



One of the great ways to make a difference and to get children involved too is to **create Blessing Bag kits** to hand out to those in need or to give to homeless shelters.

This is a very real, tangible way to help in a situation where you find someone who is in need and you really feel like you want to do something but are unsure of exactly what to do. Handing out a Blessing Bag to someone gives you a very real way to meet their immediate needs by providing them with some basic supplies such as toiletries, water, food and warmth.

Blessing Bags are great to keep on hand in your car, so if you are in a situation where you find someone in need, you have the bag right there to hand to them right away. This is a way to demonstrate to your children the act of giving in the face of a need instead of just driving by or walking away without responding. The Blessing Bag kits are also very helpful to donate to homeless shelters & other organizations working with the homeless. They can pass these out after they provide a meal so that the men & women can have some new supplies to add to their backpacks. They stack easily in boxes so you can store quite a few in an area to keep them stocked & ready to hand out to those who need them.

Many of these items can be found at significant discounts & follow the sales as well as shop clearance sections, too. You can keep a small supply at home as you find them on sale & then when you're ready to make the bags, you will already have got quite a few items. Get your children involved in picking out items for the Blessing Bags & then they can help you stuff the bags & get an assembly line style going at home. Teaching children about helping people in need in real, tangible ways is an invaluable lesson!

A few Key suggestions

Large Size Ziploc Bag – This is key for several reasons:

Helps to keep everything together & in one place so they can easily access the supplies in their bags/backpacks

- Keeps the items from spilling/leaking onto their personal items in their bags
- The bags can later be used for other storage options within their bags – storing toiletries, snacks, etc



Hand-Warmers – Put a couple of packs in, especially during the winter, but even for those chilly evenings in the spring/summer/autumn these would be very welcome.

Bag of 50 cents– These are nice to include for washing clothes at the laundromat (You can put them in a snack-size Ziploc bag to keep them contained in a smaller area)

A Phone Card – To make phone calls or appointments

Bottle of Water – Mini water bottles work great so they don't take up too much space or if you can fit a regular size water bottle

Band-Aids – these are something that may often be needed but may not be something they would be able to spend money on or think about having.

Baby Wipes – a small pack of baby wipes would be a great one to include to help with feeling clean & fresh

Hand Sanitizer – another great option

Wash Cloth – buy an inexpensive wash cloth to include

A Kind note – Just because!!



Toiletries:

**If you have a lot of items to include in your bags, travel-size toiletries work great*

- Toothbrush
- Toothpaste (*travel size if you have a lot of items to put into your bag*)
- Floss
- Soap (*Bring home soaps from hotels if we don't end up using all of them*)
- Deodorant
- Shampoo/conditioner (*Travel size*)
- Comb
- Personal hygiene items if you're making a kit for a woman (*tampons, pantliners, pads, etc*)
- Sunscreen (*depending on time of year*)

Personal Items:

- A warm hat
- New Socks
- New Underwear
- Inexpensive gloves

Non-Perishable Foods:

- Granola Bars
- Energy Bars
- Tuna/cracker packs
- Trail mix
- Raisins
- Peanuts
- Fruit cup/ applesauce cup (& include a spoon)
- Chewing Gum/hard candy
- Hot Cocoa or instant coffee packs



A parting thought from an ex-homeless person

"If you want to give these things to them, great. Also find a local charity dedicated to passing them out, so that those in need can go there and get them if they need or want them, and retain their dignity as well. If you want to REALLY help the poor & homeless, go buy a pen and paper and write to your local representatives, council members & TD's. Tell them you want to see real aid going to people in your community. Tell them to fund the mental health system, which is inadequate for the demand and constantly getting slashed. Tell them you don't want to see more young people or families homeless on the streets! Tell them a stitch in time saves nine, and if they helped people who were losing their homes, maybe there wouldn't be so many homeless. Tell them to tackle properly, practically and compassionately drug use and prostitution. Tell them to support programs like The Merchant's Quay Project, Crosscare, Peter McVerry Trust, Focus Ireland, etc.. Support universal healthcare, because you'd be surprised how many people end up homeless due to illness, either in themselves or a family member. If you're ever in a position of power, such as a landlord or employer, don't discriminate against people who don't have a current address. Also don't discriminate against marginalized groups by race, gender, orientation, ability, etc. Check out charities in your area doing actual outreach with the poor, many of whom are not visible but do tireless, outstanding and unappreciated work. Make yourself aware of the issues in your community, make others aware, volunteer if you can and be the change you wish to see!!"

