



Totes of Hope

What is it? Totes of Hope is a personal care kit drive in which items for homeless veterans are collected, assembled in a backpack or tote bag, and distributed through Veteran's hospitals or veterans outreach programs. The care kits should also include a short, personal note of thanks.

How does it help? A key part of the mission of the Red Cross is to support the military, their families and veterans. Totes of Hope will provide essential personal care items like soap, toothpaste, shaving cream, and more to veterans in need. Through this activity, you are making a huge impact and helping to fulfill the Red Cross mission.

Getting Started Before beginning, contact your local Red Cross unit for assistance. You can search for your local unit by zip code on redcross.org – when you call, ask to speak to someone who works with volunteers or Service to the Armed Forces (SAF). They will be able to guide you to available resources that can make this an impactful and successful event. Once you have established contact with your unit, there are three steps you need to complete:

- 1.** Identify a Veteran's hospital or homeless veterans program in your community and contact them to let them know you're planning a Totes of Hope activity, and would like to donate personal care kits. Share the "Suggested Care Kit Items" list with them to ensure you are collecting the items they need.
- 2.** Recruit Red Cross Club members, a group of friends, or classmates to volunteer for the event. You will need volunteers to promote, help with collection drive outreach, and pack the bags with collected personal care items
- 3.** Find a venue to host the packaging portion of the event and secure a date. The venue should be open and spacious to accommodate everyone and ensure there is enough space for the items to be sorted and organized efficiently. School cafeterias or multipurpose rooms are great locations. Also, ask your local unit if they have available rooms.

Want more information?
Email us!

youthinvolvement@redcross.org

DID YOU KNOW?

There are between
120,000 - 200,000
homeless veterans
in the U.S.

What Next?

With the venue booked and volunteers in place, it is time to begin collecting personal care items and finalizing event details. Make sure you are in contact with your local Red Cross Unit Contact every step of the way:

- Determine a 1 – 2 week timeframe to host the collection drive.
- Contact local businesses, especially stores that sell personal care items, and ask if they are willing to be a Totes of Hope collection site. Provide the businesses with information about the Red Cross's SAF program and the local veterans program that will benefit from the event. Make sure to share the list of potential businesses with your local Red Cross Unit Contact.
- Visit department stores and grocery stores and ask for empty boxes. Make sure to mark the boxes with the Red Cross logo before dropping off at the local businesses for collection. Ask your Red Cross Unit Contact for materials to use while decorating.
- Promote the event! Ask your local Red Cross unit to share event information in their communications. Ask local radio stations to include it on their websites, and ask the school PTA to share the information with parents and teachers.
- Gather donations for bags to package the personal care kits. Ask local grocery stores if they will donate reusable bags and ask local companies if they have drawstring bags left over from past events.
- Check in with the local businesses regularly to see if they are collecting items and if you need to pick up any full boxes. At the end of the collection week, pick up all the collected items.
- Host your packaging event! Ask a few volunteers to arrive early to help set up the tote bags and collected items. Try grouping similar items together and making an assembly line, so people can easily pack them. Remember to have either thank you cards or note paper and pens at the event so people can write messages of thanks to place in the bags.

Conclusion

Now that all the Totes of Hope are packaged, work with the Veteran's hospital or veterans program to determine the best way to deliver the Totes. Be sure to send personal thank you notes to all the local businesses that participated and thank all the volunteers. You've made a huge, meaningful impact in the lives of veterans.

If you're interested in completing another activity, download more activity guides on redcrossyouth.org.

Before beginning, contact your local Red Cross chapter for assistance. You can find chapter information at redcross.org.

Shake it up!

- » Decorate the collection boxes! Add eye-catching decorations so people can easily see the boxes. Make sure to ask your local Red Cross Unit Contact if the decorations on the box align with brand standards.
- » Have information about SAF on hand during the packaging event for people to read. Ask your local Red Cross unit if they have pamphlets or other information to share.
- » Considering planning this event during the holiday season, Veterans Day, or Memorial Day.

Show and tell

- » Share pictures and videos of your Totes of Hope event on social media and send them to youthinvolvement@redcross.org.

Resources

- » Totes of Hope: Suggested Care Kit Items
- » Sample messages for Thank You notes