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## Need some ideas for giving back? Read on.

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By Ami Albernaz, Globe Correspondent | December 24, 2009

The decorations are up. The gifts are wrapped and ready. You've likely planned your holiday menu. So what's the one item on your holiday checklist that you haven't found time for? Volunteering for a good cause.

Perhaps that's just as well. Lots of local nonprofits get besieged during the holidays, and then, all too often, the volunteer pool dries up. But service agencies need support all year round, especially once Santa's wrapped up his work for another year. So make pitching in a New Year's resolution and stick to it. But where to volunteer?

We've rounded up a list of organizations that could use your time - though we realize there are countless others out there. Whether you have just a few hours to give or are looking for a longer-term commitment, and whether delivering meals or stuffing envelopes is more your forte, there's no shortage of ways to give back.

**THE SECOND STEP** Volunteer work at this Newton domestic violence service program runs the gamut from filling envelopes to organizing holiday gift drives to watching children while moms attend meetings. Volunteers can host "roll drives" at their local school or office for basics such as wax paper, plastic wrap, and toilet paper that are needed at the program's transitional houses. There's also an ongoing need for front-desk volunteers, says executive director Roberta Rosenberg. For groups of volunteers (who, presumably, know their way around a kitchen), there are opportunities to cook a meal for a domestic violence survivor group that meets twice a month. Find out more at [www.thesecondstep.org](http://www.thesecondstep.org). For a volunteer application, e-mail [volunteer@thesecondstep.org](mailto:volunteer@thesecondstep.org).

**COMMUNITY SERVINGS** This Jamaica Plain-based program delivers free meals to critically ill people who can't shop or cook for themselves, and it's always looking for people to help prepare and package food. The time commitment is flexible; after attending an orientation session, volunteers can schedule in advance when they would like to come in (time slots are at least two hours). Drivers are also needed to deliver meals on Saturday mornings once a month. For more information, see [www.servings.org/volunteer](http://www.servings.org/volunteer). To get started, contact Rebecca Ober at [rober@servings.org](mailto:rober@servings.org). *Community Servings, 18 Marbury Terrace, Jamaica Plain. 617-522-7777, www.servings.org*

**NEPONSET RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION** If you always wanted to be a biologist - or you just enjoy spending time outdoors - linking up with this Canton-based organization might be the right call. Starting in the spring, volunteers will be needed to collect water samples for testing (commitment is one morning every six weeks) and - perhaps good for the kids - to help raise beetles as part of a wetlands restoration project. (Find more details at the website below) For now, the association needs office volunteers to manage water quality data, organize files, and mail materials. If interested, contact Ian Cooke at 781-575-0354, ext. 305. *Neponset River Watershed Association, 2173 Washington St., Canton. www.neponset.org*

**PINE STREET INN** Lots of people think to spend some time with this homeless services organization over the holidays. But the real opportunities to pitch in are after the new year begins. "We depend on volunteers every day of the year," says Barbara Trevisan, Pine Street's communications director. Much of the work is in the kitchen or serving lines, but there are plenty of other opportunities for individuals and groups, including helping out at one of Pine Street's 32 permanent housing sites, planting and gardening, or even leading a fitness class. *Pine Street Inn, 444 Harrison Ave., Boston. 617-892-9186 or 617-892-9187 (volunteer line), www.pinestreetinn.org*

**FRIENDS OF BOSTON'S HOMELESS** You can also help out the homeless by running a clothing drive at your office or school. Friends of Boston's Homeless needs new socks, and new or gently used hats, gloves or mittens, scarves, and coats to distribute at two Boston shelters throughout the winter. See [www.fobh.org](http://www.fobh.org) for details and to find out how to get started. *Friends of Boston's Homeless, Long Island Shelter, Boston Harbor. 617-534-2526, ext. 383.*

**NORTHEAST ANIMAL SHELTER** If you're a dog or cat lover, this no-kill shelter in Salem might be a good match. Volunteering with animals that have been neglected or abused isn't for the casual volunteer, though. "Most of our animals haven't been loved yet or had positive experiences yet," says volunteer coordinator Shaina Doberman. "It can take some folks a few visits to start to get accustomed."

Most needed right now are foster homes for pregnant or nursing cats; in-shelter volunteers for early mornings (i.e., 7 a.m.) and Friday and Saturday evenings. The shelter also needs volunteers to bring pets to nursing homes as part of its senior visitation program. After attending an orientation session, volunteers are generally expected to work one three- to four-hour shift each week. *Northeast Animal Shelter, 347 Highland Ave., Salem. 978-745-9888, [www.northeastanimalshelter.org](http://www.northeastanimalshelter.org)*

**JUMPSTART BOSTON COMMUNITY CORPS** If you're 55 or older and can spare two afternoons a week to work with kids, Jumpstart Boston Community Corps is looking for you. Volunteers work with two or three children in low-income and community preschools (in South Boston, Roxbury, Dorchester, and Jamaica Plain) on language, literacy, and social skills.

"The goal is to get kids interested in writing, songs, and word games," says Katharine Gamer, senior site manager. "We're seeing a lot of kids who are falling behind, and we're trying to give kids an extra push before kindergarten."

A training session will be held on Jan. 6; the organization will also be looking for volunteers for its summer program. For more information, call Gamer at 617-542-5867, ext. 515. *Jumpstart, 308 Congress St., Boston. [www.jstart.org](http://www.jstart.org)*

**ETHOS** This Jamaica Plain-based organization providing services to the elderly and disabled needs volunteers to take clients grocery shopping and to doctor appointments, and, to simply keep them company. Ethos is also looking for volunteers to visit long-term care facilities and advocate for the residents. Training is provided. Given budget cuts, volunteers help the organization serve people who might not be served otherwise, says Ethos community relations director Linda Monteiro. E-mail volunteer services manager Rachel Conrad Burlingame at [rburlingame@ethocare.org](mailto:rburlingame@ethocare.org). *Ethos, 555 Amory St., Jamaica Plain. 617-522-6700, [www.ethocare.org](http://www.ethocare.org)*

**826 BOSTON** If there's both a scribe and a teacher lurking within you, then 826, a writing and tutoring center for kids ages 6 to 18, might be a good match. Though there's a number of ways to help out, 826 is most in need of after-school homework tutors and volunteers for short-term, in-school projects. Architects, builders, and other handy types are also sought to help with small construction projects around the center. *826 Boston, 3035 Washington St., Roxbury. 617-442-5400, [www.826boston.com](http://www.826boston.com)*

**BEAM ESL** You don't need teaching experience to volunteer at BEAM ESL, which offers newcomers from all over the world free evening classes in the nuts and bolts of the English language and American culture. Volunteer teachers receive training and then devise lesson plans with tips from other teachers and staff. Minimum commitment is one evening per week. (Classes are held Monday through Thursday from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at St. Luke's and St. Margaret's Episcopal Church, St. Luke's Road, Allston.) For more information, see [www.beamesl.org](http://www.beamesl.org) or contact Etta Anderson at [Ettamanderson@aol.com](mailto:Ettamanderson@aol.com).

**BOSTON CARES** If you're still undecided as to which cause to choose or worried about not having enough time for a steady commitment, you can sign up with Boston Cares, which connects people with opportunities in the city and beyond that range from tutoring to serving meals at homeless shelters to recording books for the blind and dyslexic. After an orientation session, volunteers can search for projects that match their interests and sign up through the website. Lots of projects are suitable for kids and families. *Boston Cares, 190 High St., Boston. 617-422-0910, [www.bostoncares.org](http://www.bostoncares.org)*

To find even more ways to make a difference, go to [www.dogood.boston.com](http://www.dogood.boston.com). ■