

[Print page](#)[Close window](#)

Longmont, Colorado
 Monday, December 15,
 2008

Publish Date: 12/2/2008

Best medicine

It turns out that giving is good for your health

*By Susan Glairon
 Longmont Times-Call*

Giving obviously helps others, but what is not as obvious is that it can be good for your health to give. Numerous studies link longevity with a giving spirit, and people who give tend to feel good about themselves.

But if the thought of forking over cash in this economy increases your stress level, you might want to get creative and think of other ways to give.

Start by taking inventory of your talents and tangible goods, said Mary Coussons-Read, a University of Colorado Denver psychology professor and a certified life coach.

For instance, if you own a carpet-cleaning business, you could clean the carpet at a nonprofit's office. Shopkeepers can offer gift cards or a discount. If you can't give money, stuff envelopes for a nonprofit's giving drive, so others who are able to give are reminded to donate, she said.

Also look at materials you have on hand. Donating canned goods to a food pantry can be less stressful than donating cash, Coussons-Read said. Psychologically, it feels safer to give something you've already bought than to give cash, she said.

"We are afraid of giving away things that we see as increasingly scarce," Coussons-Read said.

If you want to donate money, which is what nonprofits prefer, harvest loose change from your couch cushions, clothes drawers, the penny jar and the car floor and donate what you find.

Or give a charitable donation as a holiday gift in the name someone who doesn't need anything, such as grandparents who are well-off. Make the donation extra-special by sending a handmade card. Include family photos and a note explaining how the charity was carefully chosen with them in mind.

Give a donation by buying a gift from a charity such as Unicef's toys and gifts (www.shopcardsandgifts.unicefusa.org) or gift baskets from the Women's Bean Project in Denver (www.womensbeanproject.com/employ), which helps women break the cycle of poverty and unemployment.

"There is a tension this time of year between needing to give gifts and needing to give to people who really are in need," Coussons-Read said.

A sense of normalcy

Giving can be part of a person's identity, so it's important to give in some way, said Stephanie Smith, an Erie psychologist and Colorado's public education coordinator for the American Psychological Association. Giving, she



Brett Ochs, left, who normally works at Loris Associates in Lafayette, volunteers alongside Cesar Escarcega Almanza, a regular cook, in Old Chicago's kitchen preparing plates of food for people on Thanksgiving during their fourth annual Thanksgiving Day Gathering in Longmont.

Morgan Varon/Times-Call

said, can bring a sense of normalcy when other traditions, such as the annual Mexico trip, go on hold.

Giving also can help you feel in control during the holidays, Coussons-Read said. It alleviates stress when you're outside your normal work routine and calms you down when family visits, shopping crowds or bills may make you feel overwhelmed.

"Anything we can do to be deliberate can help us feel better in this environment that's uncertain and stressful, Giving is a haven in the stress of the holidays," Coussons-Read said.

Here are some other ideas to keep you giving and feeling good.

Collect things you don't need and donate usable items. It feels good to clean out your closet.

Bake the usual holiday cookies for the office, but this year place a charity jar by the plate and ask co-workers to put 50 cents in for every baked good they consume. Donate the proceeds to a worthy cause.

Give an in-kind donation. For instance, the Ed & Ruth Lehman YMCA recently gave 12 free passes to stressed-out workers at the OUR Center.

Foster animals at the Longmont Humane Society and receive free pet food, medicines, etc., for the foster pet.

Use your hobbies. Contribute handmade cards or hand-knitted mittens to a nonprofit's silent auction.

Organize a group of co-workers to help a needy family. Being in a group means you don't need to put out as much cash, and helping those living in poverty might help put your own economic struggles in perspective.

Be a companion to a senior at a play or other event through Circle of Care's www.circleofcareproject.org and receive a complimentary ticket. Or if you are part of a cultural, educational or a performing arts organization, donate unused tickets.

Have a holiday party, but ask guests to donate the money they would have spent on a bottle of wine to your favorite charity.

Ask friends and family to donate to a charity instead of giving you a holiday gift.

Contribute a talent. Cook for the homeless, do home repairs for a needy family, sew or knit a blanket for a newborn.

Buy gifts from a fair trade shop such as Ten Thousand Villages in Fort Collins. Fair-trade organizations help impoverished people in Third- World countries become self-sufficient by paying them fair market prices for their handmade goods.

Next spring, plant an extra row in the garden and donate proceeds to Community Food Share.

For more volunteer ideas, visit www.timescall.com and click on "Holiday Giving," or contact the Volunteer Connection of Boulder County at 303-444-4904.

Contact Susan Glairon at 303-684-5224 or sglairon@times-call.com.