

Antioch woman helps clothe kids

Fisher helps families in need by providing clothing, toiletries, etc.

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When Lisa Fisher learned a student in her school, WC Petty Elementary in Antioch, had fallen on hard times and was in need of basic necessities, she began anonymously supplying the child with clothing, outerwear and other supplies. That was the beginning of the Antioch Traveling Closet, a nonprofit organization that Fisher founded, which gives away clothing, toiletries and other items to needy families several times a year.

"It made me feel horrible that this was happening in my town and it didn't sit well with me," she said. "This girl was the same age as my daughter and I wanted to help her. It was really bothering me and I wanted to do something to help."

For a few more years, Fisher did the same for several other students in the school, where she works as a teacher's aide. Eventually, it came to a point when the school would call Fisher whenever a student needed clothing or school supplies. Once her colleagues and friends discovered she was helping children, they would drop off donations at her Antioch home.

Word spread through word of mouth and social media, and the donations kept growing and growing outside her house. Fisher officially formed the Antioch Traveling Closet in 2014, which held its first public giveaway in August of that year and served



Photo provided

WC Petty Elementary School teacher's aide Lisa Fisher helps families in need in Antioch. Fisher founded the nonprofit Antioch Traveling Closet in 2014. The organization, run out of her home, offers giveaways three times a year.

about 35 families. The organization holds three giveaways each year, in April, August and December at the Antioch Senior Center. There, families can choose clothing, shoes, toiletries and cleaning supplies, and can get a free haircut courtesy of local hairstylists who partici-

pate in the event. At the most recent event in August, more than 350 people attended. Fisher said while she's seeing more families who come from other towns, most people who attend are from Antioch. "It makes me sort of sad because so many people in my community need this. I see a

lot of kids at my school there," she said. "To see a second-grader get excited about getting new socks makes you appreciate what you have more."

Local businesses are beginning to get involved with the giveaways.

Fisher said she gets toilet paper donations from Gillespie Ford in Gurnee, and local dentists donate toothbrushes. But she couldn't put on a giveaway without the help of volunteers, including local high school students. Fisher said it takes her hours and hours to sort through all the donations that are usually left at her home, and at least one full day to set up tables before a giveaway.

"It's tiring but after it's over you're so happy. Just seeing these people get excited about toilet paper and soap puts things into perspective," she said. "It takes a village to raise a child and I'm glad Antioch is my village because we have so many people willing to help. People love to give back to their town and they want to help their neighbor. They know their donations stay in this town."

And while Fisher is quick to praise the community and volunteers for making her organization a success, residents are just as proud of her.

Jay Jozwiak, an Antioch Traveling Closet board member, said Fisher is the most giving person he's ever met.

"Lisa's dedication and commitment to help people of all ages, which includes many seniors, is non-negotiable," Jozwiak said. "This has been a passion of Lisa's from day one. It is very rewarding for Lisa to see the kids come to the giveaways and pick their own clothing. When the kids come to

school they are very excited to show her their new clothing and haircuts. It really changes their attitude because they are now looking like their classmates."

Fisher grew up in Cicero, but later moved to Antioch and graduated from Antioch Community High School.

She is married to Joe, and together they have two children, 11-year-old Jazzy and 9-year-old Colin.

Fisher has been working as a second-grade teacher's aide at WC Petty this year, but the past two years, she worked with students in all grades so she got to know many of the children at the school.

"I love working with kids. I give each kid who walks through that door in the morning a high-five because you never know what situation they're coming from," she said. "I like being able to make them smile, and if I can bring a smile to their face, it makes me feel good. I'd like to think I'm making a difference in people's lives. I can see it in the kids and my school and I see families around town who smile and thank me. I just want to make sure everyone is clothed and taken care of."

One day, Fisher hopes to be able to open a location for Antioch Traveling Closet where she can have her own space to collect donations and sort through them, and be able to hold giveaways more frequently.

"This has really exploded in the past two years, so I'd love to be able to have my own place so we wouldn't have to pack and unpack and store everything," she said. "I can't say for sure that it will happen, but I'd love to have that as an option. Doing this has humbled me and my children."

Thank you!

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