

'Tis the season (all year long) to give back

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Story Highlights

Blanket Buddies is a non-profit, charitable organization that focuses on providing children a sense of security, warmth and comfort through the gift of handmade fleece blankets.

The Global Soap Project saves and reuses guestroom soap that would otherwise go to waste.

Goodwill serves as more than just a drop-off center for used goods; it also provides professional training and development services.

There are 1,000 different reasons why one would choose hospitality as a career, but an underlying thread we all have in common is the desire to serve others.

During my years as a hotel GM, this desire would be at its peak during the holiday season, between November and December. Every year around this time, I would gather the team together and discuss how we could "give back" or "get involved" somehow. And then we would.

There is no better feeling than serving others during the holiday season.

Or perhaps that should be: There's no better feeling than serving others, period.

I did some research and spoke to several GMs and charitable organizations leaders, and I heard similar stories: After peak involvement during the holidays, community involvement/charitable outreach slows to a fizzle throughout the rest of the year.

Why limit the aggressive involvement to just the holiday season? The most common answers: "I just don't have a lot of time." "Budget constraints don't allow for many charitable donations." "I don't know where to start."

Below are some options and solutions that take very little time and money but have a huge impact on the lives of others—all year long.



A child's smile

Blanket Buddies is a U.S.-based non-profit, charitable organization that focuses on providing children a sense of security, warmth and comfort through the gift of handmade fleece blankets. The blankets are made by volunteers and delivered to children's hospitals.

How to get involved: Talk about a team-building exercise! Contact [Blanket Buddies](#) and volunteer to make the blankets. Easy, fun and quite possibly one of the best experiences you and your team will have together.

Children's hospitals abound throughout the world, providing ample opportunities to bring a smile to an ailing or recovering child's face.

How to get involved: Simply contact your local children's hospital and inquire. I spoke with George Bochanski, director of public relations at [The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia](#), and he confirmed there are numerous ways for people to get involved year round. For instance, CHOP has a volunteer program that asks for a six-month commitment of one three-hour shift per week. The volunteer's task is to be with the little ones and interact with them, play games and just give them a fun, good experience while there.

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Going through a renovation?

Local crisis ministries can be found by simply "Googling" them in your local area. These organizations exist to provide assistance for people in financial crisis, helping them move toward self-sufficiency.

How to get involved: Many of the crisis ministries need furniture so they can offer it to those in need. Going through a renovation? Think twice before calling your favorite liquidator and call one these organizations first. For example, many hotels in Charlotte, North Carolina, are getting renovated in preparation for the Democratic National Convention in 2012. Here is an article from the Charlotte Observer that details how the

Charlotte Area Hotel Association partnered with area hotels undergoing renovation to help families in need through the local [Crisis Assistance Ministry](#).

Stay local, reach global

The Global Soap Project, an Atlanta-based charity, is a cause in which every hotel has the potential to be involved. It's simple, impactful, sustainable and responsible.

How to get involved: Save the opened/used soap from guestrooms, send them to [GSP](#) and they'll reprocess it into new bars, distributing it to **vulnerable populations throughout the world**. The founder, **Derreck Kayongo**, has been nominated for a CNN Heroes Award for 2011. If transportation costs are an issue, your hotel could be the "drop off location" for area hotels. Then, share the shipping costs that brings the soap to the GSP.

Goodwill Industries International is a common choice for making donations, but did you know that Goodwill's mission is "Changing lives through the power of work?" Started in 1902 and inspired by the quote "Give a man a fish, and you have fed him a meal; teach a man to fish, and you have given him a way to feed himself for the rest of his life," Goodwill is about changing people's lives for the long term. During 2010, Goodwill Industries helped more than 2.4 million people train for careers in industries such as hospitality, banking, IT and health care, to name a few, and get the supporting services they needed to be successful, such as English-language training, additional education or access to transportation and child care. There are 165 local Goodwill locations in the United States and Canada, and many offer hospitality classes within their Workforce Development divisions. This is a great way to share your experiences and offer volunteer instruction.

How to get involved: A hotel employee can get involved by contacting your local [Goodwill Industries location](#).

In addition to the above options, a hotel's brand, ownership and management company representatives also will be able to offer suggestions and create opportunities for giving and sharing in your communities, all year long. If you have any other suggestions, I encourage you to share them in the comments section below.

Enjoy the rest of 2011, and great wishes for a wonderful 2012.

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