



Family Giving Tree

Back-to-School 2025

Our History

In 1990, Jennifer Cullenbine founded Family Giving Tree (FGT) as her San Jose State University MBA project with the help and encouragement of classmate Todd Yoshida. The program started with the Holiday Wish Drive. The Back-to-School Drive was added in 1996 to equip students from historically excluded groups for the classroom and the future. 35 years later, Family Giving Tree is the largest gift and backpack donation program in California. FGT currently works with over 500 agencies and schools serving Bay Area students and neighbors facing financial insecurity to provide essential school supplies and wished-for holiday gifts.

With each drive, thousands of volunteers come to the FGT Community Hub to prepare backpacks and gifts for distribution to partner agencies and schools. Volunteerism is a part of FGT's mission, and the organization welcomes volunteers of all ages and abilities at the Community Hub, allowing families, school groups, scout troops, and beyond to give back to their community.

Since 1990, FGT has served over 2.2 million Bay Area residents facing financial hardship--the majority of whom are children.

Our Mission

Connecting those who can give to those in need with educational support, gifts, and volunteerism.

WWW.FGT.ORG

Facts & Figures

- Back-to-School Drive: Started in 1996 (2025 is the 30th annual)
- 4-Star rating from Charity Navigator
- Platinum Rating by Candid
- Number of Students Supported: Over 530K

Bay Area Counties Served

- Alameda
- Contra Costa
- Monterey
- Napa
- Sacramento
- San Benito
- San Francisco
- San Mateo
- Santa Clara
- Santa Cruz
- Sonoma

2024 Metrics

- # of students supported: 28,040
- # of schools supported: 218
- # total volunteers: 2,080
- # of donation drives: 326

Process

Family Giving Tree works to fulfill the critical need for backpacks filled with school supplies for K-12 students in schools where a high percentage (75% or more) of the student population is deemed socioeconomically disadvantaged: students who are eligible for free or reduced-priced meals; or have parents/guardians who did not receive a high school diploma. In 2023, the number of students eligible for the Reduced Price Meal program in the 11 counties served exceeded 600,000.

Once FGT and a school have decided to partner, the school informs FGT of the number of backpacks it requires per grade level. FGT then prints backpack tags for three grade groups: K-2, 3-5, and 6-12, and distributes them to donation Drive Leaders, who display them in their office or community spaces. Individuals take a tag and shop to buy a backpack and fill it with the age-appropriate supplies listed on the tag and/or extra supplies and backpacks. After attaching the tag to the backpack(s), donors bring them back to their Drive Leader, who delivers the backpacks to our Community Hub or one of our remote drop-off locations.

At the FGT Community Hub, volunteers check bags for quality, ensuring that every backpack is filled with all the listed supplies, and then each is sorted appropriately by grade. Schools then come to the Community Hub to pick up their backpacks and deliver them to their recipients at the beginning of the school year.

At the same time, community members who want to support the Drive through an online donation can do so by visiting fgt.org/give-now/donate, knowing that these backpacks will be placed into the hands of students for the start of the new school year.

Messaging

This Back-to-School season, Family Giving Tree is rallying the Bay Area around a bold goal: to provide 35,000 students with backpacks filled with essential school supplies. In a region where the high cost of living continues to strain families financially, a simple backpack can be a powerful gift—it brings relief, restores dignity, and empowers a child to walk into the classroom with confidence.

When we come together—by donating, volunteering, or partnering—we turn compassion into action. Whether you're an individual, a business, or a school group, your involvement helps us address deep-rooted inequities and foster a sense of belonging for thousands of students. Every student supported is an action that shows what's possible when a community chooses to invest in its future. Our message is clear: backpacks bring possibilities.

Join us. Be part of a movement that brings joy, grows hope, and builds stronger communities—one backpack at a time. Learn how to donate, volunteer, or become a Drive Leader or partner at fgt.org.

For a detailed list of the supplies needed, please refer to our 2025 Back-to-School Supply List available and the following link:

<https://fgt.org/school-supply-list>



Jill Mitsch, CEO

Jill grew up in the Bay Area and graduated from San Jose State University with a B.A. in English. Jill has worked in the non-profit sector since 2007 and serves on the board of directors of the Association of Fundraising Professionals Silicon Valley Chapter. In 2013, Jill and a couple of her friends launched 100+ Women Who Care Silicon Valley, a women's giving circle that has raised over \$60,000 for local nonprofits.



Jess Gutierrez, CFO

As he does for several other nonprofits, Jess currently acts as Family Giving Tree's part-time CFO. With a B.S. from Santa Clara University and an MBA from Pepperdine University, Jess is an expert in small-to-medium-sized operations with added extensive work in the nonprofit sector. His specialization is in financial reporting, internal controls, business planning, financial systems, and organization development.



Angela Mazza, Director of Development

Angela has 17 years of valuable non-profit fundraising and development experience, having successfully led teams to exceed fundraising goals. Her diverse background includes roles in non-profit schools, cultural organizations, and human services. With a strong track record in building effective development teams, Angela excels at creating successful strategies for major gifts, grants, and events, ensuring sustainable support for the missions she champions.



Charlotte Wood, Director of Marketing

A Rhode Island native, Charlotte graduated with a B.A. in Studio Art from Kenyon College and pursued a career in advertising. Working on the agency side for years back east, she brought her skills to Silicon Valley and served on the client side as an advertising and media manager in the high-tech sector before opening a consulting business.

Finance & Administration

- Kristina Afzal - IT Manager
- Lisa Hiatt - Drive Logistics Coordinator
- Liza Levin - Sr. Administrative Assistant
- Tennille Frye - Bookkeeper & Payroll Specialist

Partner Relations

- Evelyn Huynh - Partner Relations Manager
- Eddie Gutierrez - Community Drive Coordinator
- Margarita Galindo - Institutional Giving Officer

Program Operations

- Carmen Talavera - Programs Team Manager
- Ashley Jacques Vestri - Agency Coordinator
- Celeste Delamore - Lead Agency Coordinator
- Doug Harney - Facilities/Trucking
- Shannon Fey - Volunteer Coordinator

Development

- Brianna Williams - Development Officer
- Kim Foster - Development Associate

Marketing

- Mikey J Smith - Marketing Coordinator
- Pinn Pinn Sha - Content Creator & Coordinator

Testimonials

Teachers

“Entering the classroom, they are not preoccupied with what they need. They come in with more confidence. It makes a difference. It is an extremely powerful thing. Thank you!”

Students

“I was very surprised to have received a free backpack along with many materials that were very useful to me. Now that I am a senior, there are many expenses coming up and not having to spend my money or ask my parents to buy materials and a backpack I see as a blessing and benefit. Thank you.”

“They gave us a backpack and it is a nice experience because it gives us school supplies and a beautiful backpack and I am grateful because many people who do not have help [to] help their children succeed.”

-Santa Clara County Students

Find us Online

Website: <https://fgt.org>

Facebook: [/familygivingtree](#)

Instagram: [/familygivingtree](#)

YouTube: [/familygivingtree](#)

Linkedin: [/company/the-family-giving-tree](#)

Explain the Process

To showcase the “Journey of a Backpack”, use the graphic at the following link: <https://familygivingtree.org/our-programs/back-to-school/journey-of-a-backpack>



FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION,

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WWW.FGT.ORG