



How We Helped Our Sons Learn the Value of Giving Back

— by Lisa A. Beach

Giving back to others tops the list of life lessons we've tried to teach our two boys since they were little. To drive this point home over the years, we adopted a three-pronged approach to giving: we donated our money, gave away our things, and offered up our time. Sometimes we did this as a family, while other times, it was a solo effort. But the net result? We infused our family with the spirit of giving.

Giving Our Money

When my boys (now 15 and 18) first started receiving an allowance, my husband and I made them divvy it up into three jars: spending, saving, and giving. Their giving jar coins would accumulate for months until we found a worthy cause to help. Then, we'd match them dollar for dollar and donate the money outright or purchase items and then donate them.

Over the years, our family has given money in a variety of ways, usually tying into something that will benefit other kids.

- ◆ We bought backpacks, school clothes and school supplies every August and donated them to organi-

zations conducting back-to-school campaigns to help needy kids in our community.

- ◆ Every Christmas, the boys would each pick a name off of the "Angel Tree" at our church and then we'd all shop for gifts. Another year, we pooled money with several families to help out a boy on my son's soccer team whose family was really struggling financially. We bought coats, clothes, toys, books, and new bicycles for the soccer buddy and his three brothers, plus food and even a few presents for his parents.
- ◆ Through Children International, we sponsored a boy named Spencer from Zambia for 10 years, helping to provide food, clothing, medical care, and other necessities. The boys would chip in from their giving jar when we sent in our monthly sponsorship gift.

Giving Our Things

When we donated the very things we owned and loved, it's almost like we were sharing a part of ourselves with others. Over the years, we've donated hundreds of things that our family no longer needed.

- ◆ As our growing boys regularly outgrew their clothing and toys, we donated them to Goodwill, Salvation Army, and various community organizations.
- ◆ We literally raided our sons' closets one chilly night when we found out that the previously mentioned soccer buddy and his older brother didn't have any long pants to wear.
- ◆ As a homeschooling family, we accumulated a lot of books and magazines. After we finished reading them, we'd often donate them to local schools and our public library.
- ◆ When my boys outgrew their beloved wooden train set, they donated it (along with the wooden train table my husband built) to Boys Town for the young residents to enjoy.

Giving Our Time

Sometimes we volunteered as a family. Other times, my husband and I did our own volunteering gigs, partly out of our passion for the cause and partly just to model a giving heart in action.

- ◆ As a family, we volunteered with Give Kids the World, a wish-granting organization that provides a free vacation to kids with life-threatening illnesses and their families. This magical, 70-acre resort allows "wish families" to take a break from medical tests, doctor visits, and therapy appointments and just have fun together. We served ice cream, made milkshakes, distributed pool towels, handed out games, and even served as "engineer" for the train ride around the resort.
- ◆ Our boys have volunteered more than 150 hours on their own over the last few years. They painted murals for the library's puppet shows, doled out food at a food pantry, refereed soccer games at the YMCA, distributed school supplies at a back-to-school fair, worked as a summer camp counselor for the Down's Syndrome Association, and provided social media marketing

for a non-profit's fundraiser.



- ◆ My husband served as a volunteer coach for my son's soccer team (first through the YMCA and then through other youth soccer leagues) for almost 10 years, teaching soccer skills right alongside good sportsmanship.

- ◆ When the boys were in public school, I volunteered in their classrooms and served on various PTA committees. When the boys were homeschooled, I volunteered to help lead, coordinate, teach or participate in various projects, events, classes, and activities for our homeschool support group.

Over the last decade or so, our three-pronged approach definitely infused the spirit of giving into our family. But the key is to simply do whatever works for *your* family.

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