

Youth Count Column: December 2012: “The Greatest Gift: Giving”

The VERY BEST GIFTS, the gifts that sustain and nurture us, the gifts that empower us and help to instill a sense of purpose are not the gifts we receive, but are the gifts we give. These gifts may not be tied with ribbon and bows, but are gifts of time, talent, and caring.

Two special groups of southern Indiana students have especially demonstrated empathy, generosity, and commitment in their giving.

A core of approximately 20 students, with support from caring adults, plan and coordinate the overall activities of **Miles for Merry Miracles**. Another 20 plan and coordinate the activities within specific schools: from elementary students like 2nd grade student Logan, who made a presentation to his entire elementary school asking for their support, to middle school and high school students in Floyd and Clark Counties. The goal of this youth developed, youth led initiative is to adopt Angels from the Salvation Army Christmas Tree.

Their activities include three components. First is a 5K run/walk, with nearly 400 participants and an entrance fee of "sponsoring" an Angel. Second, students raise funds, manage and budget financial resources, and then shop for Angel gifts; the current number of Angels is 675. Finally, these young volunteers and their supporters serve dinner to over 200 Angels and their families, help kids with crafts and games, and share conversation with Angels and their families.

A high school Current Events class at **Jennings County Academy of Learning (JCAL)** care about people in their community and asked teacher Stacy Bezy if they could do something to help others at Christmas. As Ms. Bezy explored options, a plan quickly came together. Local Head Start leaders are excited about the JCAL class planning and providing holiday support for their 54 students. A Floyd County donor provided seed money for the project. The buzz of conversation about this project grew and resulted in the generous donation of toys to be distributed to the Head Start class.

The JCAL students have spent the past week decorating 54 stockings. They counted and sorted toys, books, and games, and packing several items into each stocking. The week before winter break JCAL students will travel to the Head Start class, visit with the children and distribute the stockings. Imagine the joyous expressions on the faces of the Head Start students as they see a host of high school “Santas” come to visit!

These two groups have empowered themselves to make a difference, both as individuals and as groups. Their sensitivity and empathy exemplifies the greatest gift – GIVING.

If you are a young person reading this column, know that you have the power to influence another person’s life. To adults readers, consider what you can do to encourage or support youth who wish to make a difference.

Learn more or share ideas by contacting Youth Count at barbara@youthcount.com or 812-923-1160 or by visiting www.youthcount.com .

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