



# Harrison County Schools

*Where all are Leaders and all are Learners!*

The Healthy Grandfamilies Program of Harrison County, in partnership with the Harrison County Board of Education, United Way of Harrison County, staff at Legal Aid of Harrison County, Expressions of Love Charities, staff at Family Services of Marion and Harrison Counties, and generous individuals not associated with any program mentioned, were able to provide 400 gifts and separate gift cards to 15 families and 32 children for this year's holiday season. The children ranged in age 6-months to 17-years.

*What is the Healthy Grandfamilies Program?* "Over 35,000 children in the state of West Virginia are known to live in the primary custody of their grandparents (grandfamilies.org, 2020); however, the National Center for the Analysis of Healthcare Data (2020) puts that estimate closer to 43,000. Grandparents raising grandchildren struggle with knowledge, finances, and resources to parent their grandchildren for a variety of reasons including the disruption in the typical family lifecycle, the challenges of parenting in the 21st century, and their own family trauma due to having a child with an addiction and a grandchild exposed to this crisis." (Healthy Grandfamilies.org)

Many of these families were *just* hoping to receive the basics, like clothing, school supplies and food for the children in their care this year. The donors of this program went so much further than the basics. The donors looked at the requests made, such as clothing, and then responded "Sure, we can get these gifts, but what do the kids want, what are their passions, what do they like to do but have not had the resources to engage in?" We found out there were voracious readers in the group, outdoor kids who like hunting and fishing, vocalists who enjoy karaoke, budding artists, lovers of dinosaurs and the struggle to get to use the one soft, plush cover in the house, bicycle enthusiasts, x-box gamers, and even those teenagers building new relationships and wanting a way to gift that special person something for the holidays but not having the means to do so. These special donors wrote heartfelt cards to grandparents to let them know that their dedication and commitment to their grandchildren was seen and

appreciated, and then gifted the grandparents with a gift card to a dining establishment which turned out to be a special place that held personal meaning to the grandmother and her late husband.

Grandparents expressed to us that they had been “worried for the last three months on what they were going to do for their granddaughters” and they said their “prays were answered . . . more than we knew, and they were able to have food for a Christmas dinner.” Another grandparent told us that “this was the best Christmas we’ve had in a couple of years – what you did was unbelievable. You made Christmas” Our donors shared with their chosen families their own unique holiday traditions by providing “Christmas Eve” boxes which included movies, popcorn, candy and hot chocolate for that special Christmas Eve celebration. Sprinkle Boxes (age –related, gendered boxes loaded with small gifts) were provided for many of the children. Donors researched the best gifts and needs for some of our children who face special challenges and procured those gifts.

A late, large donation allowed us to double the amount of gift cards to the families so that they could buy what they needed and almost all of our 15 families indicated to us that these gift cards would allow them to buy food that they would not otherwise be able to purchase. The donors and participants expressed pure joy at being able to contribute to this effort and we appreciate them and their generosity. Tears of happiness was expressed by all parties and the experience was unforgettable.