Back-to-School Shopping at Arlington Boys & Girls Club

Lauren Duddy knows 'her' kids

By Jennifer Goodwin | Aug 20, 2019 9:53 am ET

This post was contributed by a community member.

Lauren Duddy helps Daniel Saravia-Malena choose a backpack (Arlington Boys & Girls Club)

The children trickle into the cramped administrative office with their school supply list crumpled in their sweaty hands. They range in age from preschool through high school.
Sometimes the kids are accompanied by their parent or a friend, oftentimes they are gingerly and lovingly ushered in by the warm and caring Lauren Duddy. Lauren is a Program Coordinator at the Arlington Boys & Girls Club (The Club). For the fourth year she operates a back-to-school supply shopping program for the members whereby kids are able to “shop” for all of their school supplies from new supplies donated entirely by private contributions. Kevin Flood, Assistant Director at the Club states, “Our Back-to-School supply shopping program is an amazing initiative made possible due to the generosity and continued support of our many friends in the Arlington community and beyond. As the saying goes, ‘it takes a village’.” The program has grown considerably over the years.

The kids have a real shopping experience, able to choose their own backpack, lunchbox, pencil box, highlighters, notebooks, binders, folders, markers, pencils, etc. from a dazzling array of colors and patterns. Some kids are exuberant and some are quiet and in awe. They just can’t believe the Club is providing everything they need for back to school. They understand what a help this program is to their family. The quiet thank yous or the quick hug make Lauren’s day.

Delivery day is like Christmas morning in the office. When Lauren opens the mountains of boxes that contain all of the supplies, she squeals with delight in anticipation of the delighted looks on the faces of the kids. Lauren takes great pains to ensure that the “store” is stocked with everything the kids could possibly need to be prepared for school. She carefully selects each item to include in the online wish list. Eighty-five kids have already shopped. Lauren hopes that another forty or so will stop in before school opens.

Lauren knows these kids inside and out. She knows their wants, their needs, their preferences and their style. “In 2016, one of ‘my’ kids was at risk of graduating high school. I quickly learned that his poor math performance was due to a lack of school supplies – he didn’t have a calculator. From that year on I was determined to make sure
that all Club kids have what they need to succeed. “, Lauren says.

Lauren selects Unicorn lunchboxes she knows will please a few of the girls and brand name backpacks that will appeal to others. Lauren works with each child individually during his/her shopping experience ensuring that every child receives undivided attention. She makes each child feel so special. If there is an item on their back-to-school supply list that she doesn’t have on hand in the Club, Lauren will order it or run out to Staples to make sure that the child has every item he/she needs.

Lauren’s goal is to help each child succeed. She understands that having new school supplies, just like their classmates do, is important for success in the classroom. The 2018 Kids In Need Foundation School Supply Impact Survey of more than 12,000 teachers nationwide shows that when kids have new school supplies of their own: 1) grades, classroom behavior, and engagement improve; 2) self-esteem increases and 3) attitudes toward school and learning strengthen. The ABGC does an incredible job of helping each child to realize their full potential as productive, responsible and caring citizens.