

Key School kids fill backpacks for Homeless



Key School student Emma Karsten, 11, stuffs warm clothing into a backpack that will be donated to the homeless in Baltimore and Washington on Christmas Eve.

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This Christmas season, Key School student Liam Peabody, 11, raised \$404 for his school's homeless clothing drive by putting his already-honed fundraising skills to work.

The sixth-grader sent about 12 e-mails to family members and family friends asking for money to buy backpacks full of hats, mittens and long underwear for the homeless. The backpacks will be distributed Christmas Eve on the streets of Baltimore and Washington by the nonprofit organization Giving Back. "They have nothing, and we have so much to give," Liam said.

Technically, Liam was supposed to work for the money he donated - and he did in a way. Working for their donations is what made the middle school's project different from last year.

Last Christmas, students donated clothing items for the drive - enough for 55 backpacks. This year, they were asked to pledge money they could earn by doing household chores or working in their neighborhoods.

Giving Back, which was started by an Annapolis resident, then used the money to buy clothing items in bulk at \$24 per filled backpack.

The students raised enough money for 215 filled backpacks, said Elspeth Feldman, a parent who is the school's community outreach coordinator.

Students stuffed the backpacks last week.

"We wanted the kids to get their hands dirty and do creative things," Ms. Feldman said. Plus, working for the money gives students ownership over their service project, she said.

Participation in the project was voluntary, and more than 50 percent of the middle school students participated, said Irfan Latimer, assistant director of admission and communication.

Sixth-graders Addie Guth, Andrew Bobbitt and Gabby Bailer each did different projects to earn money for backpacks. Addie did household chores, Andrew raked leaves in his backyard and Gabby donated money she earned walking dogs.

Natalie Belkov, 13, an eighth-grader, said leaders in the student forum, which is the student government, each "adopted" a homeroom and encouraged students there to donate.

"Students went out and canvassed other kids," said Dave Magnus, head of the Key middle school. "It became sort of a ground swell of kids doing this."

Natalie said she plans to go out with Giving Back to distribute the backpacks.

"Until this year, I didn't have awareness of the homeless and their conditions," she said. Since starting this project, homelessness has become an important cause for her, she said.

Megan Latimer, 11, cleaned her room and cleaned up after her family's new puppy to earn the \$24 for one backpack. She will also go out with Giving Back on Christmas Eve to distribute backpacks to the homeless.

"I think it's really nice to help so they'll be warm on Christmas," she said. "It's really nice to see the look on their face, and they might give you a hug or something because they're excited and happy."

For information about Giving Back, visit www.homelessdrive.com.