

NO DINNER IN THE DARK FOR NEEDY FAMILY

By Conner Hammett • Wednesday, February 16, 2011



Photo courtesy of the Goddard School - Jack, Katie, Ethan, Chloe, Kiehl and Havi hold flowers while waiting to welcome the family whose apartment they helped furnish. The Goddard School in Allen launched a campaign in the fall to furnish an apartment at the Samaritan Inn's Gateway Apartments for a homeless family.

A local family in need of a place to stay got a little help from their friends this year — even if they didn't know what those friends looked like until Saturday.

Parents and students from the Goddard School®, an early-childhood education center near Exchange and Angel parkways, have been working to help furnish an apartment for a needy family at the Samaritan Inn's Gateway Apartments, a 20-unit complex designed to help transition families and individuals from the homeless shelter to independence.

On Saturday, the mother and her 11-year-old son moved in, and their sponsors were there to welcome them with flowers, Valentine's chocolates and a fully furnished home.

"We tried to keep dry eyes in the house, and we did pretty good, but she was so excited," said Amanda Snowman, owner of the Allen Goddard School. "She bought us a cake to thank us for moving her in, and her son was really excited, too. They were just very appreciative. It was amazing."

The apartment was furnished over the course of several months by Goddard School parents, teachers and students. Each classroom took on a room in the apartment to furnish, bringing couches, bed frames, kitchen tables, shower curtains and night lights into the apartment.

The families also fully stocked the kitchen cupboard and refrigerator shortly before the family's arrival.

"We wanted to make it feel like a home, and I think it really feels like a home," Snowman said.

The project started last fall when Ashley Ebarb, president of the Allen Goddard School's parent association, needed to get rid of some furniture but wanted to see it put to good use at the Samaritan Inn's Gateway Apartments, which relies on donations for furniture. From there, the idea was taken on as part of the school's Goddard Good Deeds campaign, which has helped the Samaritan Inn and St. Jude's Children's Hospital through various fundraising projects in past years.

To raise money for the items that could not be donated, like foodstuff and linens, the school took on various fundraising activities, including garage sales, with items donated by parents, and a fall cakewalk. Combined, the two events netted more than \$200.

“What’s cool about this is, when they move out of the apartment, they take everything with them, so it’s not like they have to start everything from scratch again,” Snowman said. “They take that ownership of the furniture.”

Erin Dunn, a Goddard School parent, was charged with stocking the apartment’s kitchen with paper products, baking dishes, knives and plates.

“Knowing how much we have, it was great to be able to give it directly to someone as opposed to just donating it to the Salvation Army and not knowing where it’s going to end up,” Erin said. “So it was great to have that kind of direct interaction and to know who it was going to help and the immediate reaction they’re going to get from it and the use they’re going to get from it.”

Erin’s daughter, 2-year-old Cassidy, made no bones about what her biggest concern for the family was.

“Those people have no lamps,” Cassidy said. “They would eat their dinner in the dark.”

The Goddard School is a franchise of education-based, private preschools. The school’s lead teachers, who all have education degrees, focus on language arts, foreign languages, creative arts, sciences and cognitive skills with a philosophy of “learning through play,” allowing students to explore these and other subjects with teacher help. The Samaritan Inn, located in McKinney, was established in 1984 and is the largest homeless program in Collin County.

Will Smith, director of the Allen Goddard School, said the school wants to educate children beyond the classroom by impacting the community.

“We want to teach the kids that they do make a difference, and we want to be a part of the community so that we’re influencing, we’re helping shape not just today but every other day,” he said.