

Helping Hands of St. Louis distributes free winter clothes

By Ellie Buerk / The Blade

Photo by Amy E. Voigt / The Blade

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Nearly 30 racks of coats in all sizes and colors were lined up neatly alongside overflowing bins of hats, gloves, and socks outside 443 Sixth St. in East Toledo on Saturday morning.

A long line of families stretched down the block as they waited their turn to shop through the kaleidoscope of options.

Amy Primo and her son Landon smiled when after the wait, they were able to find matching bright colored hats. Landon carried with him a small stuffed Grinch, already prepared for Christmas, just around the corner.

Helping Hands of St. Louis was forced to adapt its annual “Winter Coat Fest,” which historically has been indoors, to accommodate coronavirus restrictions. Social distancing was enforced and everyone who attended wore masks. A hand washing station was set up nearby the coat racks.

The event began at 9 a.m. and lasted until noon.

Sue Shrewsbury, Helping Hands’ director, said she was pleased with the turnout.

“We never really know how many people are going to show up, but I’m really glad so many came,” Ms. Shrewsbury said.

In the past, she said the organization has given away up to 600 coats.

Ms. Shrewsbury said the organization is always in need of food donations and also specifically needs men’s clothes.

“Men’s jeans, men’s tennis shoes, men’s belts,” she said. “Especially anything that is extra-large, including 2X, 3X, or 4X.”



She added that Helping Hands could also use donations of blankets, bedding, and towels.

Cynthia Villarreal, the charity's clothing manager, said the organization takes donations throughout the year and stores winter coats and other warm clothing in preparation for the upcoming cold season.

"We probably had about close to 100 large garbage bags full of coats that we stored away," she said of 2020's inventory.

This year, Helping Hands invited several other organizations, including Susie's Coats, Hannah's Socks, and Bags of Love, to participate.

"The definition of collaboration is working toward a common goal," Susan Perry, the founder of Susie's Coats, said, adding that each organization had merged its inventory in order to make sure every family received what they needed.

In addition to the brand new coats provided by Ms. Perry's group, Debbi Lechner, a board member for Bags of Love, spent the morning passing out colorful drawstring bags. They were packed with toys, snacks, and puzzles for the children who passed by her table.

Most families exited the parking lot with bags full of warm clothing.

Skeeter Kellerbauer was no exception. She had arrived roughly 45 minutes before the start of the event, anticipating that many families would come. Along with her came Trinity, 8, and Bella Rose, 9, her granddaughters. Ms. Kellerbauer said she wanted them to be able to pick out exactly what they needed.

"It means a lot to us," Ms. Kellerbauer said. "Some people can't afford it. We really appreciate what they do."

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