

COMMUNITY, NEWS FEED

Passing the Torch



Left to right: Jason, Jude, and Jason Summa with Officer Jackson Center.

Chaldean Youth carry forward a

tradition of giving

By Sarah Kittle

For Chaldean families, charity is not just an act of kindness; it is a way of life. Growing up in Iraq, Chaldean children witnessed firsthand how their parents would open their homes to those in need, whether by sharing food, offering financial support, or organizing community events for the less fortunate. The concept of helping others transcended material wealth; it was about offering love, compassion, and support during difficult times.

After emigrating to the United States and other countries, Chaldean parents continued to emphasize these values. As new generations grew up in diverse environments, they carried the lessons of generosity learned from their parents. Whether by volunteering at local shelters, participating in community fundraisers, or supporting charitable organizations in Iraq and the diaspora, Chaldean youth have embraced a deep-rooted ethos of giving.

The sense of philanthropy among Chaldean youth is not limited to financial donations; it is also reflected in time and effort. Many are actively involved in local initiatives, from mentoring younger generations to organizing food drives and healthcare campaigns. Their commitment to giving back, both locally and globally, reflects the enduring legacy of their parents' teachings.

Ava Elia is a sophomore at Detroit Country Day. She is the cofounder and vice president of the school's Chaldean American Student Alliance (CASA). When her brother Alex took a school trip

to volunteer at an under-resourced school in the heart of Detroit, what he saw there inspired the siblings to create a new kind of non-profit.

“Witnessing the contrast between the resources I had always taken for granted and the limited materials available to these students was shocking, to say the least,” said Alex. “It inspired me to take action and ultimately led to creating Spark 313, a non-profit dedicated to empowering metro Detroit youth by addressing educational inequalities.”

Spark 313 partners with United Way to provide essential learning tools like notebooks, books, and writing supplies to underserved schools in Detroit. The siblings started from scratch, building a website and using social media to spread the word. They raised over \$6,000 in just one week, demonstrating their commitment to the cause and securing their partnership with United Way.

“I’ve always believed in the importance of helping others, especially kids who don’t have the same opportunities we’ve had,” Ava said. “Spark 313 has allowed me to make a direct impact and knowing we’re helping kids feel prepared and confident in their education keeps us motivated.”

Jason Gumma, a senior at University of Detroit Jesuit High School, embodies the school’s motto of being a “Man for Others.” He’s involved in various philanthropic efforts, including tutoring students at Christ the King Elementary and volunteering at Trinity Health Oakland and St. Thomas Chaldean Church.

“Whether it’s organizing food and clothing drives, mentoring youth, or assisting in parish events, I have developed a deep

connection to my faith and a strong commitment to uplifting others,” Jason said.

He and his younger brothers Jude and Jonan, a sophomore and freshman respectively at Brother Rice, recently spearheaded a fundraising campaign that raised over \$3,000 to assemble and distribute more than 150 first aid kits to local schools, businesses, and organizations. These recipients included local day cares, elementary and high schools, police stations, restaurants, banks, and gas stations.

“We wanted to do something that could make a real difference in our community,” said Jason. “These first aid kits are a small step toward helping local businesses and organizations be prepared for emergencies, and we’re proud to contribute in this way.”

Our goal was to bring people together by showing how small efforts can have a big impact,” said Jude. “By giving these kits to places like the police station, we hope to build a safer and stronger community.”

“This project is about more than just first aid kits,” added Jonan. “It’s about taking action and showing that everyone can play a role in helping others. We’re grateful for the support we’ve received and hope this inspires others to give back, too.”

These kids are inspiring everyone. Officer Josh Center of the Bloomfield Hills Police Department said, “Their initiative in creating and distributing first aid kits reflects a remarkable commitment to our community. These young men are not just helping others, they’re setting a powerful example of leadership, compassion, and responsibility that inspires us all.”

Jason is also the founder of a teen chapter of Project ADAM, a Michigan-based initiative that has equipped over 100 high schools with defibrillators and raised awareness about sudden cardiac arrest. As captain of his school's varsity hockey team, he has learned resilience, discipline, and how to motivate others toward a shared goal.

“My experience as a leader, volunteer, and global learner have not only strengthened my character but also fueled my drive to make a tangible, lasting impact in my community and beyond,” shared Jason. “These combined efforts have shaped me into a person dedicated to serving others with integrity, compassion, and purpose.”

Jordyn Farida's uncle was diagnosed with leukemia at a time when COVID restricted visitation to hospitals. The family was not allowed to visit, and they felt helpless. “I wanted to do something that would make a difference and let him know we support him,” said Jordyn. “Seeing him persevere through his struggles and beat cancer inspired me to give back to my community by helping others who were also affected by cancer.”

Jordyn had already established a cookie baking company, providing treats for graduation parties and baby showers. To maximize profits, her family stepped in to lend a hand. “My mom helped me reach people in our community using social media and taking orders and my brother helped me deliver them,” said Jordyn. Together, they created Jojo's Sweet Eats, a non-profit that raises money for the Leukemia Lymphoma Society of Michigan.

“Growing up, I saw how my family would always go out of their

way to help others, whether it was relatives, friends, or even strangers,” said Jordyn. “That sense of generosity made me want to be involved in my community and give back. It also taught me that giving isn’t just about money—it’s about time, effort, and making people feel like they belong.

“When we raise money, it doesn’t just go into a fund—it helps real patients and families who are going through really tough times,” explained Jordyn. “At events, you meet survivors, like my uncle, who tell you how much the support means to them, and that’s when it hits you: what we’re doing actually matters. It’s not just about raising money; it’s about giving people hope and showing them they’re not alone.”

Reese Bacall is a student at St. Mary’s Preparatory. She and another student named Sorelle Yono co-founded the Community Care Club (CCC) at their school and dedicated it to helping others in the community, or as Reese put it, “We work hard to coordinate with various local organizations to help the less fortunate.”

What does that look like? Collecting scarves, mittens, hats and coats to distribute during the cold winter months, assembling and delivering meals to shelters, or providing feminine hygiene products or baby items to mothers and children in need are all examples of what this club does. If a local or national emergency occurs, these students immediately convene to see how they can assist.

“We are so blessed in life, and I feel it is our duty to help those who are in need,” explained Reese. “Any act of kindness and compassion that can have a lasting impact is not only beneficial

for the other person but also for us as humans...and society as a whole.”

CCC has already helped dozens of people stay warm this winter, and Reese hopes the club continues to inspire future generations to serve the community. “I pray it inspires our teens/students to not only join but to keep it alive by donating and continuing to take leadership long after we graduate to help those in need in our community,” she said. “Every person’s contribution makes a difference.”

The best part about these kids’ philanthropy is it invites others to help, too. Even the people who buy Jordyn’s cookies can feel good about helping. With 313 Spark, Ava said, “We raise funds through websites like GoFundMe and partner with members of the community to both assemble and distribute these kits. It’s been truly amazing to see the difference even this small act of kindness can make.

“Within the Chaldean community, we’ve seen families step up to volunteer and contribute to our cause, showing how our culture thrives on helping others,” Ava went on. “Beyond our community, we’ve witnessed the smiles and gratitude of kids and parents who receive the kits. These moments remind us why we started this project and show us that even small efforts can bring change to people’s lives.”

Jason Gumma put it this way, “Growing up, I saw firsthand how Chaldeans always came together to support one another, through small acts of kindness or larger efforts to support those in need. Our tight-knit culture has shaped my approach to giving back,

emphasizing the importance of a community-driven approach to make a lasting impact.”

This spirit of philanthropy continues to thrive in the Chaldean community, with each generation playing a vital role in sustaining the culture of charity and compassion. The legacy of giving, rooted in the traditions of Iraqi Christianity, has inspired a new generation to not only care for their own but to extend a hand to those in need, ensuring that the heart of the Chaldean spirit remains strong and vibrant for years to come.

What would these young philanthropists say to the next generation about doing good?

Don’t wait for the perfect moment, just start,” advised Ava. “Begin by finding a cause you care about, maybe through personal experience or hearing moving stories, and think about small ways you can contribute.

“Surround yourself with supportive people who share your vision. Most importantly, don’t be afraid to ask for help or advice. As with anything, challenges will come, but with passion and persistence, you can overcome them. Most importantly, remember that every effort counts, and even small actions can make a huge difference in someone’s life.”

Jordyn Farida agrees, and added, “Don’t be afraid to ask for help or team up with friends, because it’s way easier and more fun when you work together. And most importantly, don’t underestimate what you can do. Even if you’re young, your efforts can make a big difference.”

“The perfect moment doesn’t exist,” added Alex. “You have to take the first step and figure out the rest as you go.”



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