

# HELPING Homeless Kids

This teen proves you're never too young to make a difference.

By KRYSTNELL STORR

**The Inspiration:** By the age of 6, Jonas Corona was used to going with his mom to help at a food pantry in Los Angeles. What he wasn't used to was seeing a kid his age in line for a hot meal.

But there he was: a thin, dark-haired boy who looked about 6, too. Jonas talked to him and learned that he was homeless.

Jonas wanted to help the boy, but his options were limited: "I could serve him food, but there were no supplies available for children," he says.

Meeting the boy made Jonas realize that homelessness didn't happen only to adults—it could happen to kids too. "From that moment, I wanted to help other homeless kids as much as I could."

**The Action:** Jonas tried to volunteer again as soon as possible, but for insurance reasons, local organizations wouldn't allow him to work more than once a month because he was younger than 10. Then Jonas discovered he could create his own nonprofit with no age minimum for volunteers. He named it Love in the Mirror.

To form a nonprofit, Jonas had to build a team of advisers and recruit volunteers. He was shy: "I had to talk to hotshot business owners. It

was hard to go in and say, 'Hey, I want to help people, can you donate food or supplies?'" But often the answer was "yes." Jonas's first effort at collecting donations brought in four truckloads of toys, clothes, and food—which he gave to a charity that had refused to let him volunteer more than once a month.

**The Outcome:** Local and national media started doing stories about the kid helping homeless kids. Walmart, Disney, and JetBlue donated food and supplies. After Jonas appeared on TV, Skippy donated enough jars of peanut butter to make 6,000 sandwiches.

Today, Love in the Mirror volunteers make and distribute 25,000 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches each year. The organization partners with other charities on drives to collect 10,000 pairs of socks for homeless people. They fill 500 backpacks with school supplies for homeless children each fall.

Jonas, who's now 16, estimates his nonprofit has helped more than 55,000 people in the Los Angeles area, many of them children. While fighting homelessness is his cause, his real passion is inspiring other kids: "Everyone can make a difference, no matter how young they are," he says.



Jonas fills backpacks with school supplies to donate to homeless kids.

## 3 Fast Facts About Homelessness

**2.5 MILLION:** number of children who experience homelessness each year in the U.S.

**52:** percentage of homeless children who transfer schools at least twice in one year

**49 NIGHTS:** median length of stay for a homeless family in an emergency shelter in the U.S.

SOURCE: HUD; NATIONAL HOMELESS.ORG; U.S. INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

Photography by GREGG SEGAL