

For years, philanthropic organizations have reached out to underprivileged families and helped them in their time of need. While these families are grateful for the charity, they also need to obtain the skills and empowerment to permanently end their hard times. That's where Sunday Friends steps in.

Janis Baron created Sunday Friends in 1997. Her inspiration to start the organization occurred when she took her three children, along with their friends and friends' parents, to volunteer at a homeless shelter. The children at the shelter seemed disconnected and unresponsive. While there, Baron noticed that trash was scattered on the shelter's grounds. She told one child that she would give her a sticker for every ten pieces of trash she picked up. Suddenly, kids from all around started to jump up—eager to help and receive a reward as well. "The kids just came alive," Baron recalls. It was at this moment she realized the community needed an organization to teach children and families like these that hard work has its rewards.

Located at Lowell School in San Jose, Sunday Friends provides a nurturing environment for low-income parents and their children who are looking to improve their lives. Here, they can practice work ethics, learn manners, receive education on managing money, and practice healthy living.

A typical Sunday at Sunday Friends includes preparing healthy meals and snacks for the other families. Once everyone has eaten, families sit down and write handwritten thank you letters to donors—a program that helps with literacy. Some children are pulled aside to practice English, while others participate in music lessons. Families also spend the day making gifts for nursing home residents.

Once they have completed these special tasks, they earn tickets for their contributions, which can be redeemed at the organization's "Treasure Chest." This special room is filled with practical items for the parents and fun surprises for the children. The more hard work they perform, the more tickets they receive. "It really shows these families that these tasks are not busy work. They are meaningful contributions to the community that also improve their quality of life," Baron explains.

This organization prides itself on rewarding hard work. They believe that this fosters the growth of developmental assets in children, while providing their parents with the positive life skills that carry on into their households. To Sunday Friends, these developmental assets and life skills are prerequisites to breaking the cycle of poverty. "Our guiding light in developing the program is to do more of what brings out the best in people, less of what doesn't," Baron adds.

To Janis Baron, this unique organization is about giving back and moving forward, empowering families to accept hardships, and providing them with the knowledge to rise above challenges—all with the help of a few friends. ■ —SOPHIE STID

Sunday Friends, P.O. Box 24887, San Jose, 408.793.0441.

Sunday Friends

A look at locals lending a helping hand.



Every Sunday Friends donor receives personal handwritten thank you letters from the families who directly benefit from their contributors.

Ways to Help

Donate goods to the Treasure Chest. You can find a list of products that are needed on their website.

On or near a holiday, visit Sunday Friends. You can participate in activities, including gift wrapping and cooking with the children.

Organize a drive at your school, church, or workplace. This is a great way to get the community involved.