



## SoJo Foundation 8th Annual Chicken Run (2024)

It's currently Christmas Eve, 2024, and I am sitting on the floor of my room, writing this. I have just finished my 9th annual Chicken Run as of a handful of hours ago, and I am so grateful, relieved, and happy that I was able to make over 100 lives a little merrier on Christmas Eve.

This year we were able to raise a little short of our donation goal, raising \$1,200; nonetheless, I am extremely grateful for everyone who was able to help and chip in. With the \$1,200, we were able to purchase one hundred rotisserie chickens, as well as many warm coats, sweaters, and jackets, and personally hand them out as usual. However, there were a few significant factors that made this year stand out from the others.

I have always wanted to expand the SoJo Foundation and have more people join the project to help with donations and the run on Christmas Eve. I put in a lot of effort with that aspect, recruiting friends, family, teammates, schoolmates, and church leaders. Since I've spoken to most of my friends about my annual tradition, some of them had asked if they could join and help out with the project earlier this year, which I had eagerly agreed to. At the beginning of the school year I joined a club aiming to help support local, non-profit businesses in the area, and I contacted the club leader asking for help to raise money. She agreed to help spread the word and advertise my cause to the school, and it did help. My good friend from middle school, Imogene, was able to step up and help on the big day and joined.



On Christmas Eve, we arrived at Costco at 8:45 in the morning, with Imogene and I clumsily pushing the large orange flat carts through the aisles. We walked up to the rotisserie chicken stand at the back of the produce section. I reached in the chicken shelf to begin stacking the food when my dad called out to myself and Imogene to stop the stacking and come around to the side. To my surprise, unlike previous years, the workers of Costco had already stacked all one hundred chickens onto another flat cart. The gesture saved us the repetitive labor of packing each chicken onto the cart one by one, a process that no one has truly been thrilled by in previous years, to which I was very grateful for. We breezed out of the store and easily packed the chickens into the trunk of our rented van. With the van stocked with chickens, we briefly returned home to pick up my mother and the clothes we bought earlier in the week, and we were off.



Our first stop was near the Costco, where just on the other side of the road there was a decent community of tents lined up along the median. We pulled over to the side of the road and set off on foot, with myself, Dad, and Imogene each carrying a few chickens. Per our routine, we start off by standing just outside each tent and announcing that we have hot food. Each tent will be different, as some are up and about, and prefer to come out of their tents to accept the food, while others like to stay on the inside and sleep in, but allow us to leave the gift at their home entrance. However, there are also a lot of people who weren't home and at work instead. We were lucky enough to catch one construction worker right before he headed out for work, and gave him the chicken. It's truly sad to see that there are so many people who are working 2-3 jobs or more, and are still unable to afford a home.



After handing out around fifteen chickens on our first stop, we began to drive all around downtown San Jose, stopping and turning around wherever there was a person in need. After stopping at train tracks, grass strips, gas stations, medians, etc, we made our final pit stop at the Tully community library. While many people flocked to the car, I wanted to go in deeper, and give to some of those that might need more help. My mom held base at the car, giving out chickens and coats to people in the parking lot, while the trio of Imogene, Dad and I marched into the "jungle" (a more secluded park and forest, with a large homeless camp). Our boxes were so heavy that we were only able to carry two boxes at a time, and even that was a bit of a struggle. By now, more people were up and about, and were very grateful to receive a warm, hearty, Christmas Eve meal. As we handed out the last of the chickens for our first trip into the jungle, we met a Vietnamese man named Ricky, and some of his friends. He helped guide us through the community, showing us pathways and campouts where others were staying. He even volunteered himself to come back to the car with us to collect the remaining boxes of chickens and clothes. As we walked back to the car, Ricky began to tell us a bit about himself, how he helped people, thanked us, and he had a brother he had not seen for a while. His assistance helped us reach more people, and definitely helped with the efficiency of our visit.

Almost all of the people we encountered were extremely grateful for their Christmas meal, and many kind words were shared. It is always joyful to see that I can contribute a tiny bit to make someone's life a bit more pleasant, yet also so heartbreaking to see that so many good samaritans live in such an uncomfortable state. Every meal and clothing we hand out reminds me of why I started SoJo Foundation: to spread some holiday cheer to those in more unfortunate circumstances, and to make them feel seen.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this year's Chicken Run, and I hope we can continue to expand. We wish everyone a healthy, happy, and blessed holidays and new year!

With love,  
**Sophia & the SoJo Foundation**

