The holiday season is upon us, and many of us are in the spirit of giving, whether it's to our family members, friends, coworkers or complete strangers.

Even though we may feel the urge to do good and help others by giving gifts or donating needed items, we may not know how or where to go to do so. Fortunately, there are many options to give back and help others in need right here in our community.

The College of Fine Arts at ISU put up its annual Redbird Giving Tree Nov. 16, which is located in the Center for the Performing Arts. Here, anybody is able to drop off nonperishable food items until Dec. 16. All the collected food will be donated to the Midwest Food Bank in Bloomington. Everybody who plans to attend the Music for the Holidays concert in the Center for the Performing Arts is encouraged to donate food items before the concert.

Another local and annual donation that happens during the holiday season is JSM's Simply Give donation drive. For the second year, nonperishable food, clothing and other needed items can be dropped off in the JSM leasing office lobby in Uptown Crossing until Dec. 14. All items will be donated to the Home Sweet Home Ministries of Bloomington-Normal. This is a good opportunity to donate unexpired nonperishable food that you do not plan on eating or winter clothes you no longer need and help those who do need these items.

If you would rather give a monetary donation this season rather than food or clothing, The Pantagraph's Good Fellow Fund may be of interest to you. For 85 years, this charity fund has provided local residents in need with blankets, fruit baskets, groceries and gift cards. The Good Fellow Fund is made possible by donations and helps a lot of local families.

There are, of course, other ways to give back to those in need. Many organizations offer programs where you can adopt a family or child for the holidays and provide them with an item that they need. Additionally, you don't have to give items or money to help out. Donating your time can provide a lot of assistance. Simple gestures such as helping your neighbor carry in groceries or giving them a ride to a store if they do not have a car can be a lot of help.

Although the holiday season brings out the best in people and encourages us to help each other out, this attitude should not be limited to the month of December. There are people in need every day, and unfortunately, some only get the help they need around Christmas when everybody feels like helping out.

Soup kitchens and other locations that are run by volunteers are often overbooked with those who want to help around Thanksgiving and Christmas. Unfortunately, there is not as much help at other times of the year such as summer. It is important to make a commitment to giving back to our community all the time, and not only during the holiday season when we are encouraged to do so.

Local organizations such as Home Sweet Home, Habitat for Humanity and Goodwill accept donations all year long, and there are many other places where you can volunteer your time and services. When the holiday madness is over and it's time to make a resolution for the New Year, consider committing to helping out once a month in the community. Become a blood donor through the Red Cross, volunteer at the Humane Society or sign up for a charity walk or run.

Whatever you do, know that you are making a difference.