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FEATURED

St. Clair third grader collects pillows for homeless families

By Brian Arola barola@mankatofreepress.com

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Sydney Stover, a St. Clair third grader, stands with the big pile of pillows and bedding she and her family collected to donate to Partners for Affordable Housing. The donations, Stover's idea, will go to families experiencing homelessness in the Mankato area.

Pat Christman



MANKATO — Shortly after Sydney Stover turned 9 years old last month, a package for her arrived in the mail.

The St. Clair third grader thought it might be a birthday gift, but ended up getting even more excited that it wasn't.

Sydney recently had started a collection drive for pillows, pillowcases and bedding to donate to people experiencing homelessness. The package was one of many sent to her home in recent weeks from people who wanted to help.

"I've never seen a child so excited about pillowcases," said her mom, Brittany. "It was cute."

Sydney and her family's collection drive resulted in them delivering a trailer full of donations Monday to Partners for Affordable Housing in Mankato. Asked how the donations compared to her expectations, Sydney said it ended up being "much more than I thought."

"I just wanted to do something that could help the homeless," she said, adding it felt good to collect so much.

Her parents, Brittany and Ben, counted up at least 100 donated pillows to go with plenty of bedding for children. Sydney's little brother, Mack, 6, helped her unload the donations.

The family spread word of the drive at the parents' workplaces, Minnesota Elevator and Guardian Energy. Sydney even made a presentation and pitched her idea to her elementary principal, Nadine Holland, who approved it and helped her distribute the information to parents in the district.

As a parent, Brittany said it was amazing to see her daughter come up with a way to help others.

"Nothing makes me more proud than to see my daughter have such a kind heart," she said. "For her to want to do it, I said let's make it happen."

The donation was much bigger than what Partners for Affordable Housing normally receives, said Jen Theneman, executive director. The nonprofit currently serves 25 families in its three shelters in Mankato and St. Peter, 31 families in permanent housing and 24 families in transitional housing.

Families can use the nonprofit's free store to pick out pillows, bedding and other household needs, but new items are harder to come by. Theneman estimated the big donation will cover pillows for families coming in and out of the shelters for about the next four months.

She called Sydney's donation a "really important lesson to teach our young people," especially during the holidays. During a time when many are thinking of what gifts they'll get, many children are in need of something as simple as a pillow.

"We take those things for granted," Theneman said in thanking Sydney. "This is really awesome, something to be proud of your whole life."

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