



making a difference, backpack by backpack

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*Congregations for Kids, a coalition of local congregations, helps students from low income families within the Bellevue School District have a Good Start Back to School. Partnering with the school district, Eastside businesses and community organizations, we equip these students with backpacks and supplies needed for the school year. Congregations for Kids is sponsored by the Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council.*

- How your **PTSA/PTA** can partner with Congregations for Kids to help all Bellevue children make a Good Start Back to School. Please:
  - Consider helping Congregations for Kids deliver the backpacks and supplies to your school on about August 23<sup>rd</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup>. We would contact the PTSA/PTAs of the schools in which we need help.
  - Consider having a drive for school supplies near the end of the school year.
  - Consider raising funds for Congregations for Kids to help fill the backpacks. Thank you, Cherry Crest 5<sup>th</sup> Graders for your fundraiser last year and this year!
  - Partner with Congregations for Kids in the Good Start Back to School project. Let's brain storm!
  - Drop in at Stevenson's back gym to see the Good Start Back to School project in action (late mornings August 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>).
  - Help Bellevue be a better place for all our Bellevue students, regardless of which school they attend. Note: **every** Bellevue public school had at least 2 students helped by Congregations for Kids. One school had 199!
  
- **Items needed:** elementary/MS/HS backpacks, wide and college-rule composition books, composition books with 1/4" grids, dividers, pink pearl erasers, glue sticks, highlighters, 3"x5" white lined index cards; sets of washable wide classic colors markers, lined wide & college-ruled notebook paper, pencil pouches, sets of Ticonderoga brand pencils, sets of 12 colored pencils, red ballpoint pens, 3"x3" post-it notes, 12" metric/standard rulers, 5" pointed & blunt Fiskars brand scissors, 6" pointed Fiskars brand scissors, wide & college-rule spiral notebooks, 8 GB+ USB flash drives, and checks to Congregations for Kids/EISCC to buy supplies. (No gift cards again this year.) Please check with employers about matching gifts to Congregations for Kids.
  
- **The 21<sup>th</sup> annual Good Start Back to School** project will provide backpacks and/or school supplies for up to 1700 students from low income families in the Bellevue School District for the 2016-17 school year. District staff determine which students on the list of those qualifying for the free and reduced price lunch program would most benefit, and then backpacks and/or supplies are packed in August for those students based on their grade levels, genders and schools. Last fall, 19.4% of the district students, 3812, qualified, an increase from the year before. In six schools, at least 40% qualified. So far during this school year, the *Good Start Back to School* project has helped over 1600 students from kindergarten through high school. Before school started, 756 students in elementary school, 375 in MS and 444 in HS were helped. An additional 76 backpacks were prepared for students needing them later.

- We are the only organization in Bellevue that provides backpacks and school supplies tailored for these specific students throughout the district - 28 schools – this year. Since 1996 we have filled over 21,500 district requests. Our Steering Committee is made up of 20 volunteers from 9 congregations.
- Donation drives usually begin July 23-24. Supplies and/or money to buy them are turned in Monday, Aug. 15 and Tuesday, Aug. 16 at the project site, the Stevenson Elementary School gym, 14220 NE 8<sup>th</sup> St., Bellevue, to be sorted and packed.
- The project's value in 2015 was estimated at nearly \$60,000 based on our inventory estimated prices of backpacks and what goes into them: \$33 for 1st-3<sup>rd</sup>, \$48 for 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>, \$60 for middle school and \$51 for high school. The value was almost \$12,000 more than the previous year's.
- **Helping to date:** Aldersgate United Methodist; All Saints Episcopal; Beit Tikvah Messianic Congregation; Bellevue 1st Congregational; Bellevue 1st United Methodist; Christ the King Lutheran; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Lake Hills Ward; Cross of Christ Lutheran; East Shore Unitarian; Eastgate Congregational; Eastside Friends Meeting; Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council, Grace Lutheran; Holy Cross Lutheran, Newport Covenant, Overlake Park Presbyterian, Sacred Heart Catholic; St. Andrew's Lutheran; St. Louise Catholic; St. Luke's Lutheran; St. Madeleine Sophie Catholic; St. Margaret's Episcopal; St. Peter's United Methodist, St. Thomas Episcopal; Temple B'Nai Torah; Temple De Hirsch Sinai; Westminster Chapel; Alpha Delta Kappa, Sigma Chapter; Cherry Crest Elementary 5<sup>th</sup> grade Unity Fund; Costco Wholesale Kirkland; Hunter Family Foundation; Muslim Community Resource Center; Windermere Real Estate Bellevue Commons

## **Congregations for Kids' Good Start Back to School**

### **Student Stories 2015-16 School Year**

*(from 2 BSD Elementary Schools' Family Connections Centers Staff)*

"Karen" is one of five children. She, her mother and siblings have lived in their car and are currently living in a shelter. It is the type of shelter where they can go and sleep. They must arrive at night and be out early in the morning. School is very important to Karen and she carries all her supplies around with her at all times. She doesn't have the ability to leave things at home to lighten her load. She must make sure everything she needs all day is in that backpack. Just today, she made an unusual request to me. She asked me for a clip board. I asked her why she needed a clip board and she said it was so she could do her homework. It was then that I realized she was probably sitting on a cot at the shelter trying to do her homework and did not have a hard surface. I found a clip board to give her and she decided to decorate it and make it special with the markers she received through the *Good Start Back to School* program.

Karen's backpack is used for more than just her school supplies. Because all of her belongings are in storage, Karen uses her backpack to bring things to school she may need each week. She has brought clothes to change into at school and hygiene supplies to use to clean up in the mornings. It is also used as a vehicle for the school to use as a way to communicate important information with her mother.

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A teacher came to our school's Family Connections Center almost in tears and told the staff a heart breaking story: A young mom of four kids was dying of stage 4 cancer. The oldest child was a second grader. The family had tried their best to manage financially; however, the father was stressed out from running between the hospital and school. The son was depressed and even angry from time to time. His teacher and the FCC staff wanted to do something to cheer him up by giving him a brand new backpack (his old backpack was almost falling apart) with lots of crayons and markers that he could draw with to release his frustrations. He was so happy about his new blue backpack and the teacher noticed a big smile that had been missing for a long time.

**Please join Congregations for Kids in making a difference, backpack by backpack!**