



## Behind the Scenes of a Collection Drive for a Worthy Cause

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**H**ave you ever wondered how the Thanksgiving food-drive box arrived at your place of employment or how the Giving Tree Christmas project arrived at your place of worship? Have you wondered how the animal shelter donation box arrived at the front of your supermarket or how the Boy Scouts Scouting for Food grocery bag arrived at your doorknob? Have you toyed with the idea of starting a recycling project at your place of employment or school so that trash cans are not overfilled with recyclable bottles? Have you had the initiative to start a collection drive for one of these worthy causes but lacked a starting point?

People in Lowell have done a lot of behind the scenes work for similar causes but often times their hard work is not captured and their followers have no choice but to “reinvent the wheel.” If the behind the scenes information could be captured so that future drives were easier to start, just imagine the number of people that could be positively affected by such drives.

We often hear the saying that if you make the difference in the life of just one person that you have succeeded, and this is true for these drives. Making a difference does not require one to donate large amounts of money or supplies, as the person who starts the drive is also making a difference by enabling others to make a difference. Many of us have heard the following poem in one form or another.

**One Hundred Years from now**  
One Hundred Years from now  
It will not matter  
what kind of car I drove,  
What kind of house I lived in,  
how much money was in my bank account  
nor what my clothes looked like.  
But the world may be a better place because  
I was important in the life of a child.

-Anonymous

## *The Needs of Abused Children: How Can We Begin To Meet Them?*

One area that there is always room to make a difference in is in the lives of child abuse and neglect victims. Lowell is certainly not immune from the problem of child abuse and neglect but people who are not victims, police officers, or social workers may not feel its magnitude. Such populations see the realities of child abuse all too often and the statistics on child abuse and neglect do not shock them. The statistics are not as shocking as seeing a child with parent-inflicted cigarette burns covering its body, seeing a newborn baby with a fractured femur, or seeing a child homicide victim. According to the Child Welfare League of America's year 2000 State Fact Sheet for Massachusetts:

- In 1997, 64,008 children were reported abused or neglected in Massachusetts, an increase of 10.4% from 1990.
- In 1998, Eleven children died as a result of abuse or neglect.
- In 1996, 13,046 children in Massachusetts lived apart from their families in out-of-home care, an increase of 10.0% since 1990.
- 1998, public child welfare agencies in Massachusetts placed 2,254 children into adoptive homes, a 110.1% increase since 1995.

The National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse and the National Victim Center report that

- Most (Approximately 85%) of child abusers are NOT strangers, but persons that the child knows and trusts.

The media often does an ample job of sensationalizing abuse and neglect stories when they happen but sometimes neglect to reinforce what happens to these children after the news story. The thousands of children who were taken away from their abusers and placed in foster care by the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) often leave their homes with only the clothes they are wearing. In some cases, the child was neglected to a point that they have no personal belongings, in other cases, it is too risky to return to the abusers home to retrieve the child's security blanket, clothing, toothbrush, or any of life's necessities.

In an ideal world, the foster parents that the children are placed with could provide all the essentials that the average child needs to thrive. But, realistically, shrinking budgets have resulted in foster parents being paid less than thirteen dollars a day to provide care to a baby and less than eighteen dollars a day to provide care to a teenager. The lack of adequate compensation makes it difficult

if not impossible for compassionate people who want to make a difference in the life of a child to become foster parents.

### ***How to Go From An Idea to a Project: The Bear Hugs Idea***

In May of 2002, Lowell DSS Investigations Supervisor, Kristen Sheppard, worked to ensure that an idea that came from a meeting materialized into a project. Kristen met with her minister and together they brainstormed ideas to recruit and retain foster parents despite shrinking budgets. Ultimately, they dreamt up what is now the *Bear Hugs – Kits for Kids* Program. They wrote a grant for their dream and persisted in pursuing that dream despite only getting half of what they had hoped for. They then promoted their idea by word of mouth at church, within the community, and at various types of community meetings. From the beginning, they found that people were very receptive of the project and wanted to become involved. Kristen believes that a key point in the strong reception and involvement was people knowing that any money or donations went directly to the children in need and not to overhead costs. Because of Kristen’s initiative to lessen a community program and willingness to seek help from her minister, a partnership was born between DSS and the Centralville United Methodist Church and 200 *Kits for Kids* were assembled. Since then, the donations have poured in. This partnership proved to be an effective community strategy as the Lowell DSS office is now usually prepared to supply *Kits for Kids* to the next two hundred children placed in foster care.

### ***Having a Specific, Reachable Goal***

The program hopes to always have on hand a bag tailored to meet the needs of any child, male or female, from birth to age seventeen that is going into foster care. The bags, some baby bags and other backpacks, contain toiletries, school supplies, and toys (see lists at the end of this document for more details of kit contents). In the winter months, they contain hats, mittens, and scarves as well. Kits also include \$25 giftcards to Wal-Mart that can assist the foster parent in obtaining any other essentials, such as clothing, for the abused and/or neglected child. The first bag was delivered on September 30, 2002, to a baby girl that had been delivered four days before. Since then, 252 kits have been given to kids in need.

**Birth - 11 months kit:**  
jug of formula – Similac with iron  
diapers  
package of wipes  
baby shampoo  
baby lotion  
diaper rash ointment  
toy (rattle beads, keys, etc. .)  
1 stuffed animal  
2 board books  
1 bottle

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## *Learning How to Involve Others*

Since the program's inception, Kristen has received support in a variety of different ways. To date, *Bear-Hugs -Kits for Kids* have been supported by:

- ✓ 6 CHURCHES
- ✓ 6 GIRLS SCOUT GROUPS
- ✓ 4 GRANTS
- ✓ 2 COMPANIES
- ✓ 2 PRIVATE DONORS
- ✓ 1 COLLEGE PSYCHOLOGY CLUB
- ✓ 1 VOCATIONAL SCHOOL
- ✓ 1 PRESCHOOL
- ✓ 1 ANONYMOUS DONOR

This assistance has come in all shapes and sizes. Some of the above supporters have collected money, which enabled Kristen and her helpers to seek supplies at-cost from area discount stores, such as Aldens in Dracut, and dollar stores. Other supporters have put out collection boxes at their churches and businesses and collected actual supplies that way. The Greater Lowell Technical Institute became a collection site and its Consumer Science area was "filled with teddy bears of every conceivable color and style" after one of the teachers got the initiative to do more than just donate to a teddy bear collection box at a local bank. The photo below shows the results:



Yet other groups have participated by shopping from a list of Kit items or a list of Kit items in short supply, such as diapers, which are always needed for Kits for 1 to 3 year old children. Kristen states that groups have a lot of flexibility in how they want to go about the program. The only rule is that items that could hurt a child, such as razor blades, are not allowed.

## *Finding All of the Different Ways to Motivate Others*

To motivate community groups, Kristen is willing to attend staff meetings and speak about the program. She explains the basics and lets groups handle the details the way that they want to. Groups are encouraged to supply and design their own collection boxes, or Kristen can provide them if necessary. She will pick the donations up and ensure that they get sorted and packed into the Kits. Kristen also educates people about the *Kits for Kids Program* at the end of community education programs she does on child abuse and mandated reporting of child abuse. She hopes to get more groups involved and her current goals include involving

- ❑ **Boy Scout Troops**
- ❑ **More Churches**
- ❑ **Rotary Groups**
- ❑ **Local Businesses**

## *Looking Forward: Passing the Baton*

Kristen is willing to do the legwork for community groups to ensure the success of this program today but she is cognizant that for continued success, she needs to pass the baton on to the groups themselves. Lowell is currently the only DSS branch in Massachusetts involved in the *Kits for Kids* program. Her goal is to branch the program out to the other DSS offices in Northeastern Massachusetts over the next two years; this includes the Lawrence, Salem, Lynn, and Haverhill offices. Kristen's goal is already becoming more of a reality as Haverhill is getting involved in the program.

Kristen states that some groups contact her and ask "how do I get this program started." She is prepared to answer that question and can share strategies that have been successful in other community groups. She is also prepared to train these groups on how they can keep the program going on their own. This empowers the groups, frees up Kristen's time to get other groups involved and ultimately ensure that the program will be long-lasting and live on even if her involvement in it must change.

## *Reaching Others Through the Email Connection*

Kristen describes the project as "**doable**" for any group. She estimates that she gets two to five phone calls a week from interested parties. Each August, she sends out a mass mailing to all people who have been involved in the project or have inquired about it. She does have brochures on the project but they are in short supply as printing is expensive. Kristen found that e-mail communication was a solution to the expensive brochure costs and finds that people often forward the e-mails on so even more people are reached. One obstacle she has

faced is a lack of media coverage. Despite contacting the Lowell Sun numerous times, they have not covered the project in the community newspaper. So, she has relied on good old-fashioned word of mouth in addition to her mailings, limited brochures, and e-mails.

### ***Finding More and More Ways to Get People Involved***

Kristen states that the biggest obstacle that groups who participate in *Kits for Kids* will face is the people who do not want to donate. Hopefully the community education on child abuse and neglect will help those people realize that child abuse is a community problem that does not just affect its victims; hopefully they will see that the community needs to work with the victims and foster parents.

Fortunately, some groups involved in the program have gone above and beyond simply donating for the Kits; they have collected gifts for the foster parents themselves which can be an important reward for these often unrecognized community heroes. The foster parent gifts were separate from the actual *Kits for Kids* program, in which everything goes to the foster kids, and in which there are no overhead expenses.

Each Kit has an approximate value of \$30 to \$35 before the Wal-Mart gift card is added to it. But aside from the monetary value and the tangible supplies, the contents of the kit can provide the love and support to a child in need. The stuffed animal inside each kit may be an inanimate object but we all know how much children love them. Having a teddy bear to hug can help a child get through the awkward experience of meeting his or her new foster family, or get through the nightmares inflicted by their abusive parents. A stuffed animal, no matter its shape, size or color, offers a child unconditional love. If it can make a difference in the life of a child, it is all that matters. A teddy bear can also promote awareness of the problem of child abuse as some groups, such as For the Love of our Children, use a teddy bear and a blue ribbon to symbolize April being Child Abuse Awareness Month.



### ***Involving Girl Scouts and Others: Finding the Key***

**S**ome of the 551 girl scouts that belong to the 50 Lowell Girl Scout Troops in Lowell have enjoyed participating in the *Kits for Kids* program and a similar program in which they collected teddy bears for the Lowell Police Department to give out to kids. Girl Scout Director Brenda Fitzgerald, who

works out of the Lowell Girl Scout Office, reports that the girls like these types of programs because they feel like they are helping other kids. She states that the girls enjoy participating in river clean ups and other projects but feel like it is more important to help individuals like Kits for Kids project does. Brenda stated that several of her troops have made decisions to donate some of their profits from cookie sales or troop dues to worthy causes such as Kits for Kids.

Brenda has found that these projects have the most success when her troops are given ample time to learn about the project, learn about why it is important, and then prepare for their involvement in it. Brenda states that the girls were very appreciative that Kristen Sheppard visited them and explained the project to them. Brenda stated that some of the girls had never heard of DSS and did not realize that some kids out there were not as fortunate in life as they were. She stated that although Kristen geared her visit to her audience and tried to keep it upbeat, it was a real eye-opener for the girls. Brenda stated that the education aspect of the project and Kristen's visit helped kids find a link between kids like them and the kids that the project was trying to help; she stated such **links** are key to successful projects. Such links, helped the girls scouts do separate outreach work to 1,253 other girls last year!

Similar education and linkage forming was also involved in the teddy bear project between the Girl Scouts and the police department. Brenda stated that the girls learned about domestic violence and linked how kids in that situation feel scared like they sometimes do. The kids ended up collecting enough stuffed animals to fill a conference-size table and then presented them to the police department for when they had to deal with scared kids.

Brenda stated that a key to soliciting involvement in these types of projects is coming up with a **flyer** that is **clear** about the project and the goals. Sometimes kid-made flyers work well. Flyers can be posted up , mailed, or e-mailed.

The girl scouts and all the groups that donate to *Kits for Kids* are donating to a very worthy cause. Kristen states that she once had an eight-year-old kid thank her for ten minutes over everything in the pack. She described that it was like watching a kid at Christmas, and "amazing."

## **For future groups that want to get involved, the project has found that the following items work best.....**

### **Birth 1 - 11 months:**

- 1) jug of formula - Similac with iron
- 2) package of wipes
- 3) 1 baby shampoo

- 4) 1 baby lotion
  - 5) 1 tube of diaper rash ointment
  - 6) 1 toy (rattle beads, keys, etc. . . .)
  - 7) 1 stuffed animal
  - 8) 2 board books
  - 9) 1 bottle
  - 10) diapers:
    - size 1 - approximately 20 diapers
    - size 2 - approximately 15 diapers
    - size 3 - approximately 15 diapers
    - size 4 - approximately 20 diapers
- \* put tag on with white ribbon

**Ages 1 - 3:**

- 1) 1 package of wipes
  - 2) diapers:
    - size 5 - approximately 20 diapers
  - 3) 1 toothbrush
  - 4) 1 child's toothpaste
  - 5) 2 combs
  - 6) age appropriate toys
  - 7) 1 plastic toy car/truck
  - 8) child's shampoo/conditioner
  - 9) books
  - 10) 1 stuffed animal
  - 11) 1 sippy cup
- \* put tag on with white ribbon

### Ages 4 - 6:

#### *Male*

- 1) 2 combs
- 2) 1 package of crayons or wooden truck/crayon set
- 3) 1 toothbrush
- 4) 1 coloring book
- 5) 1 package of construction paper or sketchbook
- 6) 1 package of markers or paint set
- 7) 1 stuffed animal
- 8) books
- 9) age appropriate toy
- 10) child's toothpaste
- 11) child's shampoo/conditioner

\* put tag on with blue ribbon

\* put tag on with pink ribbon

#### *Female*

- 1) 1 brush
- 2) 1 comb
- 3) 1 package of crayons or wooden truck/crayon set
- 4) 1 toothbrush
- 5) 1 coloring book
- 6) 1 package of construction paper or sketchbook
- 7) 1 package of markers or paint set
- 8) 1 stuffed animal
- 9) age appropriate toy
- 10) child's toothpaste
- 11) child's shampoo/conditioner
- 12) books

### Ages 7 - 10:

#### *Male*

- 1) 1 bottle of shampoo
- 2) 1 bottle of conditioner
- 3) 2 combs
- 4) 1 age appropriate toy
- 5) 1 flash card set
- 6) 1 package of crayons
- 7) 1 package of pens
- 8) 1 package of pencils
- 9) 1 game
- 10) 1 toothbrush
- 11) 1 toothpaste (travel size)

#### *Female*

- 1) 1 bottle of shampoo
- 2) 1 bottle of conditioner
- 3) 1 brush
- 4) 1 comb
- 5) 1 age appropriate toy
- 6) 1 flash card set
- 7) 1 package of crayons
- 8) 1 package of pens
- 9) 1 package of pencils
- 10) 1 game
- 11) 1 toothbrush

- 12) 1 soap (travel size)
- 13) 1 stuffed animal
- 14) books
- \* Put tag on with blue ribbon

- 12) 1 soap (travel size)
- 13) 1 stuffed animal
- 14) 1 toothpaste (travel size)
- 15) books
- \* put tag on with pink ribbon

**Ages 11 - 13:**

*Male*

- 1) 1 bottle of shampoo
- 2) 1 notebook
- 3) 2 combs
- 4) 1 deodorant
- 5) 1 toothbrush
- 6) 1 toothpaste (travel size)
- 7) 1 soap (travel size)
- 8) 1 package of pens
- 9) 1 package of pencils
- 10) 1 game
- 11) books
- 12) matchbox cars
- 13) 1 stuffed animal
- 14) puzzle book
- 15) deck of cards
- \* Put tag on with blue ribbon

*Female*

- 1) 1 bottle of shampoo
- 2) 1 bottle of conditioner
- 3) 1 notebook
- 4) 1 brush
- 5) 1 comb
- 6) 1 hair accessory
- 7) 1 deodorant
- 8) 1 toothbrush
- 9) 1 soap (travel size)
- 10) 1 toothpaste (travel size)
- 11) 1 package of pads
- 13) 1 game
- 14) 1 stuffed animal
- 15) books
- 16) puzzle book
- 17) package of pens
- 18) package of pencils
- 19) deck of cards
- \*put tag on with pink ribbon

**Ages 14 - 17:**

*Male*

- 1) 1 bottle of shampoo
- 2) 2 combs
- 3) 1 game
- 4) 1 ball
- 5) 1 notebook
- 6) 1 deck of cards
- 7) 1 package of pens
- 8) 1 package of pencils
- 9) 1 toothbrush
- 10) 1 toothpaste (travel size)
- 11) 1 soap (travel size)
- 12) books
- 13) 1 deodorant
- 14) 1 stuffed animal
- 15) puzzle book
- \* put tag on with blue ribbon

*Female*

- 1) 1 bottle of shampoo
- 2) 1 bottle of conditioner
- 3) 1 brush
- 4) 1 comb
- 5) 1 deck of cards
- 6) 1 hair accessory
- 7) 1 puzzle book
- 8) 1 notebook
- 9) 1 pack of pens
- 10) 1 package of pencils
- 11) 1 toothbrush
- 12) 1 toothpaste (travel size)
- 13) 1 soap (travel size)
- 14) package of pads
- 15) 1 deodorant
- 16) books
- 17) 1 stuffed animal
- \* put tag on with pink ribbon

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**To become a partner of this important community program,**

**Contact:**

**Kristen Sheppard, Lowell DSS**

**(978) 275-6927**

[Kristen.Sheppard@state.ma.us](mailto:Kristen.Sheppard@state.ma.us)

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**To learn more about the community problem of child abuse,**

**Click on or call**

**Child Welfare League of America**

<http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/statefactsheets/2000/massachusetts.htm>

**Lowell Police Department Child Abuse Information**

[http://www.lowellpolice.com/crime\\_safety/safety\\_tips/child\\_abuse.htm](http://www.lowellpolice.com/crime_safety/safety_tips/child_abuse.htm)

Main Number (978) 937-3200

**Rape Crisis Center of Greater Lowell**

[http://www.rcsgl.org/resource\\_child.htm](http://www.rcsgl.org/resource_child.htm)

1-978-4527721

24 Hour Hotline 1-800-542-5212

**For the Love of Our Children**

<http://www.fortheloveofourchildren.org/>

**To learn about other ways to help children, families and individuals in the  
Merrimack Valley or how to get help, Click on**

**United Way of Merrimack Valley**

[http://www.uwmv.org/fam\\_child\\_individual.cfm](http://www.uwmv.org/fam_child_individual.cfm)

Toll Free: 1-877-588-4069

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If you know of persons or groups who have taken the initiative to solve community problems, like Kristen Sheppard, remind those people how important it is to share their experience so that other groups can learn from it and so that the wheel does not have to be reinvented.

**Lets work together to preserve community knowledge.**

