

Their blankets warm and loved!



Schools, Scout troops, churches and families all love making 'binkies' for kids in need

Susan Finch longed to do something to give back, but couldn't find a volunteer opportunity that didn't require a certain number of hours or specific times. Then one day, her mom asked if she'd help make blankets for unwed mothers, and the project inspired Susan to start her own nonprofit, which has made and donated more than 1 million handmade blankets to kids in need

Susan Finch hung up the phone, frustrated. She'd loved hosting a fundraiser for a domestic violence shelter at her Southern California art gallery and wanted to do more. But every nonprofit she called had minimum hours and specific times she would need to volunteer. As a small business owner that wouldn't work for her schedule.

There has to be something I can do, Susan thought, and as if on cue, her mom, Josephine Roush, walked into Susan's gallery holding bits of fabric and asked, "Can you help me make blankets for unwed mothers?"

Neither woman knew much about sewing—they measured fabric by cutting around cereal boxes—but they had fun and felt good knowing they were making a difference. And an idea sparked.

Kids need to know that they matter! Susan thought. And she knew she'd found the perfect project. *A soft blanket is a great way to provide comfort and love.*

Heartfelt project

A street fair happened to be taking place outside her gallery that sunny day in 1996, so Susan hung a sign-up sheet in her window asking for volunteers to help make handmade blankets, or "binkies" as she dubbed them, for babies, children and teens in need.

That night, five women joined what became Binky Patrol Comforting Covers for Kids (BinkyPatrol.org). The women would gather at Susan's house or at her mom's home in a senior community and sew blankets made with donated fabric, which they gave to orphanages, sick children in hospitals, babies of teen moms and kids living in domestic violence or homeless shelters.

"Making the blankets is easy and fun, and it feels good knowing we are making a difference in so many kids' lives," says Susan



Getty; courtesy of The Binky Patrol (4); Brian Brose

help kids in need feel



Recipients loved them and word of the Binky Patrol quickly spread. When their organization was mentioned on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, Susan's phone started ringing off the hook with calls from people around the country offering to help. Within months, there were chapters in nearly every state.

To keep things streamlined, Susan and the original five volunteers drafted guidelines in a handbook. Chapter leaders would do their own fundraising and distribute the binkies in their own communities but report their output to Susan. It doesn't matter if binkies are sewn, crocheted, quilted or fleece tied, or if they're different sizes—they only need to be handmade.

To date, Binky Patrol volunteers across the country have donated over 1 million binkies. Many chapters host "bink-a-thons" where volunteers set up sewing machines in a gym and work together to make hundreds of blankets in a few hours. In one instance, Binky Patrol quickly sent hundreds of blankets to Uvalde, Texas, after the tragic elementary school shooting.

Blanketed in love

Though Binky Patrol volunteers don't expect thank-you notes, grateful recipients frequently send them.

We were scared and exhausted and didn't want to leave our baby's

side, wrote a mom whose infant received several binkies while in an intensive care nursery. What you ladies are doing is wonderful, and it is so important!

I like my blankie from Binky Patrol. It has fairy-tale animals on it, a newcomer to a children's shelter shared.

I was in the hospital on Christmas Day for the last two years, and I got a blanket each year. They are AWESOME!!! I have leukemia,

and I am almost finished with my therapy so I'd like to make fleecies. My mom and dad would too. I want to make someone warm and happy like I was, one boy messaged.

Susan loves when former recipients join the Binky Patrol. And she's proud to count her children, Savannah, 21, and Austin, 18, among her volunteers as well as her husband, Tom. Families, neighbors, church groups, schools and scout troops participate.

What makes Binky Patrol so great is its flexibility. There's no quota, and you can make a blanket in less than an hour.

"I always say, one blanket is better than no blankets," Susan says with a smile. "Every kid needs to feel loved and important because they are. Every single binky is made and given with love. And a little love goes a long way!" —Jen Reeder

"Every single binky is made and given with love—and a little love goes a long way"

3 ways to use your skills to help others!

1 Bake a treat
Visit Bake4Sake.org to provide baked desserts for those in need. Click "Contact" to send a message letting them know you'd like to start a chapter in your city. Then bake as many desserts as you'd like and drop them off at a shelter to bring smiles and fill bellies.

2 Teach life skills
Volunteer to teach a free online virtual class for new teen moms on sewing, cooking, money management or just advice for raising kids. Go to GenerationHer.org and click "More," then click "Volunteer." Fill out the contact form to share your wisdom.

3 Lend photo skills
Prepare adoptable children to have their photo taken for adoption agency events. Are you a photographer? Or hair or makeup artist? Go to HeartGalleryOfAmerica.org, click "How to Help," click "Apply Now" and fill out the contact form to get signed up to help.

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