

Cape Coral group aids homeless students

Cape foundation collects backpacks

BY JASON WERMERS • JWERMERS@NEWS-PRESS.COM • JULY 23, 2008

The Cape Coral Community Foundation is leading a drive to make sure the city's homeless students are ready to learn when classes begin Aug. 18.

The foundation's Giving Alliance of Women and the Moms Club of Southwest Cape Coral have teamed up to collect school supplies. They plan to deliver a backpack filled with pens, pencils, notebook paper and supplies to each of the estimated 130 homeless students living in Cape Coral in the next couple of weeks, according to Beth Sanger, the foundation's executive director.

Federal law has a broader definition of "homeless" students than the standard one. Students who are in families that are sharing a home with at least one other family, living in motels or hotels, as well as those in emergency shelters or sleeping without a roof over their heads are defined as homeless.

Lee County had 602 such students in the 2007-08 school year, according to the school district.

"The request came in as a grant application," Sanger said. "It was news to us that there are 130 homeless children in Cape Coral."

The Moms Club made the grant request. The foundation's board of directors thought instead it would be a project tailor-made for the Giving Alliance of Women, which is a component of the foundation.

That is because the alliance, which has more than 60 members, conducted a school supply drive for the Abuse Counseling Treatment Center for women and children. The group also collected more than 300 new sneakers for the Salvation Army's "Sneakers for Santa" drive.

The backpack and school supply drive has been under way for only a few days, but the alliance already has collected 30 backpacks filled with supplies.

Sanger said she shared the grant application with the alliance's project committee, and she received the same enthusiastic response the foundation board had given her.

"They met with the Moms Club and took the project on by storm," Sanger said.

The foundation has the backpacks on display at its downtown Cape Coral office. Among the backpacks already collected are plain ones as well as those featuring designs, including Hello Kitty and Hannah Montana.