

Posted: 12/14/04

Afghanistan kids are learning Christmas love from heart

by **L.A. Jones**
Anoka County Union editor

Packages and boxes filled with heart-filled feelings from kids of all different backgrounds in the Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Anoka local children's organization may be bringing a lot more hope to Afghan families than perhaps even the recent democratic election in that country.

Racked by unrelenting war from different factions and governments, in addition to poverty for nearly two decades, children in an Afghanistan daycare center will soon have colored pictures to brighten up their walls and their otherwise previously gloomy lives, as well as warm clothing, huggable stuffed bears and other toys to embrace as their own.

It all started when Andrea Anderson, primary program president for the Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Anoka, saw the story of U.S. Army Sgt. Denise Schultz on the KARE 11 News Nov. 11. Sgt. Brian Horn created the Web site, www.anysoldier.com.

It enables civilians to get involved in thanking and supporting service members who are deployed overseas, according to Anderson.

"Instead of just asking for things for themselves," Anderson said, "she just really wanted to help the kids. I thought that was especially generous of her and them.

"I thought it would be just kind of nice for our family do and then I thought it would be great to involve the kids."

And the kids took the project on personally as it were their own, tying a fleeced blanket for their Afghan counterparts of their same ages or younger half a world away.

"I learned that they didn't have a lot of toys or warm clothes and two people had to sleep in one bed," said Krista Eyler, a 10-year-old in the Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints primary program.

"I realized it would help me because it makes me easier to do it in the future."

"It was a new thing for me," said eight-year-old Katie Ritschel. "I felt good helping the kids over in Afghanistan."
"I liked helping the Afghanistan kids," said McKenna Estes, 10. "It made me feel really good."

After seeing Schultz's story on KARE 11, Anderson began reading the stories of bravery and sacrifice of soldiers, and saw pictures of the Afghan children, who live and go to school in very poor conditions, without proper warm clothing and school supplies.

The following Sunday she presented the idea to the children, whose response was swift and heartfelt.

"We only had about a week turnaround to do it," said Anderson, who felt much more compelled to involve the kids in the program after the story massaged her soul and spirit with tears of amazing and astounding glory, implanted from God Himself.

The daycare to which the boxes of clothing, colored pictures, stuffed bears and other toys will be going is for children zero to six years old.

"The walls were just bare," said Anderson after seeing photos sent from Schultz.

"School for these kids is really a new thing for them."

Besides the children's efforts, Denise Johnson of McDonald's in Andover donated a large box of Happy Meal toys for the daycare kids in Afghanistan.

"We have six really big boxes, and things are still tricking in – a lot of stuffed bears, clothing, hats and mittens," Anderson said.

All the items will be shipped to Schultz's APO address from which she has agreed to hand-deliver them to the daycare center.

“I was touched by the genuine compassion for the plight of others displayed by the primary children,” Anderson said. “They are so good and giving and were grateful for the opportunity to be reminded of the blessings that are their’s to share.”

[Top of Page](#)

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