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Birthday boy decides to give something back

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EDITORIAL INTERN

Arian Vavila, who turned 11 on June 7, did not have a traditional birthday party this year.

While he loves playing soccer and "Halo," he didn't ask for a new soccer ball or another Xbox controller — or any other presents. Instead, in what he said was a spur-of-the-moment idea, the boy asked his birthday guests to bring food to donate to the Somerset County United Way.

"It just came to me," Arian said. "I get so many gifts even when it's not my birthday. I felt like I had to give something back."

His father, Raghu, said they invited more people than normal to Arian's party, including people they had not had contact with for years, in an effort to collect more food. Their efforts paid off, as Arian and his parents dropped off enough bags to fill the back seat and trunk of an SUV.

"I was very excited," his father said. "He never says, 'I need this or that.' He's not possessive. He's a very satisfied kid. We feel happy. We feel proud. We want to encourage that, and we want to be associated with the United Way and all the fine work they do for the county."

Although this was the first time that Arian came up with such an idea, he has been involved in food drives since his birth. Each year on his birthday, his parents asked their parents in India to organize a food drive at local orphanages to donate warm clothes.

"He never knew," his father said. "We would like to be active (in community service). We try to be with whatever time we get and whatever money we can."

Arian said that friends who know what he did say he did a "really nice job" and that they might do it for their birthdays, too. He's interested in doing future community services, including taking part in a school supply drive in August that United Way is running.

Arian's selflessness impressed Liliana Barreiro, an account executive at Somerset County United Way.

"We think we live in a very independent society, where everyone's just all about their success and their needs," Barreiro said. "Our new generation is more global thinking, more community-minded and caring. They realize the importance of caring for your neighbor. It's definitely refreshing to see."
