

Baylor social work staff stitches gift for orphans_11005

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Women from Baylor's School of Social Work sewed gifts for orphans in Ukraine rather than give each other gifts for Christmas. (Photo by Cliff Cheney)

Baylor social work staff stitches gift for orphans

By Julie Carlson

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WACO—Some babies and toddlers in the Ukraine soon will have some warm clothes for the winter, thanks to a group of women at Baylor University.

Rather than exchange Christmas presents with faculty in Baylor's School of Social Work, department staff members put to use their own sewing skills

to provide warm overalls to Ukrainian orphans through the program “Aid for Orphans.”

“Several of us struggled with what to give our faculty each year for Christmas,” said Linda Hardwick, administrative associate in the School of Social Work.

“As the faculty numbers grew, our business manager, Jeanie Fitzpatrick, came up with the idea of donating something to a non-profit service organization in honor of the social work faculty and let them know how much we appreciate them. Social workers have a passion for serving others and we felt they would probably appreciate an act of kindness rather than individually wrapped gifts.”

The staff made its first Christmas faculty tribute in 2000 with a donation to Meals on Wheels. Other projects have included purchasing books for Storybook Christmas, which provides books to underprivileged children; providing funds to a Baylor program that helps financially-strapped Baylor students purchase text books; and providing Angel Tree Christmas presents for underprivileged children.

But this was the first year the staff decided to tackle a “hands-on” project. Fitzpatrick recalled an e-mail faculty member Gaynor Yancey had sent earlier in the semester about the needs of orphans in the Ukraine.

“One of their needs was for people to sew little overalls for the babies to wear,” Hardwick said. “The staff got together and discussed about four or five options of what we wanted to do this year—sewing the overalls was one of them. We all voted by email and the Ukraine project was selected.”

“Aid for Orphans provides very specific construction details and the pattern for the overalls,” Fitzpatrick said. “When we got the hang of it, we could sew one overall in about an hour.”

Three staff members sewed, and the others cut patterns and pinned. The staff brought sewing machines to school so they could work during lunch breaks, and some took fabric home to work. All the staff journeyed to the fabric store to buy the needed material. The project was started the first week in December, with 35 overalls sewed by the week before Christmas.

At the department Christmas party, the staff presented the faculty with cards detailing the project and hung the overalls so they could show the fruits of their labor.

"I was overwhelmed with this gift. Nothing they could do would have brought more honor to us, than to know that babies will be cuddled in 35 flannel jumpers lovingly handmade by our staff," said Diana Garland, professor and chair of the School of Social Work.

"Every time I have gone for a cup of coffee the last few days and ducked under the clothesline where they hung the jumpers for us to see near our little kitchen, I have grinned, seeing their love for us displayed in such a visible way. They spent hours sewing these jumpers, giving up lunch hours and evenings, catching us totally by surprise, and giving us a gift that means so much because it says they know our heart."

"This has been a very rewarding project and a great shared experience," Fitzpatrick said. "It was fun to go together to buy the fabric, and those who didn't sew, still learned something. I think this will give us the courage to try more hands-on projects in future years."

Aid for Orphans provides assistance to the Antoshka and Kherson orphanages located in the Ukraine cities of Kramatorsk and Kherson. These orphanages are home to about 200 poorly dressed and malnourished babies and toddlers ages newborn to 4 years.

The babies in these Ukraine orphanages are typically dressed in easy-to-change overalls made from flannel, heavy cotton or lightweight denim.

The overalls look like footed one-piece outfits with ties at the shoulders or behind the neck. The overalls are worn with a short or long-sleeve shirt underneath, dependant on the season. To learn more about the project or Aid for Orphans, visit www.aidfororphans.org .

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