

## **Making Ripples**

### **Changing the World One Gift at a Time**

by Amanda Bancroft

If you missed the recent Alternative Gift Markets, worry not. There are plenty of ways to make a difference locally and abroad through holiday giving, whether your gift of choice is time, something homemade, a donation, or a responsibly produced item. Good gifts come from the heart. Good gifts that make ripples come from the heart and mind.

As always with good deeds, there is a spectrum of awesomeness here: anything heartfelt has the capacity to sew ripples of cheer in the world, even a hug. At the other end of the spectrum are gifts that go beyond making one person feel nice for a brief moment. These kinds of gifts can literally save lives, create memories, transform our communities, and solve problems like global poverty and preventable disease, all while making at least one person feel nice for a brief moment or longer.

If your time is short, consider purchasing a fair trade or sustainably made gift, supporting the local economy by shopping local, or donating to an effective charity that is guaranteed to do what they say they do. You can find sustainable, fair trade products (either products which are made sustainably, fairly traded, or both) online or in our local area at places like Block Street: Simply Organic Boutique offers many clothing options, and Terra Tots provides natural toys of all sorts. For food purchases, visit your local cooperative grocer and support local bakeries before buying from large chains. For donations to non-profit organizations made in a loved one's name as a holiday gift, the 2015 most effective top recommended charities that were extensively reviewed by GiveWell, a charity evaluator, include Against Malaria Foundation, Schistosomiasis Control Initiative, Deworm the World Initiative, and GiveDirectly. But if you really want to support a locally-based charity, find out as much as you can about tangible results of their work and don't buy in to big words.

If you're less strapped for time than cash, consider volunteering, creating an experience for a loved one, or crafting a handmade gift using sustainable methods or fair trade goodies. Volunteering offers diverse options and many organizations need our help especially at this time of year. Creating a custom volunteer experience for a friend or family member is cool too: if your loved one enjoys cooking, spend time making food or baking for a local pantry and serve a meal together. You could help the kids in your family to create ornaments out of recycled materials that otherwise would end up in a landfill. Or you could make and decorate a gift basket that includes homemade cookies with fair trade chocolate chips.

Giving to change the world does take a little more thought and time, but the rewards are vastly greater than a quickly-purchased consumable product that probably injured the lives of many in

its making. Bonus: receiving a gift that helped others or the environment makes us feel doubly good!

Amanda Bancroft is a Master Naturalist and volunteers with her husband Ryan for their solar-powered online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: [www.RipplesBlog.org](http://www.RipplesBlog.org).