

The Give-Back Kids



Bill Wagner / The Daily News From left at table, Fallon, Hailee, Jesse and Poetry make bracelets as Gaeb prepares yarn in the background.

By Cathy Zimmerman / The Daily News | Posted: Monday, June 28, 2010

Fallon Christy is only 11, but the Castle Rock girl already knows you're never too young to pay it forward.

After Fallon's family received help with a May rent payment that saved their household from eviction, she sprang into action.

"My mom had sent a money card to our rent person but it got shredded," the girl said. "We came here for help."

When Fallon's parents, Bethany Christy and Doug Clough, mailed their money order to the landlord, they enclosed a maintenance request, Christy said. "When they shredded that, somehow they shredded the money order, too."

There was no timely way to undo the problem, she said, so they went to the Community Action Program for help.

An emergency grant from CAP saved the day — and bowled over Fallon.

"She said, 'These people don't even know us and they helped us,' " her mother said.

Fallon "wanted to do something to give back," said Colleen Dean, coordinator of Help Warehouse, CAP's stores of food for the needy. "She asked if she could volunteer here, but we don't accept volunteers younger than 16."

Fallon was undaunted. "I thought of a way I could volunteer on my own," the girl said.

Her friend Hannah had taught her how to braid and knot strands of multicolored yarn into tightly woven, adjustable bracelets.

Days after her family was thrown a life line, Fallon had organized two sisters and a brother and taught them to braid the yarn bracelets, necklaces and bookmarks. They priced them at 50 cents.

"We made 20 or 30 to begin with," the girl said.

Choosing some busy areas of downtown Castle Rock on Mother's Day, Fallon and her sibs raised \$110.58 selling the crafts. They went in to CAP with \$55.29 for the Help Warehouse.

"We thought they might make \$20," Dean said. "I was overwhelmed when they handed me the money. That's a lot of money to this family."

Fallon's parents have five other children between them: Jesse, 13; 9-year-old Hailee; Gavin, the 6-year-old "comic relief" of the group; 5-year-old Ashlen, who's eager to learn to braid yarn; and a fast-moving 2-year-old named Rhien.

They are also currently sheltering Poetry and Gaebreall Douglas, ages 9 and 8, whose mother is homeless and no longer able to care for them.

Doug and Bethany are students at Lower Columbia College, where he is two years into a double major in automotive and diesel mechanics and she has completed three-quarters of the classwork for a counseling degree in chemical dependency.

They support their "yours, mine and ours" brood on income from his part-time job, financial aid from the college and a TANF grant (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families).

The family has lived in Cowlitz County for eight years, and their recent move from the Highlands to Castle Rock means a lot to them, Bethany said. "We were so lucky to get that place," she said. "It's quiet."

The older kids seem especially aware of the intervention provided by CAP.

Last week the bracelet makers — Fallon, Jesse, Hailee and Poetry — showed us how they make the craft items and talked about their surprisingly successful sales day.

"It was kind of hard running around looking for people that might buy 'em," Jesse said. "We went down to the bakery, and then we went to the parking lot at the Select Market, and we went to the laundromat."

"One guy at the bakery, when we told him it was to help the needy, he went to his van and got \$20. Just for a donation."

Poetry's mom gave the kids extra yarn, and the funds reserved for the family helped buy tape, scissors and notebooks "to keep track of the money we make," Fallon said.

She has made fliers for another round of the bracelet project and they're thinking about baking brownies to sell, she said. The kids saved the receipt from Help Warehouse to show that their efforts are legitimate.

"We want to keep doing this," Fallon said. "We can save up our half and do something with the family."

The Homelessness Prevention Program is available to people with income sources who experience an emergency, said Alan Rose, community relations director at CAP. It does not provide ongoing rent money.