

Little Penguins get big help with Backpack Project

✘ For many Southwest Washington families, the beginning of this school year was particularly challenging, featuring teacher strikes and last-minute scrambles for child care. But one thing remained unchanged: Dozens of Clark College students could depend on Clark employees to purchase and fill backpacks so that their children could start the school year off prepared.

The Clark College Backpack Project is a long-standing tradition at the college. Names of the children are gathered and referred by Workforce Education Services, Financial Aid, Veterans Affairs, Transitional Studies, Child & Family Services, and the Penguin Pantry. Volunteers gather information about each child—grade level, supply list, color preferences, etc.—and send a shopping list to an employee who has agreed to sponsor a backpack. Children receive their backpacks about two weeks before school starts in the fall.

This year, donors provided backpacks to 65 children. All told, the Backpack Project has delivered almost 900 backpacks to children of Clark students over the last 15 years.

“This year has been rough, and without this help my ✘ children wouldn’t feel as secure with their schooling,” wrote one student whose children received backpacks. “I appreciate my Clark Family.”

Other parents expressed their appreciation for what the college community has done:

- “Your kindness and generosity will never be forgotten.”
- “Thank you so much for thinking of our family and providing such a meaningful thing for my kids to have. It makes my heart fill with love knowing they are

starting the school year off right.”

The children were also very excited about their backpacks, sending messages like:

- “Thank you for my backpack, you did good job.”
- “Thank you I really like the backpack, when I saw it I said it was soooooooooooooo cool!”

The annual backpack project is coordinated by Cindy Heck, Susan Maxwell, and the Office of Planning & Effectiveness. Thank you to all of the employees who sponsored a backpack this year! These backpacks make a positive start to the school year for our students and their children. Thank you!

This article and photos were contributed by the Office of Planning & Effectiveness.

The joy of giving



Backpacks collected during the 2017 Backpack Project.

Earlier this year, Clark College employees donated 91 backpacks filled with school supplies to the children of Clark students—a new record for what has become known as the Backpack Project.

Approximately one quarter of Clark’s students have dependent children, and back-to-school supplies can easily run to more than \$100 per child. Recipients for the backpacks are identified each year by staff in Clark College departments like Workforce Education Services, Financial Aid, Veterans Affairs, Transitional Studies, Child and Family Studies, and

the Office of Diversity and Equity.

As one family wrote, "Thank you, thank you, thank you! This is absolutely amazing and I am so taken with your generosity and thoughtfulness. Our family is so grateful to you!"

This was the 14th year that employees have participated in the Backpack Project. We want to acknowledge and thank all of you who have helped to provide more than 822 backpack over the years.

Each backpack is unique because the project's organizers ask the children what their favorite colors and characters are. Many donors go out of their way to find the perfect backpack for a child, scouring stores or the Internet for the perfect Seahawks or My Little Pony theme. Others load the backpack with extra supplies and fun items. This year, one Clark employee created a book about her own horses for a young child who liked horses.

More than 70 employees donated backpacks to the project  this year, for a variety of reasons. Some do not have children at home but want to participate in the excitement of back-to-school time, while others are parents who are working to instill the value of giving in their own children. Many departments also make this a team project and take an after-work shopping trip together. Whatever their reasons, the Backpack Project brings as much joy to those who give as it does to those who receive the backpacks.

If you would like to participate in the Backpack Project next year, watch for a collegewide email sent in July; backpacks are generally due by mid-August so that children can receive them before the new school year starts.

This article was contributed by Planning & Effectiveness Administrative Assistant Cindy Heck and ctcLink Manager Susan Maxwell, who co-organize the Backpack Project each year. Photos contributed by Clark College Workforce Education

Services and by student parents.

Clark employees' generosity is always in style

✘ We are in the midst of change at Clark College. The STEM building is being built and people will begin moving next year. ctcLink has many of us reviewing our business processes and anticipating a modern ERP (enterprise resource planning) college-wide management software. The new Academic Plan is focusing us on developing academic pathways that will lead students to gainful employment and further education.

What hasn't changed is Clark College employees' willingness to go above and beyond to help students. This year, for the 12th annual Backpack Project, employees donated backpacks and supplies to 52 school-aged children of Clark College students. The support and generosity of employees has sustained this project through the years, and employees tell us that they always look forward to the announcement of the project.

Names of children are gathered and referred by Workforce Education Services, Financial Aid, Veterans Affairs, Child & Family Services, and the Diversity Center. Each child is asked their favorite color and characters so the donors can find a backpack that is specific to that child. The characters from the children's movie *Frozen* were the favorite this year.

This year we received some wonderful drawings and heartfelt thank-you notes we wanted to share with you. ✘

"Hey, thank you for the backpack, it was very helpful for me. I know you guys didn't have to do it but I'm very thankful so

thank you!"

"Thank you so much for the backpacks, you have no idea how much this helped out our family."

"I ♥ my backpack!"

No matter how things change, we know we can count on Clark employees to keep helping our students and their families, year after year. Thank you!

Helping little Penguins start the school year right



Eleven years—that is how long Clark employees have been generously donating backpacks and supplies to school-aged children of Clark College students through the Annual Backpack Project. This year, employees sponsored 76 backpacks, adding to a cumulative total of well over 600 backpacks collected so far.

Once again, the Office of Planning and Effectiveness oversaw the donation process. Student parents were identified by staff members from Financial Aid, Child & Family Studies, Eligibility Programs, and Veteran Affairs. In August, employees from across the college volunteered to purchase and fill backpacks. Each donor was given a shopping list that included basic information about the child—age, gender, favorite colors and themes—as well as specific items that child would need at school. The backpacks were presented to their recipients before the beginning of the school year.

Through emails and thank-you notes, students expressed  their gratitude at receiving the backpacks. One parent's response expressed the realities faced by many families with both children and parents in school: "I received the backpacks for the kids today and I am overwhelmed with gratitude," she wrote. "I didn't realize that supplies would be included. ... I appreciate the support. It was a difficult decision to come back and finish my degree. There is a lot of family sacrifice involved, [and] gestures like these make a big difference. Thank you."

Another student wrote, "As a single working mother, this is a great stress relief." Yet another card read, "I'm currently homeless, so this helps so much."

The children also expressed delight as they picked up backpacks stuffed full of supplies. As one child put it: "I really like it, and can't wait to use it for school."

Story and photos submitted by Susan Maxwell