

GENEOUS DONATION HELPS FAMILIES IN NEED



Families facing hardship in one of the most economically disadvantaged parts of England have been helped thanks to the generosity of two Sembcorp employees.

High quality children's clothes donated by Neil Harris and Joanne Potter following an appeal made by a secondary school near the Wilton International site have now been distributed to families in need in the Redcar area.

Neil, a planner in Sembcorp Utilities UK's Maintenance department and Joanne, who heads the UK HR function, donated dozens of children's leggings, tops, coats and other items and the company chipped in with surplus safety boots and other materials.

Outwood Academy in Redcar created the "pop up" foodbank at the school in December when it became obvious that many families and individuals in the area would struggle over the festive period, particularly due to well publicised payment problems with the Government's Universal Credit benefits system.

The after-school initiative, which ran for six weeks, gave hundreds access to food donated by supermarkets and local people. Generous residents also contributed much needed toiletries, children's toys and clothing.

The wider Middlesbrough area ranked 7th in a recent Government survey of the most economically disadvantaged towns and cities in England. It is still feeling the effects of the closure of the Redcar steelworks in 2015 which led to the loss of 3,000 jobs and has one of the highest rates of unemployment in the country.

Melissa Brant-Smith, Principal of Outwood Academy, said: "We are immensely grateful to Sembcorp and everyone who contributed to the initiative. We know that even within the school there are a number of families that are really struggling."

The school's foodbank received support from Redcar Foodbank, part of the Footprints in the Community initiative addressing isolation and poverty in and around Redcar. There are eight foodbanks in the borough providing food and support to people referred to by agencies.

Manager Helen Hedges said: "In the past six years that we have been open we have helped feed and clothe around 26,000 people and the need is growing year on year."

Neil, who lives in Redcar, said modestly: "It was really just a number of items our daughter had grown out of. We'd normally donate them to charity but this was a good opportunity to donate them to a cause closer to home."

The picture shows Neil with Mrs Brant-Smith and Outwood Academy's Vice Principal Graham Skidmore, prior to the foodbank opening its doors to people seeking its help.