

Storage unit history – Where to start? How about at the beginning in 2006!!

Meredith club members joined forces with the Laconia Altrusa Club to learn more about how we could help children in need – more specifically – foster children & families. Some of the members on the joint committee were Sally Porter, Linda Foster, Ceil Andrews, Paula Trombi, Hilda Schmidt, Denise Doyle, Diane Skilling, Donna Buletti, Jodi Wilson, and myself from Meredith, (forgive me if I left someone out), and Laura Cameron, Penny Franciosi, Sue Clauson, Kathy Morin, Shirley Mento, Judi Shaw and Brenda Tillotson from Laconia. (These names are according to my 2006-2007 e-mail notes. We have had other members from both clubs cycle in and out over the years for sure!!!)

One of the first and most gratifying projects this group jumped on in 2006 was to provide “emergency bags” based on a list of essentials provided to us by DCYF/ DHHS. Each “club” shopped for bags (gender specific). The budget was \$300 per club for 5 “bags”. These emergency bags were used when the police received a call regarding domestic violence where young children were involved and had to be removed from the home temporarily – many in the middle of the night – and moved to a safe house (usually a foster family that had agreed to participate). The “emergency bags” were quite simply a (new) large durable laundry bag filled with “essentials” (toothbrush, toothpaste, complete set of (twin) sheets, hair brush, cream, deodorant, photo album, etc. and of course some type of teddy bear or stuffed animal to call their own. We did this in 2006 and 2007. In 2008 we added “infant” emergency as well. At some point in 2008 this project was taken over by one of the church groups in Laconia and our committee moved on, providing essential furniture items for foster children aging out of the system. Our first was a young girl where we helped to outfit her apartment with furniture (kitchen table & chairs, coffee table, dishes/glasses, kitchen utensils, pots and pans, blankets for her bed and for the crib (handmade by one of our members!), complete baby layette from Baby Threads, and other baby clothing - some from the Etcetera Shop – and of course diapers & diapers that the committee purchased!

For several years this committee also provided Christmas gift cards for the 17 and 18 year old foster teens – each club provided \$50 gift certificates for 5 teens purchased from the Tilton Mall so they would have a nice variety of stores to do their shopping!

2008 was also the first of 3 annual picnics provided by this committee. Thanks to the generosity of our own Helen Robinson these picnics were held at Helen’s beautiful Camp Wulamat on the shores of Newfound Lake in Bristol. This picnic was held in early June and offered a beautiful setting for foster families, their care-givers and family support workers from DCYF and DHHS to join together for a day of relaxation, caring and sharing. The committee (and a few husbands) provided hot dogs, (veggi-burgers as needed), salads, desserts (donated by many, many club members) and drinks. Each event also included free books – courtesy of the Literacy committee of both clubs and one year we even had a huge assortment of brand new sweat shirts, fancy tee shirts, shorts, hats, etc., donated by Walmart and sorted and transported by Judi Shaw!!

2008 also saw the beginning of the “back to school backpack” project with an average of 35 to 40 backpacks gathered and assembled for donation each year for several years.

In 2008 the committee was able to line up a storage unit, located in Meredith, donated by Four Seasons Storage courtesy of Roger Nash. This storage unit was a huge help allowing members to clean out what they had been storing in attics, garages and cellars to one central location for easy access as needed! The committee even placed signs at local nursing homes “advertising” the fact that we would accept items if a loved one was going to downsize or relocate (and yes, we did get a call!)

During 2007 thru 2009, new members joined the committee – Shirley Currier, Lisa Davis, Katt Stewart – to name a few and I am sure I may have missed some – but you get the idea!!

In 2010, Laconia's Judi Shaw again spearheaded the back to school backpack project where we all gathered at Judi's house to assemble 41 backpacks donated to DHHS for distribution. Sadly, it was about this time that our warm and wonderful Judi began to experience recurring symptoms and was taken from us on February 2, 2011.

In 2011 the work of the Meredith and Laconia joint foster care committee experienced some changes and downsizing. The committee did meet to discuss their purpose and by vote agreed that while the committee started out with the focus on "foster children and families", they agreed that their storage unit resources should be put to good use to help all families in need. While Laconia members did provide items for the storage unit, it was agreed that after all items were sold in the 2012 yard sale, the proceeds from those items would be divided and Laconia was sent a financial "settlement". In 2012, Meredith club members, Lisa Davis, Betsy Raffaele, Robin Woodaman and myself traveled to Spaulding Youth Center to provide chili and the fixings for 100+- foster families and members of DCYF and DHHS! Laconia could not join us as the date was so close to their own Taste of the Lakes and they were understandably "flat out". However, they did "join us" by providing financial support from their final joint storage unit yard sale proceeds. This event continues at Spaulding Youth Center each year in mid-May and our club through the Community Service Committee, continues to provide financial support in place of "hands on" help – in that it now happens on the same weekend as our yard sale!

Your storage unit continues to provide furniture and household goods for families in need whenever we have what is needed - we receive requests from folks like Erin Klasen, Family Support Manager, located on North Main St., Laconia, with the Family Resource Center of Central New Hampshire as well as of course our own local Town Welfare Offices – or just word of mouth.

Late in 2012 the storage unit provided furniture to a fireman from Campton and father of 6 that had just recently been disabled and had to relocate. He had just received housing in Laconia and needed most everything and virtually cleaned out the unit – which was a good thing!! Recently, we have not had many items in storage (other than dishes and pots and pans and glasses which we generally always have some of on hand and "fun & pretty" things – good for yard sales – not especially helpful to someone that has nothing). Items most requested are bed frames, bureaus, small tables, lamps, microwaves, dishes, etc. (We do not do TV's. Also, we do not do mattresses – we refer them to St Vincent DePaul). However, due to the yard sale "spark", we have accumulated a nice assortment of bureaus, small tables, bed frames, etc. Some will of course be used in the yard sale, with selected practical items remaining in the storage unit for what it was intended...families in need!

So, if you see Roger or Ellen Nash, please say thank you! (Oh, and Roger is very hard of hearing - so be sure to speak up!! – but don't you DARE tell him that Sylvia said that!!) A letter/card is nice - but never replaces that special Altrusa warmth!