



Media Release

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DHS Kicks Off Month-long Donation Drive with Help of Clinton School of Public Service

Agency accepting basic items for children in foster care all across the state at offices, Clinton School

The Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) is holding a month-long, statewide donation drive to collect basic items needed for children who come into the State's foster care system. The drive is being held in May in observance of National Foster Care Month.

Each year thousands of children are rescued from dangerous situations and taken into the Arkansas foster care system. Sometimes, DHS Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) workers find that the children don't even have the basics, like clean underwear, diapers or a bag for their clothes, and they may not have eaten.

Other times, children simply can't bring their own clothes and toys because they were living in situations in which their belongings had been contaminated by drugs or very unhygienic living conditions, Willie Baker, a Family Service Worker in Pulaski County, said during the donation drive kick-off event at the Clinton School of Public Service on Monday.

"Last year, I had to remove three children from a home because their parents' meth lab had exploded in the family's kitchen. There were chemicals everywhere," Baker explained. "Things were so bad they had to leave their clothes, and the 2-year-old could not bring the blanket she slept with. Her older sister had to leave her Teddy bear behind."

Baker replaced the blanket, bear and clothes, but that meant taking the children to the store late at night after they'd already experienced a traumatic event.

"They were crying, and my heart broke for them," he said. "With the donations we're collecting, we'll be able to have things in our offices for the children. That will make that first night in care just a little bit easier."

Foster parent Christine Walker said donations also help foster parents.

"When a child comes into your home in the middle of the night, you may have to spend hours the next day enrolling him in school and shopping for clothes," Walker said. "Not only do these donations save us time, they allow us to use our money to take the children out to eat or to do something fun, like go to a water park."

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Walker, who has fostered more than 70 children, knows first-hand that people donating basic items make a difference. She opened a boutique in White County where foster families in her community can “shop” at no cost.

“We often hear people say they want to do something for foster children, but that they are not ready or able to be foster parents,” she said. “That’s OK. Communities can support foster families and the children they serve simply by donating items at a DHS county office.”

The Delta Dental Foundation announced at the kick-off event Monday that it would donate 4,000 toothbrushes during the donation drive. Mattress Firm also announced that it will be accepting donations at six locations in central Arkansas (in Hot Springs, Bryant, West Little Rock, North Little Rock and the stores in Midtown and on Highway 10 in Little Rock).

There are currently more than 4,900 children in foster care in Arkansas. That number has been rising steadily over the past few years.

“Children come into foster care at all hours of the day and night,” said DCFS Interim Director Mischa Martin. “As you can imagine, you never quite know what a particular child may need. Often times our caseworkers are at a store in the middle of the night purchasing diapers, clothing or food. Having needed items ready and available will save time and make things less stressful for everyone involved.”

The 85 DHS offices located in counties statewide will be accepting items that are most often needed immediately by these children. Needed items (NEW items only) include:

- Backpacks
- Duffle bags
- Suitcases and luggage
- Diapers and wipes
- Toothbrushes and toothpaste
- Children’s underwear size 2T and UP
- Children’s socks
- Pacifiers, bottles and sippy cups
- Deodorant, lotion, soap, baby shampoo and lice shampoo
- Kid-friendly, pre-packaged non-perishable snacks (fruit snacks, individual size crackers, granola bars, individual goldfish packages, applesauce pouches, fruit roll-ups)

In addition to the collections at DHS County Offices, DHS employees at the DHS downtown office are holding an internal month-long collection and The Clinton School of Public Service also will be accepting donations at each of its speaking events in the month of May.

If a group has a large donation or needs more information on the project, contact Lecole White with the DHS Division of Children and Family Services at 501-682-8759.