



Help your community

Junior Council members share how you can make a difference in the lives all around you.

When the 12 members of *The Week Junior's* Junior Council began meeting for the spring 2026 session, it was clear they wanted to use their voices to raise awareness about helping their community. They came up with specific ideas, conducted research on the topic, interviewed experts, and wrote their stories. We hope their work inspires you to contribute to your community too! If you do, please write to us about it at hello@theweekjunior.com.



UNDERSTAND THE POWER OF USING YOUR VOICE



By Kesli, 13, North Dakota
Most people think civics is just for adults. But kids have rights too. Civics are the rights and duties of citizens, such as voting or paying taxes. While kids

don't do those things, they can help to make changes in their community.

Last year I learned how to use my voice to make a difference. My state was trying to pass a bill that I didn't like, so I decided to do something about it. I wrote letters to my local government representatives and told them why I thought the bill was wrong. I also testified before state lawmakers. The bill did not pass, and I learned my voice has power.

I spoke with Ben Sheehan, host of PBS's *Civics Made Easy*, about why it's important for kids to learn civics and how to get more involved. He told me that children can attend town halls, volunteer for issues they care about, and stay informed about the news.

Of course, sometimes you can't change someone's mind. However, it's still important to speak up. Sheehan says that in a democracy, the political process is slow but intentional so that, ideally, the best decisions are made for everyone. He adds, "The earlier you learn how to participate in the political process, the more you're going to participate in it as an adult."



MAKE SPORTS ACCESSIBLE



By Rohan, 9, Virginia
I love playing sports because they're a fun way to spend time with friends and meet new people. But barriers like cost and accessibility mean not all

kids get the chance to play. Here are some ways you can help more kids get in the game.

Donate gently used items. Talk to your family about donating old sports gear. I learned about Second Serve, a nonprofit that distributes gently used tennis gear to kids, and I collected 12 rackets and a bag of balls for donation. The nonprofit Leveling the Playing Field is another organization that helps get sports gear to kids.

Offer to be a mentor. Another way to help is by sharing your knowledge. You can teach younger kids proper techniques you've learned. Even sharing tips—such as how you stay

positive after a disappointing loss—can help others feel more confident and motivated.

Ask kids to join. Sometimes the simplest thing you can do to help kids play sports is to invite someone on the sidelines to join you. Keep in mind that rules can be modified to suit all abilities. When I interviewed Nico Calabria from the Bionic Project, a group that advocates for an inclusive world, he said, "The number one goal is that people feel like they belong, including people who have a disability or are different in some way." Sports can help make that happen by bringing people together, teaching teamwork, and building friendships.

TAKE SIMPLE STEPS AT HOME TO PROTECT THE EARTH



By Lara, 10, New Jersey
Last year, I joined a gardening program through a local university and became a Junior Master Gardener. I learned about how plants grow and realized

gardening is also about taking care of the Earth. Here are small changes that can protect our planet.

Grow a pollinator garden Pollinators are insects, birds, and animals that move pollen from one flower to another, helping plants produce fruits and seeds. The number of pollinators is declining, but you can help them by planting flowers. Ask a nursery about what to grow in a pot or garden.

Start a kitchen compost. Americans throw away up to 40% of food, according to government data. When food waste ends up in landfills, it produces

harmful greenhouse gases. A natural way to reduce that waste is to compost, which breaks down food to be used in soil. Instead of tossing uneaten food, as well as other items like eggshells and coffee grounds, put them in a scrap bin on your kitchen counter. Move the scraps to a compost bin outside or take them to a compost drop-off site in your area.

Rethink pest control. People spray pesticides to kill weeds, ticks, and mosquitoes. But those chemicals can harm pollinators and other plants, says Patricia Basko, a Master Gardener. "When you contaminate the soil, you may poison animals that feed on your plants," she adds. Talk to your family about eco-friendly ways to repel insects, like planting basil or marigolds. Small actions matter!





RALLY YOUR SCHOOL TO FIGHT FOOD INSECURITY



By Oscar, 11, Massachusetts

The United Nations (UN, an organization of 193 countries that work together) has set 17 goals to achieve worldwide by the year 2030. One of them is to eradicate hunger. The UN estimates that up to 318 million people experience serious hunger, which means they don't have access to healthy food when they need it. A great way to make a difference is to help make food more accessible, starting in your community. One way to do that is to set up a "free pantry" table with food and other essentials. Here's how you can get started.

Come up with a plan. Talk to people who already work in a food pantry or soup kitchen in your community. They can tell you about your area's greatest needs, such as canned beans or diaper wipes, and help brainstorm ideas about how you can get donations of them. And if you ever get too many contributions for your table to hold, you can share extra items with the local pantry.

Seek school support. One of the best places to set up a pantry table is at a neighborhood school, where families can easily access it. Explain your plan to a teacher or school administrator, and ask how to get permission to set up a table after school. Find out what days of the month you can display your table, and ask parents, grandparents, and other students to join you in running it.

Gather donations. "There is a lot of need and, unfortunately, not as many resources to keep up," said Alex Gladwell, director of programs and partnerships at

Food for Free. To encourage contributions, you could ask your school's permission to set up a bin where people can place donations and post a sign about what items are needed most.



TALK ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS



By Zara, 11, Ohio

When you're sad, anxious, or lonely, it can be scary to share those feelings with other people. However, talking about your mental health can help you feel less stressed about keeping your emotions hidden and help you find support.

A year ago, I was diagnosed with anxiety and depression. I was afraid to reveal my feelings to other people. When I finally did, it felt so good. "Talking about feelings helps children make sense of their emotional experiences instead of being overwhelmed by them," says clinical psychologist Lisa Damour, PhD. "When kids put their feelings into words, they gain perspective and often feel relief."

By not talking about mental health, we add to the stigma that surrounds it and often make people feel ashamed. Some of the harmful effects of stigma can include discrimination, a lack of understanding by others, and bullying. Meanwhile, talking about mental health helps people feel more confident about sharing their emotions. By discussing mental health, you can help yourself and others.

When considering who to talk to about your feelings, Damour says, "It can help to think about who feels safe and trustworthy—someone who listens carefully and takes you seriously. The goal is to feel supported, not pressured." This person, whether a family member or a school counselor, can help by listening and assist you in getting support.

If someone makes fun of you because of how you're feeling, tell a trusted adult immediately. If someone decides to tell you about their mental health, Damour says that it's important to show care and concern. "Listening without interrupting, avoiding quick judgments, and taking feelings seriously helps young people feel safe opening up," she says.

In the end, being kind is very important—it gives people support when they might feel like they don't have any. You can make someone's day better for them—and you'll feel better, too.



CARE FOR YOUR NEIGHBORS



By Kamen, 11, Missouri

I live in a small, diverse neighborhood of 135 homes where people like to help one another. The community gathers early on Saturday mornings to work on projects like cleaning the street or sprucing up our yards. I like to help dig up weeds in the spring and summer.

One winter, I shoveled snow for a neighbor who was going through a tough personal time. I think when people help out in a neighborhood, it makes the place look nice and shows kindness to

others. A few years ago, two dead trees were cut down in our community's common area, and a group of neighbors helped move branches to the side of the road for people to take home as firewood. When my friends saw me helping, they also joined in, which shows caring is contagious.

Bob McConnell, the president of my neighborhood association, says volunteering is a way to help neighbors feel connected. When all of us work together, our streets and common areas look much

neater, we save money, and at the end we get a strong community. There are many things you can do, from simple efforts like picking up litter to helping water a neighbor's plants.

McConnell told me that some neighbors lend their tools, help deliver groceries, take part in a carpool, or check in on an older neighbor who lives alone. Caring for your neighbors can even be as simple as saying hi when you see them.

When neighbors help one another, the community is happier and nicer for everyone who lives there. As I've discovered, even doing small chores around my neighborhood can make someone's day better—that's pretty cool.





How to



SHARE YOUR LOVE OF READING WITH OTHERS



By Manvi, 9, Washington

Books have taken me to new worlds, introduced me to fascinating characters, and taught me things I never expected. So when I found out my elementary school had a program called Reading Buddies, where older students read with younger students, I wanted in. We read stories together, talk about books, and sometimes do fun activities like games or art.

As a reading helper, I support young students as they practice phonics, pronunciation, and sounding out words. Sometimes we talk about the characters or pictures in the story to shed light on what's happening. One student I helped later performed a poem confidently at a school show. Seeing them stand onstage without fear made me feel proud and happy. It showed me that even a small amount of time, patience, and encouragement can make a big difference.

Teachers say programs like Reading Buddies help both younger and older students grow. My teacher Mrs. Kirkness says that when older students read with younger kids, they build mentorship and leadership skills. Ms. Laughlin, a language learning specialist, says younger students feel excited to share their books with older buddies and become more willing to try new genres and practice reading more often.

Kids can also spread a love of books outside school. Author Ellie Peterson, who wrote *Schools Wherever I Am*, says donating to book drives and other collections is another way to help. When kids share books and encourage one another, they can make reading fun and accessible for everyone, no matter where they are.

BE A FRIEND TO BIRDS



By Elliott, 10, California

A few years ago, my dad and I went on a Christmas Bird Count, which is an annual nationwide citizen scientist project run by the National Audubon Society. Once we started to count the birds we saw, it made me realize how important birds are to this planet and that they're fun to hunt—with our eyes!

Birds play many important roles in the environment. For example, they catch insects, disperse seeds, and pollinate certain plants. In fact, about 2,000 species of birds are pollinators.

Today, however, certain bird species are becoming extinct. "I think it is our responsibility to make sure common birds stay common and rare birds don't become extinct," says Diana Humple, senior avian ecologist at Point Blue Conservation Science, a nonprofit based in Northern California. Here's how you can be a friend to birds.

Minimize collisions. Birds often crash into windows and get killed from the impact. You can help prevent that by hanging streamers on the

outside of windows or attaching special decals or stickers that will turn birds away.

Keep cats indoors. In the US alone, cats kill approximately 2.4 billion birds per year. Keeping cats inside is not only good for birds but will also keep the felines safe from predators and traffic.

Find out more about birds. Humple says buying or borrowing a field guide that you can bring into nature is a great way to learn about birds. Another is going to a nature center or bird observatory.

Go on a bird count. A bird count is a survey to keep track of bird populations. "Bird counts are often repeated over time, so you can look to see how those numbers have changed," explains Humple. "A bird count helps us understand how birds are doing and figure out if and how we need to help them."

GIVE THE GIFT OF MEAL PACKAGES



By Nia Janae, 11, California

Many people don't always have enough food to eat. This is called food insecurity. Millions of people get money or food from the government, such as through programs like SNAP

(Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Government statistics show that SNAP served about 41.7 million people per month in 2024. In November 2025, however, SNAP benefits were delayed during the government shutdown, leaving many families without immediate help to get food. My mom and my church had a great idea. They gathered donations and put together meal packages to help those in need. I helped assemble them and learned some important insights.

First, when making these packages, it is so helpful to try to give full meals instead of random items. For example, instead of giving away assorted cans of food, we gave away breakfast kits with pancake mix and syrup, and dinner combinations like chili and cornbread mix.

Jenni Bradford, who works for our county and helped organize a meal package project at our church, has suggestions for choosing what to donate. She recommends giving items that are high in protein—like nut butters, canned fish, beans, and lentils—and have long expiration dates. Protein boosts energy, and a long shelf life allows the recipient to store it and use it when they need it.

Helping to make sure others have food to eat taught me that my efforts go far beyond providing a family with a meal. "It's not just about food," Bradford says. "Food affects your ability to function well in life." Being hungry makes it much harder for kids to concentrate and learn in school, for example. In addition, helping teaches us how to care for others. As Bradford says, "When we choose to help, we work together as a village instead of as separate individuals."

Everyone deserves to eat, and making sure that happens can change someone's life. You don't have to be an adult to make a big impact. Fighting hunger starts with all of us.





ENCOURAGE BIKE SAFETY

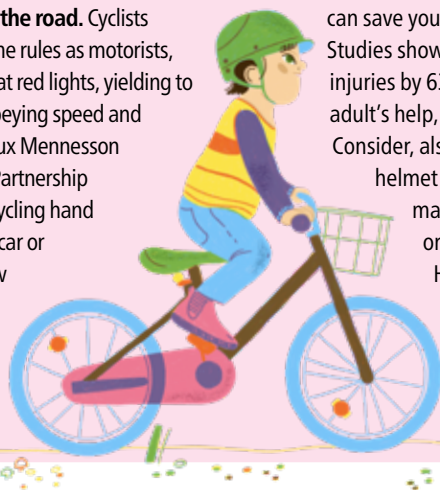


By Tae, 13, New York

A record 112 million people in America rode a bicycle in 2024. Biking is good for people's health and benefits the environment as well. Since

bikes do not use gasoline, they produce no tailpipe emissions. By choosing a bike over a car once a day, the average person can significantly reduce emissions. Bikes also produce no engine noise, making cycling a quieter, cleaner choice for communities. Before you start biking, be sure to follow these guidelines to stay safe.

Know the rules of the road. Cyclists must follow the same rules as motorists, including stopping at red lights, yielding to pedestrians, and obeying speed and safety rules. Margaux Mennesson of the Safe Routes Partnership suggests learning cycling hand signals, which let a car or another cyclist know which way you're going to turn. Mennesson adds that where you ride matters. "You



should try to avoid biking on the sidewalk," she says. "But if you do, be aware of driveways because cars can back out and the driver might not see you." Before passing a driveway, slow down and look both ways.

Make sure you're highly visible. Staying visible keeps everyone safer. Research shows that wearing visible clothing while cycling can reduce collision rates. Wear bright, fluorescent clothing while biking during the day and reflective materials at night. Experts also recommend fitting your bike with a front headlight and a taillight.

Always wear a helmet. Before you start cycling, be sure to put on a helmet. "A helmet can save your life," says Mennesson. Studies show that helmets reduce injuries by 63% to 88%. With an adult's help, make sure it fits properly. Consider, also, that the cost of a helmet puts it out of reach for

many. You can help support organizations like the House of Good Deeds by donating new or used bike helmets. The helmets are then redistributed to those who need them.

PUT CREATIVITY TO GOOD USE



By Lucy, 11, Tennessee

Did you know that your favorite crafting hobby, whether it's drawing, knitting, crochet, or painting, could make a huge difference in someone's life? It can! Here's how.

Knit hats for babies. Knitting or crocheting hats for babies is a great way to keep newborns warm in the hospital. You can call your local hospital's maternity ward to ask whether they have preferences for sizes or materials. You could also collect hats from anyone you know who likes to knit and add them to your donations.

Draw cards for the elderly. Elderly people living in a senior community may not get many visitors or have family living close by. You can show them some love by drawing them cards, especially around the holidays. Receiving a handmade card from you just might be the highlight of their week.

Give to an animal shelter. You can call your local animal shelter to see what items they need. You may have fabric that could be a comfy blanket for animals to snuggle up in. Some shelters accept homemade items. For example, you could take an old T-shirt, cut it into strips, and braid the strips to make a pet toy!

Volunteer. Search for a charity in your area that will welcome kids as volunteers. An organization near me called YAIPAK (You Are Important People Administering Kindness) helps anyone going through rough times and encourages families to volunteer together. YAIPAK founder Sherry Nicholson says that up to 300 volunteers help weekly, which shows that volunteering is rewarding work!



EXPLORE AMAZING SCIENTIFIC EFFORTS



By Aditya, 11, Washington

Archaeology (the study of objects left by people long ago) is vital in today's world because it connects

communities to their heritage and deepens our respect for diverse histories. To find out more about the importance of this type of work, I spoke with Frances Gallart Marques, the former Frederick Randolph Grace Curatorial Fellow at the Harvard Art Museums. "As an archaeologist, I am constantly touching things that someone held thousands of years ago. If I can hold an object and feel connected to someone so far removed from me, then I can feel connected to anyone alive on Earth now."

I personally learned this through my experience with a First Lego League robotics competition, which explored the theme of archaeology. It opened my eyes to real problems archaeologists face, like artifact preservation and the vandalization of digs.

Funding is another major problem faced by archaeologists. Even small community fundraising

efforts in support of the Archaeological Institute of America can have a positive impact on fieldwork. Advocating for the protection of archaeological digs and raising awareness in your school are two additional ways to support the work of archaeologists.

For kids interested in archaeology, Marques suggests starting with a local museum and exploring the National Park Service's Junior Archaeologist program for children ages 6–12. Older teens can look for field volunteer opportunities on excavations.

Marques studied science before becoming an archaeologist, and she believes patience and curiosity matter most. "Archaeology is a science that wants to understand humans," she says, "and it benefits from a diversity of human thought and voices."

