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Sammie helps kids in need

Children in crisis have a friend in 10-year-old girl

By MONA SLOAN
For The Salinas Californian

At 10 years old, Samantha Dilbeck of Prunedale has long known the joys of giving. Today, an organization based in north Salinas does plenty of giving in her name.

Ever since Samantha, known as "Sammie," was a baby, her family had a tradition of donating any clothing or toys she had outgrown to children in need. Sammie's parents, Erick and Tiffany Dilbeck, said they chose the Monterey County Department of Social and Employment Services' Child Protective Services division as the beneficiary because they knew their items would go directly to children that needed immediate help.

▼ ADVERTISEMENT ▼ "It was after one special Eastertime donation that Sammie was very touched," her mother said. "Sammie was 6 years old at the time and she didn't want to leave. She just kept asking if we could do more."

The Prunedale Elementary School fourth grader's insistence on helping prompted her mother to schedule a meeting with the head of the county's Family and Children's Services. The Dilbecks told her about Sammie's wish and asked how they could help.

That meeting led to the family obtaining a 501-(C)(3) non-profit corporation status in February, which provides recognition as a charitable organization. The time-consuming process ended just as the county found the perfect way for the family to help: the receiving center.

⊕ Zoom Photo



PROVIDED PHOTO

Samantha 'Sammie' Dilbeck gets a hug from her mother, Tiffany Dilbeck. The giraffe Sammie's holding is part of the filled backpack 'Sammie's Kids' gives children placed in child protective services.

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"The receiving center is where children are placed when they are removed from their homes," Tiffany Dilbeck said. "Although the center receives funding for necessities, there really isn't anything left for extras. That's where Sammies Kids Foundation comes in."

When a child is placed in foster care, the receiving center calls the Dilbecks and shares information on the child's age, size and gender. Within 12 hours, the Dilbecks deliver a care package for each child.

Children up to age 10 receive a backpack with a change of clothing, pajamas, blanket, nightlight and finally a stuffed toy - a giraffe - Sammie's favorite animal.

"Sammie said the older children are basically given the same items, except theirs will fit in a duffle bag," Dilbeck said.

Sammie helps the foundation as much as possible along with her siblings, 4-year-old twins Tristan and Mackenzie.

"If we get a call and Sammie is out of school, she will help with shopping, filling backpacks and delivery to the center," Tiffany Dilbeck said. "Sometimes we'll get a call regarding a child that may need more than what is included in the backpack; in that case we'll try to go above and beyond.

Because of confidentiality guidelines, the family never meets the children receiving the gifts.

To provide the gifts, the Dilbecks began soliciting donations through Sammie's Kids Foundation. The group is supported entirely by private and community donations.

"We've been up and running since February of this year and to date, have assisted over 200 children that have come through the center," Dilbeck said.

Dilbeck reaches out to friends and business associates for support through her business, Pacific Breeze in north Salinas, a salon she's owned since 2002 which features dry hydro massage beds, tanning beds, facials and pamper parties.

She also donates profits from parties and the shop's many retail items.

"Pacific Breeze is home to Sammie's Kids," Dilbeck said. "My father owns JCA Archery, an indoor shooting range located right next door. When parties are given, we open adjoining doors, and party guests can hop from target practice to a pampering party within a few short steps. Net proceeds go to Sammie's Kids Foundation and is a great way to raise money.

TO HELP

To share donations of toys, blankets and other items with Monterey County children entering foster care, contact the Sammie's Kids Foundation, in care of Pacific Breeze, 28-B Quail Run Circle. No. B, Salinas, 769-0355.

"I think it's a very worthwhile program and we're trying to get the word out that there is a need."

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