



Kid-friendly projects bring out young volunteers

By Bill Graves, The Oregonian

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Hands on Greater Portland, an agency that organizes volunteer activities, provided a special volunteer activity for young children and their parents on Wednesday, during Spring Break, in which the children will write letters to seniors to make them smile. From left, Julia, 9, Emma, 6, and their mom Jennifer Povich volunteer to write spring letters to seniors. "We wanted to volunteer as a family," says Jennifer.

The children cut and pasted the heart out of a fine spring break morning as they crafted upbeat greeting cards for homebound senior citizens.

"We are thinking of you," wrote 6-year-old Emma Povich on a card she decorated with a butterfly, frog, heart and two bees. "Happy Spring" proclaimed Hayley Jones, 13, on a card she filled with flowers. Noah Fort, 8, tied up his card in a red ribbon.

The young volunteers and their parents worked on their creations Wednesday in a small room of Loaves & Fishes Centers headquarters in Southwest Portland's Multnomah Village. Their cards would go out with some of the 5,000 meals distributed by Meals-On-Wheels each day throughout the metropolitan area, including Clark County, to homebound elderly residents.

"We've been wanting to do something as a family and get the girls involved in volunteering," said Jennifer Povich, 38, who made cards with Emma and Julia Povich, 9.

The project was organized especially for children and their parents during this spring break week by Hands On Greater Portland, an agency that connects volunteers to nonprofit groups that need them. For more than a year, Hands On has organized about five volunteer events a month for kids, said Mindy Coolidge, program director.

The kid-friendly projects are short, usually about an hour, fun and early so they do not conflict with naps and bed time, she said. Many nonprofits have barred young volunteers, frustrating parents who want to instill a service ethic in their children, she said.

"Our goal is everyone can serve," Coolidge. "That is really not the case if you have age barriers."

The agency offered four extra projects for kids during spring break week. Children packaged toys, clothes and other goods for agencies that serve disadvantaged youth; they cleaned and prepared used books for low-income families; and they will sort food for the Oregon Food Bank today.

Parents and children committed about 90 minutes to the Love Letters for Seniors project Wednesday, producing scores of cards. The children have no idea how big of an impact they have on the seniors who receive their cheerful cards, said Julie Piper Finley, spokeswoman for Loaves & Fishes.

"Our seniors will get this wonderful handmade card from a child," she said. "You would be amazed how much that will brighten their day."

Like the other kid-friendly volunteer projects this week, Love Letters quickly filled with nine parents and 20 children, said Lisa Nelson, who contracted with Hands On to help organize volunteer activities for kids.

"It shows the demand out there of families wanting to teach their kids the value of helping others," she said.

Andy Fort, 38, of Southeast Portland, the only dad among the volunteers, said he and his son, Noah, have collected food, helped out at a homeless shelter and done other community service together.

"I just think it is good for him to get a glimpse of things outside of his world," he said. Rashmi Nath, 36, an Intel manager who lives in Northwest Portland, said she searched hard to find a service that could include her two children, ages 3 and 6.

"This is the first in which I could actually bring the kids," she said. "I just wanted to get the kids involved early in the concept of doing something for the community."



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Hands on Greater Portland volunteers created cards for senior citizens over spring break.

Hayley Jones of Southwest Portland, said she participated in the card project because she wants to replicate it for middle school students at Oregon Episcopal School, where she's an eighth grader.

"I really enjoy crafts, and it seems like a good way to get middle school students involved," she said, as she cut out a flower for her card.

Beside her was her friend, Quinlan Nielson, 13, of Southeast Portland, working on a card that beamed "Sending you smiles."

"It feels good to do community service," Nielson said.

--**Bill Graves**

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