

# It's the season of giving

...and you *know* that doesn't just mean gifts. So make it extra special for those who need it most. BY JESSICA PRESS

## KEEP PETS WARM AND SAFE

**"OFTEN**, a homeless person's pet or service animal is their family and their protector on the street," explains Bridget Kleinert, a social worker who assists homeless veterans in the greater Los Angeles region. "Operation Blankets of Love allows people in need to take care of their companions." The nonprofit, started by Eileen Smulson in 2008, gives blankets to people who need them to protect their animals from winter temperatures. Its annual holiday program also provides food, leashes, and treats to organizations that serve pet owners who are homeless, elderly, disabled, or veterans. Donate at [operationblanketsoflove.org](http://operationblanketsoflove.org) or reach out to your local animal rescue to find out what it needs, then hold a drive in your area.



Eileen (above left) and Operation Blankets of Love have assisted over 100,000 pet owners.



FB4K collected 9,000 bikes in four hours, a Guinness World Record.

## FIND A HOME FOR OLD BIKES

**THREE WEEKS** before Christmas last year, Esmeralda Cortes's husband was laid off. "I knew we wouldn't be able to get our daughter the bike she'd been hoping Santa would bring her," Esmeralda says. Then she heard about Free Bikes 4 Kidz, a Minnesota-based nonprofit that since 2009 has refurbished 38,000 bikes and gifted them to kids in need through its massive yearly giveaway. "I will never forget Marinnia's squeals of delight when she saw her Doc McStuffins bike under the tree,"

Esmeralda recalls. Founder Terry Esau says a bike can transform not only a child's Christmas, but his or her whole life: "It's their first ticket to explore the world. And a lot of the kids we give bikes to use them to get to after-school activities when their parents are working, so it broadens their horizons." Pass on your kid's too-small wheels or \$30 to cover the cost of parts and materials and a new helmet, or contact Terry for insight on starting an FB4K affiliate in your town. See [fb4k.org](http://fb4k.org) for details.

## HELP THROW A HOLIDAY PARTY

**"MY SON HAS** spent nearly half of his life in hospitals for respiratory issues, often unable to leave his room," says Lauren Anderson of her youngest child, Micah, 2. "The only thing you can think about is how your child is suffering and what you can do to get them better." Bridgette Ferraro, executive director of the nonprofit Holiday Heroes, knows that means celebrations often get overlooked. "We come into the hospital with a two-hour

party—including crafts, games, and food—to provide space for kids to have fun and just be a kid again. For their parents to see that is so powerful." Lauren, who attended a superhero-themed party with Micah last spring, couldn't agree more: "We got to forget for a while that he was sick and enjoy something together." Give \$25 to cover the cost of one family's party, or \$125 to add a \$100 gift card so they can buy presents they might not otherwise be able to afford. For more info, see [holiday-heroes.org](http://holiday-heroes.org).



Holiday Heroes has given parties for more than 5,000 pediatric patients.