



Share Our Spare





Chicago Non-Profit Provides Essentials and Offers Hope for Families in Need

by Matt Beardmore | photos by Maija Martin Photography

For anyone with a child, you understand the daily challenges that exist – even in the best of circumstances. Now imagine having children and not having a place to call home, or knowing where your next meal is going to come from or having the resources to purchase diapers for your children. Unfortunately, that is the reality that some Chicagoland residents endure on a daily basis.

Alex Goodfellow, Executive Director of Chicago-based non-profit Share Our Spare (SOS), thinks often about how many Chicagoland families are just getting by.

"I know how hard it is to raise children," said Goodfellow, who has two boys (ages 5 and 7) and a 2-year-old daughter. "And to add on top of that, just worrying about where you're going to get a safe place to sleep or a diaper is just not something parents should have to worry about. We want them to be focused on caregiving."

Founded in 2011, "by area mom, Amy Kadens, and nine other Chicago women with a desire to help local families in need," SOS has "helped an estimated 50,000+ unique children and their families across metro Chicago find support, strength and hope through an agency partner model, which emphasizes wraparound services and empowering upward economic mobility."

SOS is essentially a recirculation organization. It accepts donations (diapers, wipes, along with gently used clothes, toys, books and other essentials) from the community and distributes everything back to the community as its network of respected social service agencies come into SOS' 10,000+ square-foot Sharehouse located at 3800 N. Milwaukee Avenue in Old Irving Park and "shop" the shelves for their clients' needs.





SOS also leverages its wholesale purchasing power to procure diapers and sometimes purchases car seats through grants.

In 2023, SOS delivered 7.5 million diapers to residents, and distributed 161,000 winter coats and clothing, nearly 4,000 containers of formula, along with approximately 2.5 million wipes and 290,000 other essentials like strollers, pack n plays, books and hygiene items.

"Diapers aren't covered by WIC (Women, Infants and Children) or SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)," Goodfellow said of the two federal assistance programs. "Families are counting the days' worth of diapers they have left as the cost of diapers is very high. Families are scraping by and buying diapers at the corner store where they are even more expensive. It's become more of a burden than even for families, so we want to be able to take that one stressor out of their life."

While the donations are crucial as SOS serves nine counties and 170 zip codes, the organization relies heavily on volunteer support to redistribute the items to the community. There are many ways to volunteer, as SOS has weekly open sessions where individuals or groups can come into the Sharehouse to sort, perform quality checks and assemble kits. There is also

a remote option as volunteers can make hygiene kits at home and bring them into the Sharehouse when complete.

Goodfellow estimates there were close to 3,200 volunteers (you need to be at least 6 years old to volunteer) at SOS in 2023 who worked approximately 7,300 total hours.

The Share our Spare team understands the difference it is making in the community, but it realizes there is still much work to be done.

"We try to be conscious of how much left there is to do," Goodfellow said. "The other day we had 150 programs on our waitlist – that equates to something like 9,000 children. As much as we can be happy and pleased with what we have done, there is so much more work to do. It almost feels daunting. The need is growing faster than we are growing."

There have been discussions about expanding SOS as many of its partners are located on Chicago's South and West Sides, but for now, the staff is going to remain lean (there are 8 employees) to keep the focus on the existing programs.

To learn more about Share Our Spare's mission, items that be donated, and volunteer opportunities, please visit <https://shareourspare.org>.