



## Great Organic Ways to Serve!

### Hospitality

So many of us don't know our neighbors! The first step in organic serving is engaging others on your cul-de-sac and inviting folks in. We all eat three meals a day...that's 21 chances to open your doors and get to know your neighbors. Once you do, you will hear the need in your community, and organic serving simply comes naturally!

### *Brainstorm:*

- Pull your small group or network of friends together to host a block party to get to know who lives around you.
- Host a community-wide event at a local park. Some ideas? A car wash or dog wash; a free bicycle repair day; a fun contest to raise funds for a good cause; a neighborhood chili cook-off; etc. Plan a follow up action (another gathering in the park, Explore God bible study, etc.) in which you can include new friends and get engaged.
- Gather with your small group to cook meals for those you've encountered in need such as those with an illness, new baby, new adoptive or foster families, someone who's lost their job, etc. Include with each meal a note of encouragement.
- Host a canned food drive in your neighborhood to bless a local food pantry.
- Prepare meals with your family for another family who may be struggling in some way. Talk with your kids about the importance of reaching out to those in need.
- Host a prayer walk around your neighborhood, using what you see as fuel for prayer. Pray for people, homes, businesses, community groups and community needs. Ask God to open your eyes to where He is at work and to help build your passion for your community.

## **Education**

Organize your group to regularly support a local school. Ask the school principal what they need most.

### *Brainstorm:*

- Is staff morale low because of budget cuts or standardized testing? Cheer up the staff with notes of encouragement! Gather to bake treats and write notes of encouragement to each staff member and ask one group member to deliver goodies during the school day.
- Support literacy efforts: commit to volunteer to read to students each week. Gather to have a children's book swap and each member brings a new book for the library.
- Organize a "spruce up" day for the school: paint, plant seasonal flowers, rake and mulch, build a bench on the playground.
- Organize and host a school supply drive to provide teachers and staff with a stock pile to help less fortunate kids in the school get what they need.

## **Widows and Orphans**

Single parent families and foster and adoptive families need support. Simple acts of kindness can offer respite to a drowning single parent.

### *Brainstorm:*

- Help give a break to grandparent caregivers, foster parents, and single parents so they can recharge their batteries. Host a parents afternoon or night out, complete with fun activities, movies and pizza.
- Arrange a yard or home care day or a meal calendar for a single mom or dad, or elderly.
- Adopt a family who has become foster parents. Receive respite training to help with regular child care; provide meals; arrange for housekeeping; offer to help with homework; etc.
- Host an open house, inviting neighbors to learn more about becoming a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate).
- Arrange a carpool for a single parent, offering to shuttle one or more kids to obligations. A simple offer of picking up a child from sports practice can relieve an overstressed household and turn a hectic day around.
- Assemble "First Night Bags" for children removed from their homes and placed into foster care. (See [partnershipsforchildren.org](http://partnershipsforchildren.org)) Invite others to your group to learn about foster care and raise awareness in the group about families in the community who have fostered or adopted children and may need support.

## **New Moms and Newborns in underprivileged neighborhoods**

Many children are born into poverty in some areas of Austin. As a way to encourage and support life, consider pulling your group together to help these struggling families.

### *Brainstorm:*

- Host a baby shower at a small group gathering, bringing baby essentials and care items. Pray over the children who will receive these items and their mothers. Gift the items to Chicon Pregnancy Resource Center or Austin Life Care to stock their baby boutiques where moms can earn points through attending child-rearing classes and life skills trainings.
- Host a child care book and parenting magazine drive to donate to these organizations for their waiting rooms and resource center.
- Host a baby blanket-making gathering.

### **Consider these 5 critical elements of community service as a model for leading your family or group in organic serving:**

1. Community voice: The recipient of your serving efforts has told you what they need and has given you a blessing to proceed. Pray with your group over how best to engage.
2. Orientation and training: Prepare your group to serve appropriately and sensitively, with humility. Attend any training necessary to serve well.
3. Meaningful action: Ensure the serving approach is necessary and valuable to those served, and your group members feel their efforts were effective.
4. Reflection: Your group gathers to reflect on and share their experiences and God-sightings with the whole team.
5. Follow up: Take time to follow up with those served. Ask how your group can continue to serve them and how you can be praying for them. Check in periodically, and stay engaged.