

Write a little
note inside
a book for a
friend to find
that will make
them smile.

Small acts of kindness

that make a big difference

Random acts of kindness make the world a better place. With the festive season on the way, our thoughts turn to showing our love to those we hold dear

Words: Clemmie Millbank

Whether it's helping a stranger who is in genuine need or simply being thoughtful for the sake of it, an act of kindness is one of the most rewarding things we can do. As well as enhancing our own wellbeing, it brings happiness to others and all those who witness it – which is perhaps why so many of these kind gestures keep popping up in your social media feeds through the hashtag #payitforward.

The movement has become so popular that heart-warming helpers are now everywhere, from Australia to the United States – where there is even a dedicated foundation, Random Acts of Kindness (www.randomactsofkindness.org), with an army of 'RAKtivists', who spend their time carrying out various good deeds for no other reason than to make the world a brighter place. So how do we help to share the love? These inspirational ideas should get things started...

1 Send flowers to someone

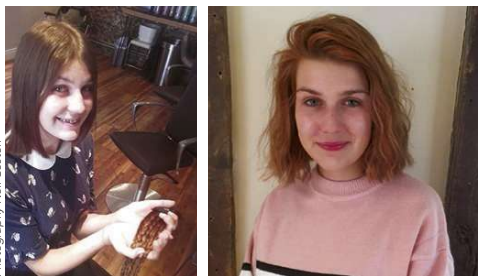
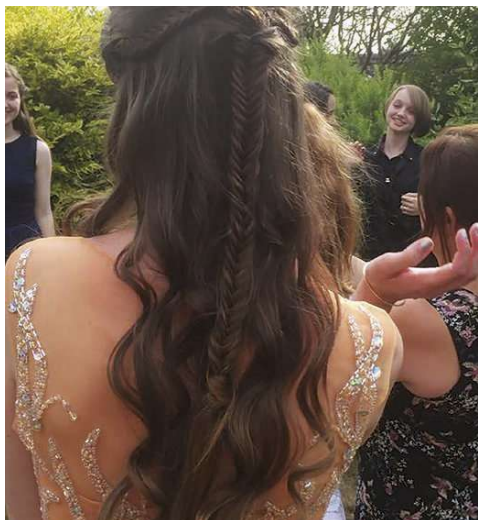
Send them to family, a colleague or a friend who's having a hard time. Everyone (and we mean everyone) loves a surprise delivery, and flowers are guaranteed to cheer up a dreary week.

2 Let queue jumpers in

Whether you're stuck in a traffic jam or in line for your local coffee shop, allowing someone to go ahead gives you time to breathe, relax and stop rushing everywhere.

HAPPY HORMONES

Witnessing an act of kindness produces our 'love hormone', oxytocin, lowering blood pressure as well as increasing optimism and self-esteem.



Photography: Neil Costen

Nell donated her hair to The Little Princess Trust for wig making.

3 *Go for the chop*

Fed up with your long hair? The Little Princess Trust (www.littleprincesses.org.uk) creates free natural wigs for children who have lost their hair due to cancer and other illnesses, and they are always looking for donations. Read their specifications, then head to the hairdressers and embrace a life-changing new look.

4 *Save someone the trolley trouble*

We all know the struggle of scrabbling around for a £1 coin at the supermarket, only to find your wallet empty and having to heave a heavy basket around. Think of those forgetful folks and try donating your £1 trolley token on to the next shopper.



Paying someone
a compliment is
infectious. Share
the love and watch
it spread through the
world around you!



Emma Watson leaves her favourite
feminist reads around town.

5 *Give the gift of a great read*

Just read a really incredible bit of literature? Make like Emma Watson and become a book fairy! Emma has been spotted writing personal notes inside some of her favourite feminist reads and hiding them on buses, trains and subways ready to brighten and enlighten someone's day. Visit www.ibelieveinbookfairies.com to get started.

6 *Pop something in the charity box*

It doesn't matter if it's a week's wages or a few bits of spare change, donate what you can, as often as you can, to a cause you really believe in.

7 *Warm up hands and hearts*

As those cold nights draw in, we often think of those who are stuck without a home to shelter in, but are at a loss as to how to actually help. Instead of walking by, knit, sew or buy some hats, gloves, blankets and scarves. Donate them to hostels, or give them directly to homeless people in need.

8 *Pay someone a compliment*

Love a stranger's top? Think your colleague's new haircut looks incredible? Tell them so immediately! You'll both instantly get a warm fuzzy feeling inside.

9 *Strike up a conversation*

Always see the same old gent on the bench at your local park? Or the same faces on your bus route into work? Try asking how their week's been, and really listen to what they have to say.

10 *Let someone stand under your umbrella*

Ah, the great British weather. Those delightful surprise showers often mean we're caught out without a brolly. If you happen to have come prepared during a storm, make like Rihanna and offer to share your umbrella with someone less fortunate. You can have a chat along the way!

11 *Buy a treat for a stranger*

Chris Topping was surprised to find a £5 note hidden inside a book at a bookstore, along with a note which read: "Hi, if you've found this money then know the universe is smiling at you today." Chris and his girlfriend "used it to buy some sandwiches and drinks for a few homeless lads and lasses on the way home, to pay it forward". ➤

"Kindness is one of the most rewarding things we can do. It brings happiness to others and enhances our own wellbeing."

12 Beat the parking meter clock

One new mum was especially grateful for an act of kindness that helped her avoid a nasty parking fine. Posting on Aussie

Facebook page Canberra Mums, she wrote, “Over the past few days I have been in hospital with my nine-week-old son.

We were discharged today and as I walked to my car I noticed that I had a parking ticket.” However, there was another (better) surprise in the form of a note which read: “Hi

there, I saw your car had a parking

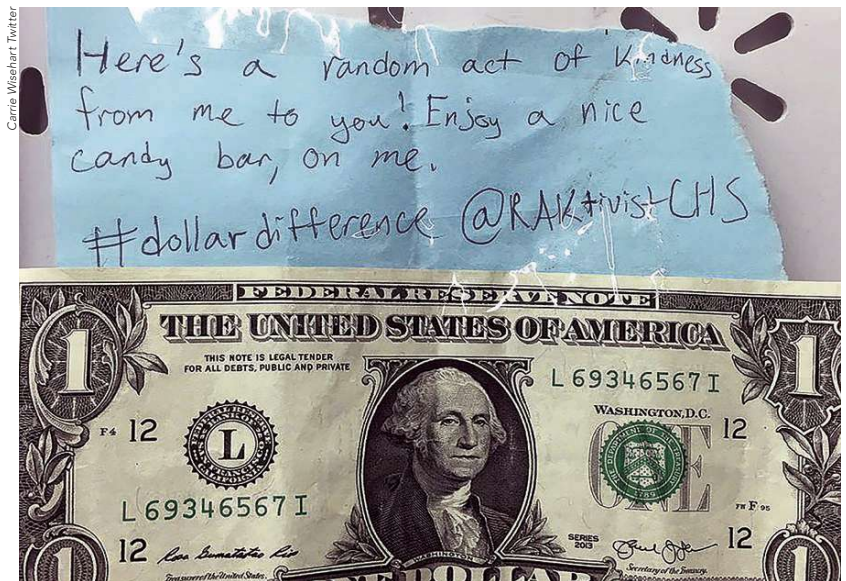
ticket on it, I’m sure whatever you’re going through in hospital is tough enough, so I have paid it for you. Hope things get better.”

TAKE TIME TO MAKE TIME

A study found that those who volunteer for two or more organisations are 44% more likely to live longer. Pick something you’re passionate about and get involved!

13 Bake some kindness

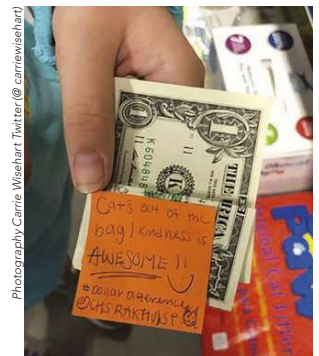
RAKtivist Billie Ann Papuchis loves to make unsung heroes feel special. “A woman in our RAK group had twins and they spent a lot of time in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. She wanted to show her appreciation for all that the nurses do, so we delivered cookies to them on a night shift.”



Clockwise from top: two ways to make a #dollar difference; spread a smile; share kindness through cake.

14 #dollar difference challenge

When RAK member Carrie Wisheart was challenged by a friend to do something amazing with \$40, she knew she had to pay it forward. As a teacher, she asked her class to take a dollar each and do something meaningful – the results were amazing. “One girl headed to the dollar store, bought a teddy bear, and stopped at the hospital. She and her dad met a man who had been in the hospital over 100 days – a total stranger – and she spent time talking with and encouraging him,” says Carrie. “Another student paid it forward at the library copy machine. Two students rode their bikes to Walgreens, bought a card, then rode to a retirement home, where they gave it to a stranger. The list went on and on...”



15 Put a smile on your face!

Smiling costs nothing and says everything. Give a grin to people as you pass them in the street – you’ll instantly boost their mood, plus you’ll feel cheerier for doing so. ☺

Photography Gabriel Silverio