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Donating is a popular way to show appreciation during the holiday season, but not every household has the funds to donate this year. In lieu of making a financial donation, a gift of time and service is just as valuable.

Research indicates that 50 percent of charitable donations are made between Thanksgiving and Christmas. During the season of hospitality and togetherness, making charitable donations is ever-present in many people's minds. However, financial insecurity due to the sluggish job market and economy will likely result in more people hoping to volunteer their time instead of their finances this holiday season.

Volunteering one's time is a way to give back without expending funds. Just as charities and other organizations are in need of money to operate their causes, they also need manpower to put plans in action.

Busy people may think they don't have the time to volunteer, but this is not the case. According to Char-

ity Guide, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting flexible volunteerism by inspiring and facilitating acts of kindness, volunteer work can take as little as 15 minutes per week and be based on a flexible schedule.

When considering volunteerism, individuals can pick a cause that is dear to their hearts. Organizations that raise awareness about medical conditions to animal rights groups are all charities that can use assistance. Here are some ways the average person can volunteer service.

* Business owners who provide a particular product or service can donate such items to the charity. For example, a printing company can offer to print letterhead or envelopes for an organization. A baker can offer food for luncheons or fundraisers. Donation of time doesn't necessarily have to mean manning the phones.

* Schools are often understaffed and can use the help of parents and

other community members. Volunteering beyond the typical call of duty can help school programs flourish. Volunteering time as a coach or as a librarian can ensure children have the resources and programs for a well-rounded education.

* Consider spending time with the elderly at a nearby assisted-living facility or as part of a home-visitor program. Individuals who don't have family nearby may appreciate a visit from someone, even if it's just to sit and chat. This is something the entire family can do, even children.

* Something as simple as carpooling or offering to shop for busy people is another form of volunteer work that doesn't require being part of a particular organization. Why not babysit for a person who has to catch up on some holiday shopping?

There are plenty of ways to contribute without writing a cheque. The holiday season is the perfect time of year to think in a giving way.

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