

Operation Christmas Child packs 250 shoeboxes to send to children in need

The Columbia Missourian

COLUMBIA — More than 60 community members met in the high school foyer at The Crossing church on Friday to pack 250 shoeboxes full of clothes, school supplies, toys, crafts, toiletries, encouraging notes and other items as a part of Operation Christmas Child.

Operation Christmas Child is a project of Samaritan's Purse, an international evangelical Christian relief organization. Volunteers for the project collect shoeboxes filled with a variety of toys and items to give to children 2 to 14 years old.

"These kids have seen things that we could only imagine," said Renee Munns, Operation Christmas Child's Central Missouri area coordinator and organizer of the packing event. "So to just give them something tangible to hold onto, whether it's a teddy bear or a ball to play with or new school supplies, just a simple thing — it can really help change their life."

During the packing party, volunteers and their families, friends and co-workers picked up red and green boxes at the front of the room and chose to fill them for a boy or girl of a certain age group — ages 2 to 4, 5 to 9, or 10 to 14. Children and parents filled the boxes with clothes, sneakers, colorful notepads, wooden reindeer ornaments, coloring books, Legos, jump ropes, washcloths, patterned headbands, dolls and hundreds of other toys. Volunteers also chatted while eating pizza, chili, chips and cookies while Christmas music played on a portable speaker.

"You're changing some little kid's life, and you're letting them know that somebody around the world cares about them," Sam Munns, Renee Munns' 14-year-old son, said. This was Sam's third year packing boxes.

Renee Munns bought about 80 percent of the items and community members donated the rest, she said. This was her fourth year organizing a packing event as a coordinator and her 15th year volunteering. To get ready for the packing event each year, Renee Munns collects items year-round, shopping at after-Christmas sales, looking for bargains at Walmart and picking up items during weekly shopping trips, she said. She spends \$50 to \$100 a month on supplies.

"I put things in (the box) that I would want if I were them," 10-year-old Lily Fox, a family friend of Renee Munns, said. "Sometimes I take a pair of shoes for granted and they might not have shoes, so it's really important that they have them."

To send shoeboxes, people can go to packing events, [create boxes on their own and drop them off](#), or [pack virtual shoeboxes online](#). In addition to filling a shoebox, people can [donate \\$7 and receive a label for their box](#) to track it to its destination.

"It's just kind of fun to think about how much joy it could bring to other people who, like Lily said, don't have a lot," Lori Fox, Lily's mom, said. "The things that we just take for granted so much like a spoon or a washcloth or a towel can really be important to give."

Samaritan's Purse will collect the shoeboxes at The Crossing and Parkade Baptist Church during its nationwide collection week beginning Monday through Nov. 21.

Samaritan's Purse will also collect shoeboxes from 4,500 locations around the U.S. and Puerto Rico. This year, the organization estimates it will collect 12,693 boxes in the Central Missouri area and 12 million worldwide. Last year, it collected 11.2 million worldwide, with 11,037 from the Central Missouri area.

Children who receive the boxes go through a 12-week Bible study program.

Although the shoeboxes are like Christmas gifts, the kids receive them at various times throughout the year, Renee Munns said.

"It gives them some things that they need, but more than that, it just gives them hope knowing that someone out there cares about them," Erin Tuller, a volunteer, said.

Supervising editor is Allison Colburn.

See the story online here: http://www.columbiamissourian.com/news/operation-christmas-child-packs-shoeboxes-to-send-to-children-in/article_c67eebf8-a84f-11e6-8a94-4302ae03efdc.html