Give back on your birthday

Plan an awesome, meaningful celebration that also helps others.

As we celebrate The Week Junior’s birthday in this issue, one thing is for sure: Birthdays are the best. If you want to make your big day extra special, use it as a way to do good for people and communities in need. Get started with these fun, creative ideas.

**Swap gifts for donations**
Some kids ask friends and family to make a donation to a good cause instead of buying a birthday present. If you like this idea, first choose the organization you want to support. It could be a local animal rescue, a food bank, a homeless shelter, an environmental group, or anything you feel a connection to. Then ask a parent to help you check out the group’s website or call them to find out what they need. Some groups prefer cash donations, while others have a list of items they need most. Be specific on your party invitations. You can write, “Instead of buying a present, please consider making a donation to [name your organization] instead.” Or include what items you’d like guests to bring to your party. Food pantries may need canned goods, while many animal shelters could use old towels and sheets.

**Donate some gifts**
If you’d rather not give up all your gifts, that’s OK. You can also pick a cause to donate to and use a website like Echoage.com to send invites. This charity-birthday site provides guests with a donation link. Half of the money the guests give goes to the cause you selected, and the other half gets sent to your parents as a check or e-payment so you can use it to pick out gifts.

**Create cards**
Sending homemade cards to people who need cheering up is a thoughtful way to give back. Ask your guests to make or bring an extra card to the party for someone in need. One good place to donate cards is the Confetti Foundation, which throws birthday parties for kids in the hospital. (Go to tinyurl.com/TWJUS-MakeCards for details.) Or make cards together at your party to deliver to local first responders or nursing home residents. To send cards to military members serving overseas, go to operationgratitude.com.

**Do a service project**
You and your guests could spend part of your party doing an activity that helps others. Some ideas: Plant new trees or flowers at a nature center or park. Set up a sidewalk lemonade stand to raise money for a charity. You could also decorate paper place mats to include in meal boxes for your local Meals on Wheels group, which delivers food to older people.

**Mark a friend or family member’s special day**
If your birthday isn’t coming up soon, here are some ways you can give back to honor other people’s big days.

**Give books**
Does your grandma or uncle love to read? Donate copies of a few of their favorite books to a local library or school. Include a nameplate in front of the book that says it was donated in that person’s honor.

**Sponsor an animal**
This is the perfect present for an animal-loving best friend. Organizations such as Wildlife Alliance and Word Wildlife Fund let you sponsor or adopt leopards, elephants, and other endangered animals in honor of someone. Your friend will receive a personalized certificate in an email.

**Buy give-back gifts**
If you want to give someone a gift, consider buying from a brand that donates money or items to a charity.

**Bake extras**
If you’re already making treats for a family member’s birthday, double the recipe. Then you can bring the extras to a homebound neighbor or drop them off for your local police officers.