

# 6 ways to keep a homeless family warm this winter

The number of American families with no place to call home has shot up 30 percent since 2007. Helping is easier than you think—just pick from this list!



Jennifer Maulsby and her son, Liam, bag up donated staples for the homeless.

**1 Give** the basics. It's a tragic fact that right this instant, thousands of parents and their kids have nowhere to live—and often no access to simple necessities that most people take for granted. The heartbreak of homelessness struck Jennifer Maulsby when her mother, a volunteer shelter director near Chicago, told her this story: A mom and her young daughter arrived at the shelter one night, dirty and tired. But when volunteers offered the use of a bath for the little girl, the mother declined, saying she didn't have any clean underwear to put on the child afterward. Jennifer, 35, did some research and learned that “people donate canned food and old clothes all the time, but rarely do they think about bringing in underwear—it's one of the most obvious but overlooked needs of the homeless,” she says. So she and her mother started a collection called Socks'n Undies Sunday, exclusively for new and unused underwear, bras, T-shirts, socks, and toiletries, at their family church.

In 2009, Jennifer expanded to New York City, where she lives. Now she teams up with community groups and schools to host drives and to get children involved in giving. “It can be hard for kids

to understand what it means for people to go hungry, but they get what could happen if they didn't have socks to keep their little toes warm,” says Jennifer, whose own 3-year-old son, Liam, is her constant helper. To date, Socks'n Undies has delivered more than 50,000 undergarments and toiletries to the homeless. Ready to spread a little warmth of your own? Organize a drive in your area. Go to [socksnundies.org](http://socksnundies.org) for a step-by-step guide.

**2 Hand over** jackets your family has outgrown to One Warm Coat, a charity that supports coat drives for the homeless and others in desperate need across the country. Find a location near you at [onewarmcoat.org/donatecoat.php](http://onewarmcoat.org/donatecoat.php).



**3 Volunteer** at a local shelter with your family. Click on [homelessshelterdirectory.org](http://homelessshelterdirectory.org) to learn what's needed near you, from sorting donations to making sandwiches in the kitchen.

**4 Text** STANDUP to 85944 to donate five bucks to StandUp for Kids, a nonprofit that combs streets around the country to help homeless children and runaways under the age of 25. (Your donation will help them expand to five more cities in 2011.)

**5 Provide** a blanket and a set of clean sheets for a homeless child by contributing just \$35 to Covenant House, which cares for more than 70,000 homeless kids nationwide each year. Go to [covenanthouse.org/donate/gift-catalog](http://covenanthouse.org/donate/gift-catalog).



**6 Click** on [clicktogive.com/End-Homelessness.aspx](http://clicktogive.com/End-Homelessness.aspx). Do it once a day; it doesn't cost a thing, and every time you hit the “Click to Give” button, the site's sponsors will donate to the National Alliance to End Homelessness. How's *that* for easy? —JIHAN THOMPSON



**It's cold out there:** Roughly 170,000 U.S. families—that's more than half a million people—slept in homeless shelters in 2009.