights hunger.



Handmade items can be sold to raise money for charities.

## One for the Records

Students in the North Carolina School of Science and Math are good with numbers. In 2011, they set a world record. It was for the most food collected at one place in a 24-hour period. How much food did they collect? Over 500,000 pounds!



## Food for Thought

Kids' Food Basket is in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The group makes Sack Suppers for people in need. Kids collect items like juice boxes. They raise money to buy other foods. They decorate, fill, and distribute the sacks.



# Coming Home

Some groups aren't set up for volunteers from the general public. They need help from people who are trained to do special jobs. Many need doctors. The Coming Home Project helps veterans who have been at war. Doctors give their time to help soldiers sort out their thoughts and emotions. The group needs medical people trained to do this job. But they take **monetary donations** from anyone.

## Special Delivery

One way to help soldiers is to send a care package. Work with *OperationGratitude.com* to find out what soldiers need. Collect supplies and add something fun—perhaps some homemade cookies! Every soldier loves receiving a letter, too.



THANK  
YOU

Your the  
BEST!

## A Symbol of Hope

People use yellow ribbons to show their support for soldiers and veterans. You can raise money for veterans' organizations by selling yellow ribbons to your family and friends.



Some trace this **symbol** to the Civil War.



Others believe it was first used in stories people told each other long ago.



Some ribbons are short and looped so they can be worn on a pin.



Others are long and tied around trees. The yellow ribbon is a powerful way to show the world you respect soldiers.



# Every Penny Counts

Every organization needs money. But you don't need to be rich to help. You can make a big difference with small change.

In Canada, a teacher at Gordon Terrace Elementary School showed her students a video. It was about a school in Nepal with a dirt floor. There wasn't enough room for all the students, and the school needed supplies.

The Canadian students decided to help. They sold candy and ice cream to raise money. They sent emails to family and friends asking them to send in nickels and dimes. Together, they raised over \$6,000.



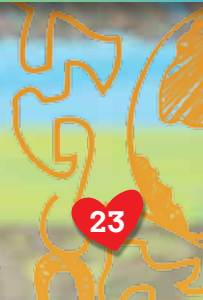
Students in Nepal thank their friends in Canada for their help.



Members of the Boys and Girls Club raised money by collecting and displaying a mile of quarters.

It takes 68,000 quarters to span one mile.

**"You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give."**  
—Unknown





# It All Adds Up

Americans donate more money than any other people in the world. Some of it comes from businesses, but much of it comes from individuals like you. These **charities** receive the most donations each year.

United Way



**\$3.9 billion**

United Way focuses on education and health issues.



**\$1.81 billion**

Salvation Army provides housing and help for those in need.

FEEDING AMERICA

**\$1.15 billion**

Feeding America partners with food banks around the country.



American Red Cross

**\$1.08 billion**

The American Red Cross is well known for its work during disasters



**\$1.04 billion**

Food for the Poor collects donations for those who are food insecure.



# STOP! THINK...

- Which charity earned the most from individual donations?
- Could Food for the Poor surpass the United Way if it doubled the donations it received?
- How do you think people choose which charity to give money to?

## Making It Count

Charities can use the money they collect to do good work. For every dollar earned, these charities donate as much as they can.

- American Red Cross: 83% of every dollar earned
- Salvation Army: 92% of every dollar earned
- United Way: 93% of every dollar earned
- Feeding America: 97% of every dollar earned
- Food for the Poor: 96% of every dollar earned

Other charities may use large amounts of money to organize more fund-raisers and don't pass on as much money to those in need.

# People Power

Donating time and money is important. But there are other valuable ways to help. Before people can help, they need to know about the problem. Have you ever seen people holding up protest signs by the side of the road? They are trying to tell the world about an important **issue**. Many volunteers call or write letters. They may send them to government leaders. Other people raise awareness locally. They describe the problems they see. One of the best ways to spread the word is to contact newspapers and magazines. TV shows and radio programs can also share important news.

Many people raise awareness by **boycotting** a business. They refuse to buy anything from businesses that are acting in ways they think are wrong. These people ask others to boycott with them. Together, small changes can make a big statement.



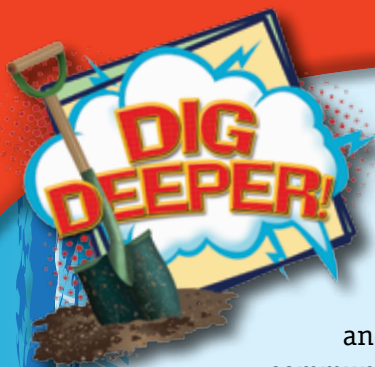


## Walk On

One way groups raise money is through walkathons. Teams walk in the name of someone who is sick. Friends and family members support them by donating money for each mile that is walked. Walkathons don't raise only money. They raise awareness in the community. The more people who know about a cause, the more people can help!

If the  
environment  
COLLAPSES,  
we will  
FALL  
with it.





## Powerful Words

Do you worry about the problems we face and have ideas for how to help? Newspapers and politicians have the power to communicate with hundreds of thousands of people. If they support your idea, they could communicate your message to a large audience. Find out how to write a letter that will get results.

1

Clearly describe the problem. Try telling a story about your own experiences to make your letter personal. Explain how this problem makes you feel and how it affects the people around you.



2

Ask for support. Explain what you want the recipient of the letter to do about the problem.



3

Thank your audience for its attention. And don't forget to include your name and address so you can be contacted if needed.

4

Organize friends and family who feel the same way as you do. Invite them to write their own letters. When you have a good number of letters, send them off. Let your voice be heard!



February 20, 2012  
The Honorable Sandra Price  
Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

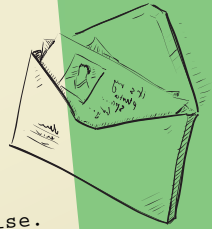
Dear Senator Price:

I am writing about a problem that impacts many people and animals in this community: unhealthy dogs. I live in an apartment, and there is no grass nearby to let my dog Rocky get his exercise. I was told that Rocky was overweight during his last visit to the vet. This made me very sad. I want Rocky to have a long and healthy life. Many others in my community also have dogs and live in apartments or houses with no yards. My goal is to help all dogs in my community.

A dog park would be a great way to keep dogs healthy. The dog park would provide people with a fun and safe place to take their dogs to get the exercise they need. The dog park would be a beautiful addition to our town.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. I hope that you will be able to help.

Sincerely,  
Joy North  
513 Spring St.  
Maple, CA



# Spreading the Word

People need to understand a problem before they can help. Telling real-life stories is a good way to get people involved. It gives others an insider's view.

Autism Speaks is a nonprofit organization. Volunteers share stories about what life is like with autism. People with autism have trouble connecting with others. Experts estimate that 1 out of 88 children is affected by autism. But the issue wasn't widely understood until the group started talking about it. Many groups use stories to explain their concerns.

## Something for Everyone

There are organizations for many different conditions. People struggling with health problems can find a group specific to their needs. These nonprofit groups raise money for research, education, support, and awareness.

Autism Speaks organizes events that bring the autistic community together.





## Horse Sense

**Equine therapy** helps people with autism. People who distrust others will often relax around a horse. People in general benefit from spending time with animals. Dogs, especially puppies, are often used to help people feel better.





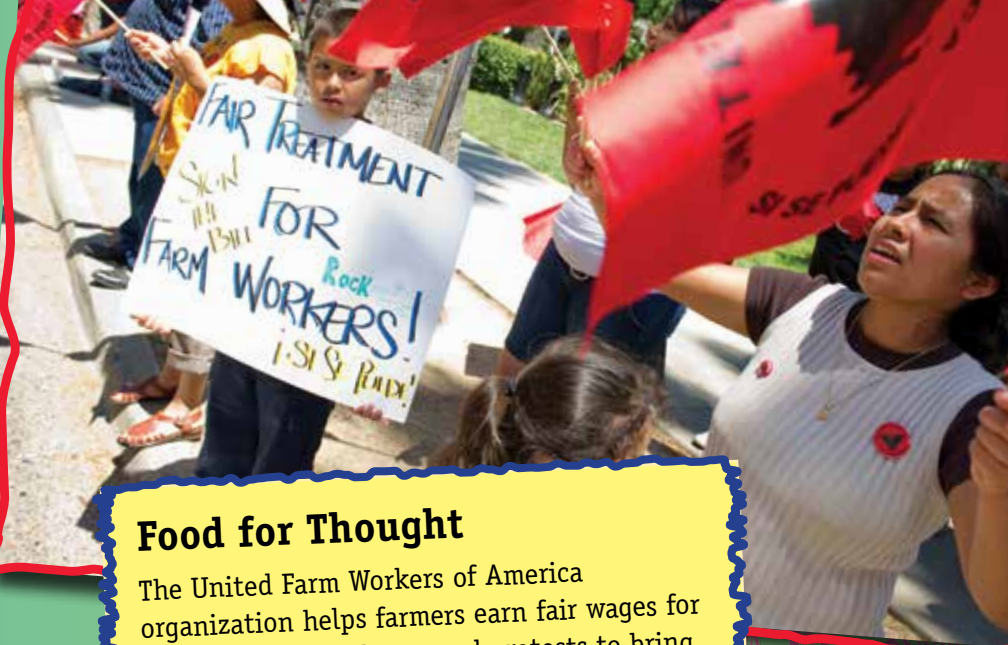
# Demonstrations

One strong voice can make a difference, and a crowd of voices is even harder to ignore. In May 1963, students gathered together for a peaceful **demonstration**. Their cause was simple. They didn't like the racial **segregation** in Birmingham, Alabama. At that time, African Americans and white people couldn't eat in the same restaurants. They couldn't shop in the same stores. The students believed everyone should be treated equally no matter the color of their skin. They hoped the demonstration would bring awareness about **inequality**.

The students marched in the street to stand up for their cause. The police hit them with painful high-pressured sprays of water. But they didn't fight back. The pictures of how peaceful they were helped the protesters gain supporters. Soon, there were more people to fight for equality.

Demonstrators fight for equal rights in Alabama in 1963.



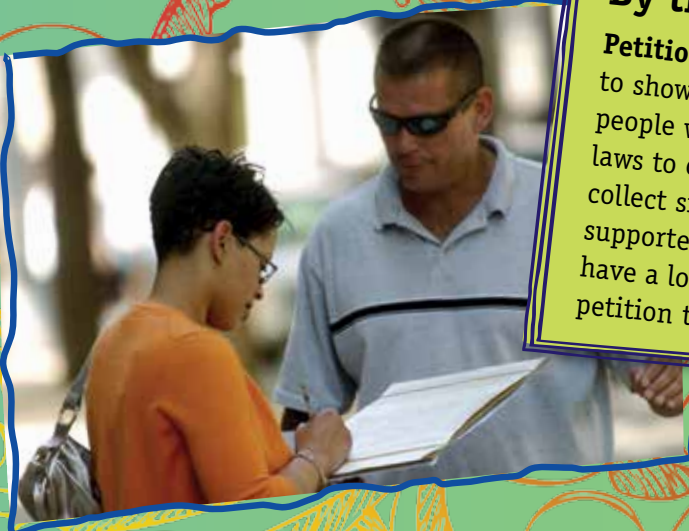


## Food for Thought

The United Farm Workers of America organization helps farmers earn fair wages for their work. They have used protests to bring attention to unsafe working conditions. They also make sure all workers are treated fairly.

## By the Books

**Petitions** are a way to show that many people want unfair laws to change. People collect signatures from supporters. When they have a lot, they send the petition to lawmakers.



# Smart Spending

Sometimes, helping is as simple as choosing what to buy or not buy. Many companies have found ways to raise awareness with their products. Some donate their profits to charity. One shoe company, TOMS, gives a pair of shoes away for each pair it sells. The shoes are sent to children in poorer countries that can't afford shoes. This program lets more kids go to schools that require shoes. And it also protects their bare feet from hazards. Choosing companies that do more than make profits is an easy way to support change.

Each year, TOMS runs an event called One Day Without Shoes. During this event, people go barefoot to bring attention to the problem of having no shoes.





**Volunteers give medicine to a boy in Pakistan.**

## **Giving Globally**

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) sells everything from note cards to dolls in its catalogs and online shop. These products were made by people in need around the world. When a product is sold, some of the money is given to the people who made it.



## Sweeter Dreams

The Pajama Program collects sleepwear and books for young people. They send these items to groups that help people who need them. Meet Genevieve Piturro, the head of this peaceful program.

**Jessica:** Where does the Pajama Program operate?

**Genevieve:** We serve more than 2,500 locations throughout all states. These include schools, scout troops, churches, companies, [clubs, and more].

**Jessica:** How do kids help?

**Genevieve:** We call on children to hold pajama drives and fund-raising events. It is often children who have never experienced loss who work the hardest to help bring a smile and some comfort to their less fortunate peers.

**Jessica:** Why is the work important?

**Genevieve:** There are more than one million children who are not living at home. Many have been through hard times. They have fallen behind in their reading skills and no longer have books to read on a regular basis. These supplies make a real difference.



## Bookmarks For Change

Reading a book is the perfect way to fall asleep. These bedtime bookmarks are a good way to promote the Pajama Program or your favorite cause. Give them to friends to raise awareness, or sell them to raise money.



1

Cut a 2" x 6" piece of construction paper.



2

Punch a hole at the top of the bookmark. String a piece of yarn through the hole and knot it.



3

Find pictures inside old magazines. Cut and paste colorful pictures to decorate the bookmark.



4

Write a sentence or short message on top of the bookmark.



5

Make more and spread the word!

### Supplies:

Construction paper

Markers

Glue

Hole punch

Yarn

Old magazines



Sweet Dreams from  
the Pajama Program!

# No Voice Is Too Small

You have the power to make a difference! All it takes is one person to start a wave of change. Whether the problem we face is big or small, there are people like you who want to make the world a better place.

We can't stop natural disasters. But we can gather together to help everyone get back on their feet. War and illness often seem out of our control. But we can protect, nurture, and help our neighbors. Every problem we see is a chance to make a change. Change may start small. It may be a change you make at home. Or it may be one you make with your friends. But when we work together over time, a small change can become a very big deal.



## Be Kind

Being nice is a simple and powerful way to change the world. That is the idea behind random acts of kindness. There are ways to help without a lot of planning.



## World Kindness Day

The second Sunday in November is World Kindness Day. People celebrate in many ways. They are nice to people who are not nice. They babysit for parents who need a break. They leave small gifts in mailboxes. These are ordinary but important acts of kindness.



**“Be the change you want to see in the world.”**

**—Mohandas Gandhi**







## Finding Your Place

There are over one million nonprofit organizations in the United States. Use the questions below to help you find the best way to volunteer. It doesn't matter what you do. Just do something!



Are you a friendly kid who likes **sports?**

Join a team that can match you with a kid who has a physical or mental disability.





## Do you like to work **outdoors**?

Plant and take care of a community garden. Or help with a neighborhood cleanup project.



## Is **reading** your favorite hobby?

You can read letters to seniors with poor eyesight. Or volunteer at hospitals and homeless shelters to read favorite stories to younger children.



## Do you love **pets**?

You can care for pets while their owners are on vacation. Let your neighbors know you're willing to help.



# Glossary

- activist**—a person who acts to bring about change, especially political change
- auctions**—sales at which things are sold to those who offer to pay the most
- awareness**—understanding or knowledge
- boycotting**—joining with others in refusing to buy from a person, organization, or country
- charities**—groups set up to provide help and money to a certain cause
- crisis**—a major challenge or emergency
- demonstration**—the public support of ideas or people by a group
- equine therapy**—using horses to heal the mind or body
- food insecure**—not certain where the next meal will come from
- fund-raising**—collecting money for a cause
- inequality**—an unfair situation in which some people have more rights or better opportunities than others
- internships**—unpaid work experience in which people learn a particular skill
- issue**—a point of debate or controversy
- monetary donations**—gifts of money to a cause or organization





**nonprofit**—not done for the purpose of making a profit;  
profits are donated

**operates**—functions; works

**organization**—a group of people who work together for a  
purpose

**persistent**—existing for a long time without changing

**petitions**—formal written requests to an authority signed  
by many people

**religious**—related to spiritual beliefs

**segregation**—separation by race

**symbol**—something that stands for something else

**tsunami**—a great sea wave made from an earthquake or  
volcano

**veterans**—people with long-term experience in a  
particular field, especially those in the armed forces

**volunteers**—people who give time or money to a cause



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**Leman, Talia.** *A Random Book About the Power of Anyone.* **Free Press, 2012.**

The girl who was only 10 when she helped raise more than \$10 million for the Hurricane Katrina survivors shares her tips to success in this guide.

**Lewis, Barbara A.** *The Kid's Guide to Social Action: How to Solve the Social Problems You Choose—And Turn Creative Thinking into Positive Action.* **Free Spirit Publishing, 1998.**

This book gives instructions for writing letters, conducting interviews, making speeches, and taking surveys—everything kids need to make a difference in the world. It also includes inspiring true stories.

**O'Neal, Claire.** *Volunteering in Your School.* **Mitchell Lane Publishers, 2010.**

Filled with examples of big and small volunteer opportunities, this book has ideas that you can try at your school.

**Sundem, Garth.** *Real Kids, Real Stories, Real Change: Courageous Actions Around the World.* **Free Spirit Publishing, 2010.**

Learn about 30 kids and how they used their hearts and heads to make a difference in the lives of others.



# More to Explore

## 4-H

<http://www.4-h.org>

4-H includes more than 6.5 million young people across America. They learn leadership, citizenship, and life skills.

## Pajama Program

<http://www.pajamaprogram.org>

The Pajama Program delivers new pajamas and books to children and teens in need. The website gives you an opportunity to find out ways you can help in your area.

## The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation

<http://www.randomactsofkindness.org>

This website gives lots of ideas for simple things you can do to spread kindness.

## RandomKid

<http://www.randomkid.org>

Talia Leman shows you how you can start your own project to help others.

## Volunteer Match

<http://www.volunteermatch.org>

This website helps you find volunteer opportunities in your community. You can search by interest and age.



# About the Author



Jessica Cohn grew up in Michigan, where she volunteered in school and with the Girl Scouts. She has a bachelor's degree in English and a master's in written communications. She has worked in educational publishing for more than a decade as a writer and an editor. She is married and has two sons. The family is based in New York state, but she knows that kindness has no borders.





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