

Avoca West students collect items to help those in need



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Earlier in the school year, a high school student spoke to students at Avoca West Elementary School in Glenview about the idea that big things often start with a smaller step.

That talk led to The Kindness Project, a weeklong drive to collect items to assist those in need.

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"As we look to really build the 'whole child' at Avoca West, we have actively looked for ways to increase the mindfulness of our students, a sense of where they fit in the world and the impact that small actions can have on others," said Jessica Hutchison, principal of Avoca West, which has an enrollment of 462.

Items were delivered Dec. 9 by adult volunteers to Journeys-Road Home in Palatine. According to its website, the nonprofit agency provides shelter, social services and housing to the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless in 37 towns in suburban Cook County.

"Though the hope was initially for each classroom to build one kit per classroom, complete with a heartfelt letter from the students, the outpouring was incredible (in) that we are simply making a large donation of goods to Journeys-The Road Home," Hutchison said.

Jameson Rick, 10, an Avoca fifth-grader from Wilmette, was among youth philanthropists.

"It helps kids and it's cold," Jameson said.

Karen Azar of Wilmette has two children at Avoca West and is coordinator of The Kindness Project.

"It's important to be empathetic, mindful and kind to everyone, and especially to those in need in our own community," she said.

"We couldn't do this without the support of our administration, parents and our kids who are a part of a leadership club called Helping Hands," she said. "And of course, our entire student body has a big heart."

"One person can make a difference by themselves and by working with a team," said Elliott Olcott, 10, an Avoca fourth-grader of Glenview and a member of Helping Hands.

"Something as small as someone needing a couple dollars or a toothbrush can help a lot," said Madeline A'Hearn, 10, a fourth-grader of Winnetka and a Helping Hands member.

One person making a big difference was part of the collection's message, Hutchison said.

"As a follow up, many of our students had ideas for outreach, clothing drives, food drives," Hutchison said, adding that "it was a joy to see the kids in action."

Parent volunteer Patrick Zerm of Winnetka assisted as Helping Hands student members loaded the truck.

"I think they did a great job," Zerm said.

Karie Angell Luc is a freelancer for Pioneer Press.

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