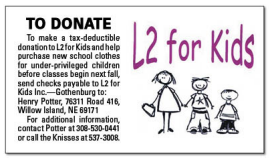

L2 for Kids leaders hope donations will influence more lives

Think about the spring a new pair of shoes adds to your step the first time you wear them.

How about the confidence from a whole new outfit?

Now imagine how you would feel getting shoes and brand new clothes for the very first time.

It's a feeling Henry Potter has shared with hundreds of under-privileged children over his years of building L2 for Kids across central Nebraska.

Now local board members hope monetary donations will help it spread to those in need in the Gothenburg area.

Faye and Jack Kniss got to know Potter through their church. They were drawn to L2 for Kids because of the opportunity it provides them to make a difference in children's lives.

They have since become leaders for Gothenburg's L2 program. Faye is president of the local board, which Jack serves on as well.

"L2 stands for Lazarus in the Bible," Faye said. "Just like Jesus gave Lazarus a second chance, we're giving children a second chance with new clothes for the first day of school."

Where it began

L2 for Kids is a non-profit corporation that started more than 10 years ago when Potter and his wife, Pat, lived in Elsie.

Potter mentored a troubled child then and was amazed at the excitement the child showed when Potter purchased him new clothes.

The idea caught on and the non-profit organization expanded beyond Perkins County to McCook, Gothenburg and other Dawson County communities.

What it does

Following an application process done through local churches, families are screened by board members to verify need, Jack said.

Then monetary donations received from churches, businesses, organizations and individuals provide the funds to take the children on a once-a-year shopping trip to buy school clothes.

Often, Potter said, it is the first time the children have chosen new clothes and shoes.

“These are kids who have never known anything other than hand-me-downs or thrift store clothes,” he said.

HENRY POTTER

FAYE KNISS

JACK KNISS

Faye emphasized that the program is designed for elementary and high school students, not parents, and it provides only clothing and shoes, not backpacks, coats or school supplies.

“We want to work with other programs but we don’t want to overlap what they’re doing,” Faye said.

How it helps

Application forms are available at the First Baptist, American Lutheran, Evangelical Free, First United Methodist and Trinity Lutheran churches.

Once the confidential application is approved, Potter or another local board member will arrange a shopping trip with the family to Wal-mart or another approved shopping center.

Children are allowed to choose their own suitable clothing including pants, shirts, belts, shoes, light jackets and even pajamas, if needed.

Between $75 and $125 is allowed per child, depending on age, and that generally provides more than one complete outfit.

Last year, Potter said, 66 children received clothing throughout the L2 program, 30 in the Gothenburg area.

“One little girl came up to me in church and wanted me to see that she was wearing her new clothes,” Jack said. “It makes your heart smile.”

L2 for Kids wants to double the number of children served this fall, Faye said, but it all depends on donations.

“If people just look at the things they spend their money on and ask themselves, ‘Do I really need to spend this $10 on junk?’” Faye said. “They could give that money to L2 and help provide some kids new clothes.”

All donations received locally are used to buy clothing specifically for Gothenburg children, Faye said. Each community involved has their own board which follows the overall non-profit organization’s bylaws.

The impact

Children who feel good about themselves and don’t stick out in a crowd because of what they’re wearing find more success in the classroom, Potter said.

“These kids’ eyes just light up,” he said. “They walk a little taller and they’re just so proud. It carries over into their school work.”