

Nonprofit agency needs donated back-to-school supplies

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Submitted by Shelley Shelton, Communications Writer, Interfaith Community Services

Interfaith Community Services needs help collecting school supplies for its annual Gifts of Love distribution that begins at the end of July.

The nonprofit social services agency at 2820 W. Ina Road has gathered enough materials to serve only 50 of the 400 children it is planning to help.

For the past nine years, ICS has distributed school supplies via Gifts of Love, which is supported entirely through donations from the community.

Last year, a line wrapped around the ICS building on the designated distribution day as ICS volunteers gave away 410 backpacks filled with basic school supplies — notebook paper, spiral notebooks, pens, pencils, glue sticks, crayons, pocket folders and more, depending on a student's grade level — to families experiencing financial hardship.

Many more were turned away when supplies ran out.

Julie Berson got supplies for two elementary-aged daughters and a third in high school.

"We are low-income, and back-to-school every year is tough," she said. Because she was able to secure school supplies for free, she could buy school clothes for the children, she said.

Several backpack recipients visited the independent ICS Food Bank after putting school supplies into their cars.

Census data shows that one in five children in the United States lives in poverty, which in turn affects their educational opportunities and outcomes. In Tucson, the rate is one in three.

The Gifts of Love school supplies program is one of several services ICS offers for families who are struggling financially.

It is designed to help children start the new school year prepared and ready to learn, thus supporting their academic success.

Most-needed items are brand-new backpacks, binders/folders, notebooks, notebook paper, scissors, glue sticks, markers, rulers, highlighters, protractors, erasers, pens, pencils and crayons.

A complete list by grade level is available at www.icstucson.org online.

People can drop off items from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday at the ICS northwest office at 2820 W. Ina Road, or from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Thursday at the ICS east office at 8701 E. Old Spanish Trail.

This year there won't be a designated distribution date, but on July 30, members of the public may begin calling ICS at 297-6049 to find out how to get school supplies, which will be given away on a first-come, first-served basis.