

Champlin Park community reaches out to help its own

Wednesday, December 8th, 2010

Little did Champlin Park High School (CPHS) Guidance Counselor Amy Harnack know that when she was asked to be the school's homeless liaison, she would spark a movement that is bringing a community together.



"As I started meeting with students who are homeless, I began to see that they had so many immediate needs I couldn't help them with," Harnack said. Harnack realized that the "internship program does a food drive and the National Honor Society has a hygiene drive, but those items were being sent to people outside our community. I thought we should collect things and distribute them to people within our community."

From that idea was born "The Shelf." Located in a conference room near Harnack's office in House I, The Shelf has everything from food to paper products to school supplies.

"At first it was called 'The Shed,'" Harnack said, "but I purchased shelving and found myself saying, 'take what's on the shelf.' It just seemed easier."

To get The Shelf up and running, the Student Council raised \$600 through "Champlin for Change," Target donated school supplies and first hour classes held a competition to see who could bring in the most items. The winner received a pizza party. Special education students have been working to rehab school supplies for reuse.

[Channel 12](#) and the *Brooklyn Park Sun Post* ran stories that caught the community's attention. The Shelf will receive more attention in January when KARE 11 comes to the school for a story to be broadcast Jan. 27.

"There was a big 'ah ha' moment for parents who call and say they didn't know this was going on in their community and that there are families in poverty," Harnack said. "I've received a lot of calls from parents and community members who wanted to know how they can give. Knowing that what they donate goes back to their own community makes a difference."

After seeing the story on Channel 12, someone who lives outside the community gave a cash donation. In addition to accepting cash donations, Harnack is accepting used cell phones that she will sell. The cash from donations and sale of cell phones will be used for a "Random Act of Kindness Account" to buy specific things for students, such as coats.

Harnack said word is getting out about The Shelf and students will pop into her office and ask if they can use The Shelf.

"We give them a bag and let them know they can take whatever their families need," Harnack said. "They don't have to drive anywhere or show ID, it's all here at school."

Harnack has also put the word out to teachers that if they notice a student needs school supplies to send them to The Shelf because "it's not just for homeless students, it's for the whole school community."

Harnack said she would like other schools in the district to entertain the thought of starting their own Shelf.

"There are needy families in every school that don't have the transportation they need to get somewhere and having something like this in a school is just easier for them to access," she said.

"Recycling is another thing all schools can do. At the end of the school year we are going to set up bins for students to put their school supplies in instead of just throwing them away. We will take what's

useful and give it to students who cannot afford school supplies in the fall. So many families can be served by recycling."

Anyone interested in donating to The Shelf can drop off donations at the CPHS House I Office or send checks made out to "Champlin Park High School" with "The Shelf" written in the memo line to Harnack at CPHS, 6025 109th Ave. N. Champlin, MN 55316.