

Cooperation Releases Abundance!

School Supply Kits Create New Connections

Fall 2017 service project

The political shutdown on refugee intake has left many in the Eugene/Springfield community with much energy and enthusiasm, but with few means to feel effective. The UU Refugee Sanctuary Project co-sponsored and hosted Eugene's first World Refugee Day last June and screened the documentary "After Spring" at the Eugene Public Library. This fall, we learned of a refugee relief kit program organized and administered by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). The kits consist of sewn drawstring bags containing basic school supplies to be distributed to children overseas, many restricted to refugee camps without resources or activities. Over 70,000 school kits were assembled last year across the nations and sent to waiting hands in regions of crisis and disaster.

Our UU group recognized that the timing for this project was ideal during the holiday season when people are already inclined to good causes. We began with a modest goal of 50 school kits. Our church's sewing group "Quilting for a Cause" was already working on quilts for St. Vincent de Paul's new Youth House Project in the former Cascade Presbyterian Church, but they were eager to help us. As bags were completed, donations of school supplies were being dropped off each Sunday after service at our project information table. We provided shopping lists (with local pricing for best deals) and maintained a chart that tallied up what supplies we had received and what were still needed.

Barbara Flitcroft's daughter and her Baby Bootcamp group donated supplies for 30 school kits. Our reaction to this generous offer was to increase our project goal to 100 kits. In addition, UUCE's Religious Education program wanted to get involved.

On a December Sunday, two Spirit Jam groups of about 20 kids helped to assemble contents for 40 more sewn bags.

By the end of December, we upped our target to grand total of 130 school kits, and a new wave of sewing commenced. In the meantime, Reverend Sydney, always supportive of the project and the ways it had engaged so many in our congregation, offered to dedicate Christmas Eve offerings towards the school kit fund. We purchased the remaining supplies, and after Sunday service on January 7, we finished packing the remainder of the kit contents in their colorful drawstring bags.

The completed kits were then delivered to the Eugene Mennonite Church in west Eugene to await transport to Hubbard, Oregon, then on to the next stage along their long journey.

When I think of all the circles of people who found ways to be involved with our school kit project, I remember my husband's oft-repeated saying from our food co-op days: "Cooperation Releases Abundance!"

by Jennifer Rowan

