

Alcott youth, parents sort clothes for the needy

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By Christopher Huber

When they could have been out playing or gardening on a sunny Saturday, dozens of Alcott Elementary fourth-through sixth-graders and their parents chose to help fold and sort clothes.

They weren't doing laundry, but rather they were volunteering to help Sammamish-based Kids Without Borders, an organization that collects and distributes new clothes to needy children.

The volunteers, with guidance from Alcott student council advisor Sara Bennier and organization founder Son Michael Pham, loaded numerous four-foot-by-two-foot boxes full of clothes — about 1,500 pounds worth, Pham said.



The late-morning event was quiet and relaxing as people sorted piles of shirts, pants and other articles.

"It's fun because we get to help kids in need," said Alcott fifth-grader Sarah Tarta. When they receive the clothes, "they might even say, wow, I wanna help someone my age, too."

The clothes from the Feb. 20 sorting event in the Alcott library will go to youth in the Tukwila School District, the Ronald McDonald House and some may end up in other countries, said board member Judy Pham.

"We are one of the few organizations that gets brand new clothing to give," Pham said. To get new clothing, "is really

special for them."

The organization gets most of its donations from Kids In Distressed Situations, a nonprofit that receives and distributes clothes from corporations and chain stores, she said.

Kids Without Borders has collected new clothing since 2001, according to Son Michael Pham, and usually holds sorting events at its storage lockers in Redmond.

"The kids were so energetic, and thoroughly enjoyed working that I had a hard time keeping up with them. I had to take two more trips to our warehouse to get refill," Son Michael Pham said. "It was a great day of giving and service and we know the conversation between the students, their parents and the teachers will continue on. And that's what our work is all about: inspiring youth in service and helping others."

Son Michael Pham said they decided to partner with the Alcott student council this time so the council members could do more than just plan school fun days.

Approximately 24 students make up the council, Bennier said.

"This is the first type of community service activity they've done," Bennier said. "This year we have a really good group of kids — very hard-working."

The parents in attendance said it was important for their children to learn the value of volunteerism; something to help others their age.

"It gives him a bigger picture," said parent Jo Weise as she and her son, Edward folded at a table.

Plus, he learned how to fold clothes, she joked.

The Phams and Bennier said they plan to do a similar event in the future.

Kids Without Borders supports and works with children in 30 countries.

But it's growing — it just opened a center in Tukwila — so they will always need volunteers.

The organization also provides numerous other programs and financial resources to help children and young adults in Vietnam, according to the Kids Without Borders Web site.

It also partners with various Rotary clubs to support the Asia Injury Prevention Foundation, which provides youth with helmets and safety education.

Photo by Christopher Huber: Lanfen Kaplan, left, of Redmond, folds clothes with Alcott fourth-grader Olivia Henshaw Feb. 20 at the Alcott Library.

Volunteer or learn more about Kids Without Borders at www.kidswithnoborders.org.

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