

Giving Back

By Shelly Perry

I've recently found myself drawn to sweet, happy videos that show some nice person happening upon a situation where there is an animal of one type or another that needs help. The video usually starts when whatever rescue or recovery starts to happen and in the end, it's always happy. The bear gets freed and scampers back into the woods or the little kitten gets adopted sort of thing.

Why am I bringing this up you may be asking...

Well, with all that is going on in our world, these little glimpses of people going out of their way to help another creature (or human) provides a sense of the "goodness" in the world. Videos like this are a reminder that perhaps, at heart, we really are benevolent and kind.

This month, let's tap into this idea a little deeper. We want to see charity in action. People getting out there and getting involved volunteering in their local neighborhood or across the globe. People helping the elderly, sick babies, cats stuck in a tree... whatever you can discover or create that captures the idea of charity and/or volunteering.

I am hoping it will be as inspiring for you to photograph as it will be for me to see the final results.

Here are a few of my own charity and volunteering-themed shots:



Now it's your turn.

This month's theme is more conceptual, in a way. In the videos I was mentioning earlier there are several minutes to get the idea across, but with a still photo it takes a lot more intention to pull off the story in the shot. Lots of these (even mine above) likely need a description. But as you will see in the following pictures, some shots stand out and we know right away what the message is. Remember to write a description if there is any doubt whether the story is clear.

The other thing I would like to point out is that as I was searching for the photo examples for this Roadmap, the options were pretty sparse. What that tells me is that this theme is ripe for some good stock shots! The more heartwarming or poignant, the better.

Some of the places you might see these types of shots in use could include:

- ▶ Nonprofit and charity mailings
- ▶ Blogs, website, brochures, advertisements
- ▶ Lifestyle media of all types
- ▶ Animal or human rights media
- ▶ Medical media, including western and alternative medicine
- ▶ Specific/niche media depending on subject (religious, political, local)
- ▶ Health and wellness related media
- ▶ Family life media
- ▶ Newspapers, magazines, flyers, newsletters, "junk mail" and so on
- ▶ Educational/Editorial

"Giving Back" as Stock Images

Photos of giving back have a ton of potential as stock because there really isn't very much competition in this genre, relatively speaking. Although the overall theme is quite broad, it leaves plenty of options open for your creativity. People helping others or engaging in their community, volunteering, doing charity work, the list goes on and on.

If captured thoughtfully, these images could be a real hit with buyers. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Visualize it:

Think of what you want to express through the photo you create. Who or what do you have access to that could meet this theme?

Perhaps you volunteer somewhere already and you have easy access to shots like this. If not, maybe go do a volunteer day to gain access or talk with family and friends and see if you can tag along with any of them as they volunteer. Organizations usually need photos, so it could be a good idea to reach out to local nonprofits in your area and see if they have any upcoming events they need photographed.

Be Creative:

Think of not just the emotion and the story you want to capture, but also about the lighting and the setting. In some situations, the setting will be super important to provide context. You may have to think outside the box to get the shot you want.

Wardrobe:

As you are planning and setting up your shots, look for clothing options that are free of logos, plain and generic, and also not dated. Don't dress your subject in something that's sure to be out of style next year, or your photo will only be good for one year. You want it to sell for years and years to come.

Color Coordination:

Put some thought into the color scheme you want your photos to have. Coordinated colors often work well for stock. For instance, if you have a large group of people, having them all in similar or at least complementary colors seems to work well. Be especially aware of clashing colors in what people are wearing and also with the background. Each season the popular colors shift... but also each year the en-vogue colors change, so try to be aware of what's hot or about to be fashionable.

Diversity:

This theme lends itself really well to diversity. People of all ages, shapes, ethnicities, gender, abilities, and relationships... all need visual representation. Just about anywhere you can think of where people volunteer needs photos to represent it.

Be Unique:

Even though there appears to be less competition in stock libraries with this theme, you'll still want to try to make the shots as unique as possible.

Here are a few examples of "Giving Back" images found in stock:



This shot above doesn't take much guess work, as "VOLUNTEER" is written right on them. The image also provides concepts of teamwork, community, diversity and togetherness. This one was part of a series of photos, so this photographer worked the scene and got several sellable shots.



While the uniforms and emblems inform us that this fits into the volunteering theme, this shot would only be able to be sold as editorial because of it. Sometimes we have to go the editorial route to get the true message across and that is totally fine, not everything has to be "cleaned up" for stock, so long as your agency accepts editorial.



Food, water, housing, medical, and education are all major areas of volunteering and charity around the world. Shots like this one to the left that show joy and happiness are heartwarming and inspiring. People want to know that their money, their time, and their efforts are actually helping and those smiles tell them all they need to know.

Bringing meals to the elderly is such an important charity for those folks who receive it. This shot to the right, while staged, still carries an air of authenticity to it. While this shot may not scream volunteer it's all about showing how the woman feels. She looks pretty darn happy and grateful. Designers and agencies can use that to convey the message.



Seeking human kindness... charity and compassion go hand in hand. This particular shot on the left has a real story; it's got grit and a sense of place. The documentary style of this shot lends itself really well to this particular theme.

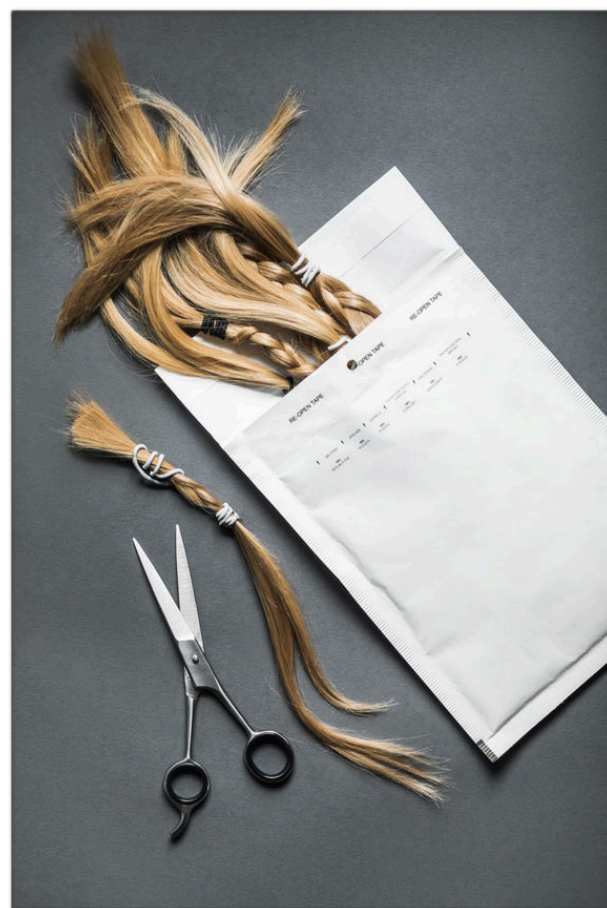
There are so many agencies and organizations around the world that raise funds to provide an education and occasionally seek volunteers as well to help students in various parts of the world. The beautiful smiles as these kids sit in school can help promote more generosity for these charities.





Volunteering can be fun! That's what I see when I look at this guy who appears to be having a fantastic time. His expression (and the turtle, let's be honest) drew this shot out of the crowd. The composition is nice, too.

This photo below is my favorite shot of the bunch. So simple and clean, and yet the immediate recognition that these hair pieces are cut and being packed up for "Locks of Love"... it tells the story. While there is nobody actually in the shot it still clearly fits in with our theme.



A stock worthy "Giving Back" photo should have these qualities:

Expression: I've mentioned on several of the shots above that the expression was everything basically, so pay close attention to that and make sure your subjects are conveying the expression that fits with the situation.

Action or Activity: Not an always must-have, but certainly worth trying and adding in when you can. It's about taking natural situations and trying to convey them with your camera in a genuine way.

Interest: Take your photo with purpose. While lots of these shots will likely be more documentary in style and less planned and staged, don't just settle for snapshots. Think about the concept you're going for and try to convey that with the help of your model, setting, props, etc...

Simple Impact!: Some shots can be so simple and yet so powerful in their impact. It's really all about what is IN and what is OUT of the shot. Take your time and ask yourself before each shot "Are the important things in the frame? Are the distractions out? Is my subject clear? How is my composition looking? How is the light? What could be better?"

Good Lighting: These types of shots can run the spectrum, however most will typically be natural light as you find it in the situation. Remember that capturing people under the shade of a tree or the shadow of a building can provide nice, soft lighting. Avoid harsh shadows on people's faces or under their eyes.

Good Composition: Think rule of thirds and implied motion (which way is the action or eyes leading you — through or out of the frame?) Are there leading lines you can use in your composition to bring the viewer into your scene?

Excellent focus: The focus should be on the eyes. Shallow focus is alright, but be sure you get the eyes sharp.

Story/Emotions: The subject matter for this theme lends itself to images that stand out with emotion. Dig deep to show a story and provide an impact to create something that makes us look twice or linger longer.

Top Tips for Creating Storytelling Photos:

- ▶ Identify the story: Who, What, Where, When, Why. Doing this will help you in your compositions and in thinking about what should be included and excluded in your frame.
- ▶ Work the scene: If you are telling a story across multiple photos you want to be sure and get both wide shots and detail shots (close-ups). You'll also want to capture any action and also be sure to get at least one really nice vertical shot with some copy space, if possible, for the ever coveted magazine cover shot. Including different perspectives (from wide to detailed, will affect how the story is told.)
- ▶ Capture the entire day: If there is a progression in the activity you want to try and show that. For example, if the activity is to clean-up a park, you would want to capture images that show the entire day's activities.
- ▶ Watch for interest: Keep a lookout for interesting characters, activities, touching moments, opportunities for social commentary, etc...
- ▶ Be observant, patient and ready! Get your camera settings dialed in beforehand, so that you are free to anticipate and capture important moments.

Where to Find Good “Giving Back” Shots

I am positive that there are charities and volunteer opportunities in probably every single one of our local communities, no matter how big or small. Perhaps you are involved with a charity already or have family or friends that are whom you could tag along with.

Really, charity happens all around us, all the time. People stop and help those desperate animals I mentioned from the videos... but to be in “the right place at the right moment” might be a challenge. It’s great if you can be! Additionally, like the last shot, you can stage something to

fit this theme as well. It doesn't have to be an exotic trip, it can be local, even your own neighborhood.



Shooting Tips

How to get good lighting:

A lot of these shots may be outdoors, so pay close attention to the lighting in your area. Ask yourself what time of day is going to be best to shoot your subject. If you’re in a bright, sunny part of the world it will be earlier in the day or later in the evening. (Think a few hours after sunrise or a few hours before sunset.) Avoid the bright, harsh light of midday. If you are in my part of the world (Pacific Northwest) our window of daylight hours is getting slimmer by the day, so plan accordingly.

When scoping out when to shoot, check your local weather forecast. It can be very informative for when conditions will be best. If you are heading outside just remember you typically want to stay away

from direct, harsh, midday sunlight. Lighting really depends on subject and location but is a critical component to your shots.

Work the shot:

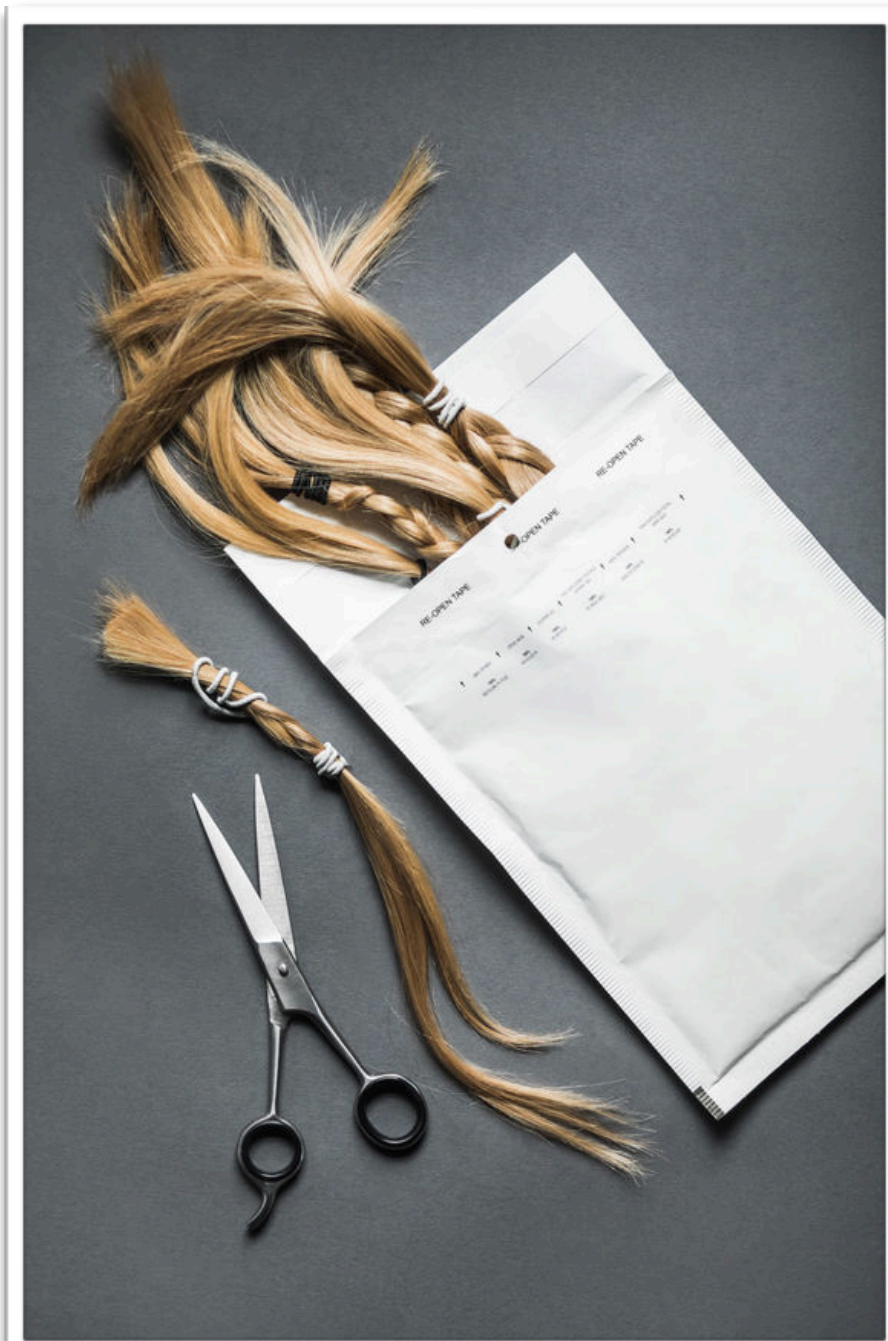
Always “work the shot.” With digital photography we can afford to take 100 shots to get one to five great ones. Not all of them will be good, nor do you need them to be. You’re trying to hedge your bet of walking away with a few excellent shots by trying a wide variety of options.

The options can range from varying your composition to playing with your exposure setting for different effects. The more you experiment and play with it, the more you will be learning and the more likely you will be to end up with the shots you want.

Keywording Tips for “Giving Back”

All your shots should include the who, what, where, when, why as keywords. The actions, mood, and feeling are all important descriptors as well as a few concept or idea words. For instance, all of these should be able to use “charity” or “volunteering” as a keyword.

Let's look at the “Locks of Love” shot again. Here is how I would keyword it:



blond	haircut
braid	hair tie
charity	mailing
cut	makeover
donation	nobody
envelope	package
generosity	rubber bands
giving	scissors
gray	still life
hair	vertical

Remember, it's important to keyword specifically for each photo you upload. Avoid the urge to spam... I am tempted on this shot to include “wig” since that's obviously what these hair pieces are destined for, but there is NO actual wig in the shot, so I will leave it out. I would also leave out the keywords barber, hairdresser, and salon since none of those things are present.

Now let's get out there and capture people changing the world one charitable moment at a time. Can't wait to see what you guys come up with!