

## Ready Kids for School seeking supplies

By Pam Chickering Wilson Union staff writer | Posted: Friday, July 31, 2015 8:53 am

JEFFERSON — Over the past 13 years, Ready Kids for School has helped equip thousands and thousands of area children with the backpacks and school supplies they need to start off the year on the right foot.

And for the past four years, the Wisconsin Dream Center has piggybacked on that effort, offering needy families assistance in the form of health assessments, dental and vision screenings, haircuts, fresh-grown produce, family photos and more.

Volunteers for both organizations are making their final push ahead of this year's events, which both take place Aug 8, at separate locations. The Ready Kids for School distribution will run from 10 a.m. through 2 p.m. at the Jefferson County Fair Park Activity Center.

Wisconsin Dream Center's "Back to School Clinic" will run from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. the same day at its Jefferson location at 424 N. Sanborn Ave. in Jefferson.

Gail Slight, coordinator for Ready Kids for School, said that the school supplies charity got its start in 2002 as an outreach effort of Jefferson's Immanuel United Methodist Church.

It then expanded to other churches and, eventually, the church volunteers joined hands with Jefferson County Human Services to assure that the program reaches those it is designed to serve.

The distribution eventually got so big that the entire operation moved to the county fairgrounds.

The organization has served around 600 to 800 children per year since, last year benefiting more than 800 children, Slight said.

"It has grown over the years," she said. "It goes up and down a little bit but the general trend is up. There is a growing need."

Each qualifying student receives a new backpack plus all of the basic school supplies he or she needs for class: pencils, notebooks, folders, crayons, looseleaf paper, scissors, markers and more.

The charity currently is enlisting volunteers to help set up and to assist in walking each child through the lines as he or she selects the items on the class supplies list.

While the distribution does not start until 10 a.m., volunteers will be needed as of 7:30 a.m. to help set up the event. Volunteers also are being sought to take inventory and pack items away after the distribution has concluded.

Jefferson County Human Services coordinates the event, with volunteers and contributors coming from churches, businesses, government and civic organizations from across the county.

The program is designed to help families that are experiencing hardships, whose parents currently are unemployed or underemployed, and those in government programs. Participants must register ahead of time through the Human Services Department.

“If families have a caseworker, they work through them,” Slight said.

Slight said that the program has seen good support in past years from around the county. With the help of local individuals, businesses and organizations, the charity has fulfilled a vital need for families across Jefferson County who are struggling, she said.

The Ready Kids for School Committee begins its preparations for each year’s distribution in April, meeting every month to coordinate the event. On the day of the event, around 50 volunteers come out to assist students and their families.

There is no deadline for donations to the program. Most needed are monetary contributions which help coordinators purchase the most-needed items, following class supplies lists from each school.

Also welcome are contributions of basic school supplies, including new backpacks. The program does not give out hand sanitizer, whiteboards, candy or tissues.

The program is open to any child or teen in need attending any school district centered in Jefferson County or any homeschooler who resides within the county.

Applicants are asked to sign up ahead of time through Jefferson County Human Services or the Workforce Development Center. Preregistry makes the process more efficient and saves families time on the day of distribution, Slight said.

Having participants sign up in advance allows program coordinators to obtain the right quantity and type of supplies, which vary widely depending on the grade and school each student is entering.

If a qualifying family cannot make it to the official distribution, some exceptions are made through arrangement with the Workforce Development Center.

It is helpful if families can bring along the classroom school supply list from their child’s grade and school to assure they get exactly what they need.

To volunteer with Ready Kids for School, people may contact Lindsay or Meghan at the Workforce Development Center at these respective telephone numbers: (920) 675-4632 and (920) 675-4623.

It takes a lot of volunteers to make everything run smoothly, around 60 to 80 for the event, Slight said.

Monetary donations for Ready Kids for School are accepted year-round. Checks may be written to Ready Kids for School and sent to 201 E. Racine St., Jefferson, WI, 53549.

School supplies may be dropped off at the Jefferson County Human Services office at 874 Collins Road during office hours. Some of the most needed items include: pencil boxes, one-inch and 1 1/2-inch binders, pens, glue sticks, glue bottles and backpacks, although all most standard school supplies are accepted.

There will be a “Stuff the Bus” effort to collect donations at the Jefferson Walmart Supercenter on Saturday, Aug. 1.

For more information on the Wisconsin Dream Center and its back-to-school clinic, people may call (262)-893-8063 or visit the charity’s website at [www.wisconsindreamcenter.org](http://www.wisconsindreamcenter.org).

“We want to thank the community for their support of this program,” Slight said, adding a special thanks to all of the volunteers who donate their time to make the Ready Kids for School distribution days successful. She said the volunteers hear from participants that this effort really makes a difference for their families.

“School supplies can be really costly, especially for those with large families, and if they’re already struggling, it can be a real stress,” she said. “We can help children start out their school year on the right foot.”

### Back-to-School Clinic

Meanwhile, for the third year in a row, volunteers from the faith-based charity Wisconsin Dream Center also will be at the Ready Kids for School distribution to inform families of their free back-to-school clinic, which is taking place on the same day at a different location in Jefferson.

The back-to-school clinic, which will take place at 424 E. Sanborn Ave. in Jefferson, will provide free haircuts, free bikes or bike repairs, “ask-a-nurse” services, dental screenings, fresh produce, canned goods and essentials, individual/family portraits, new underwear and socks, a lunch on-site, and information on other community resources.

The 2015 Back-to-School Clinic is hosted by the Wisconsin Dream Center and CrossPointe Community Church.

The Wisconsin Dream Center is a Jesus-centered, faith-based organization that has grown out of the ministry of CrossPointe Community Church.

“Find a need and fill it; see a hurt and heal it” is the philosophy of the Dream Center, which serves a tri-county area year-round.

The ministry provides a whole spectrum of services, ranging from mentoring for single parents and returning citizens, one-on-one resume development and job search assistance, “Celebrate Recovery” for recovering drug and alcohol abusers or others suffering from dependencies, and more.

The nonprofit organization played a vital part in establishing the “Seeds of Hope” garden, where inmates from the Jefferson County Jail can work to grow vegetables, create positive links to the community, and provide for their families and the community at large.

In the next year, the Wisconsin Dream Center is preparing to launch an Immigration Center as well.

The Back-to-School Clinic, one of the major events of the year for the Dream Center, provides an opportunity for individuals and families to serve those in need in the local community and brings volunteers together from local churches, businesses, and community organizations to host a free clinic addressing the physical, medical and spiritual needs of local families.

“And we do all this on a budget of zero dollars and zero cents,” said Lori Sura, event director for the Wisconsin Dream Center.

“This clinic is a response to Jesus’ command to love our neighbors,” said Russ Walker, senior pastor at CrossPointe Community Church. “We live in a community where people have very real needs. We have a responsibility to care for those members of our community who are in need.

“We are called not only to love with words, but also through our actions,” he said. “Over the past four years, more than 1,800 individuals have gone through the Dream Center’s Back-to-School clinics and the organization is gearing up to serve even more people this year,” Sura said.

“The clinic would not be possible without all of the generous gifts we have received from local businesses, churches and professionals,” she added.

Building on the assistance offered on the same day by Ready Kids for School, the Wisconsin Dream Center’s Back-to-School Clinic will provide a variety of supplemental services to families, including health assessments, vision and dental screenings, individual and family portraits, and new underwear and socks for school-aged children.

All guests also will receive a free lunch, and there will be a variety of fun and enriching activities at the event.

“The day is about meeting people where they are in very real and tangible ways,” Sura said.

She said the Wisconsin Dream Center wants to help all families get their children ready for school. A haircut, new underwear and socks, and family photos are all steps toward that readiness.

“We want to make it a joy instead of a burden for families,” she said.

Sura emphasized that the clinic is free and open to everyone, regardless of whether they have students returning to school.

In addition to haircuts, photos and other related services, the Wisconsin Dream Center will have people on site to help families with babies through 3-year-olds, and the event will offer a wide variety of family friendly fun.

Representatives of the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office will be on site providing free fingerprinting for youngsters. There also will be bouncy houses, face-painting, and arts and crafts projects for youngsters.

“This is going to be a great day,” Sura said. “Needs will be met, fun will be had, and the community will be strengthened.”

The Wisconsin Dream Center also is welcoming volunteers for the Back-to- School Clinic.

To volunteer or for more information on the clinic, people may contact the Wisconsin Dream Center by email at [info@wisconsin dreamcenter.org](mailto:info@wisconsin dreamcenter.org) or by calling (262) 893-8063.

For more information on the Wisconsin Dream Center as a whole, people also may check out the nonprofit organization’s website at [www.wisconsin dreamcenter.org](http://www.wisconsin dreamcenter.org).