Second Chances Kids Community Closet scheduled in Fort Fairfield brings free clothing for children

AROOSTOOK COUNTY – After hosting three successful Kids Community Closets this past summer, United Way of Aroostook and Aroostook County Action Program received a request from Fort Fairfield Housing Authority to bring the Closet back to help clothe local children and teens at no cost to the families in February. The event is open to the public and will take place at the Community Room at Fort Fairfield Housing Authority on February 19 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Gearing up for the event, United Way will accept donations of gently used, clean, or new clothing for infants, toddlers, children and teens from now until the day of the event at their offices located at the Aroostook Centre Mall. People can also drop off their donations at the Fort Fairfield Housing Authority or the Fort Fairfield Health Center.

In July and August, United Way, ACAP, and Adopt A Block in Houlton, hosted similar clothing swap days in Fort Kent, Presque Isle, and Houlton, inviting the community so parents and their kids could choose clothing prior to the start of the school year. The events in those larger regional communities were such a success that even as they were happening, coordinators were discussing how they might bring similar “pop-up”-style clothing swaps to other communities in Aroostook County.

“The Fort Fairfield Housing Authority contacted us,” said United Way Executive Director Sherry Locke, “and their assistance has made organizing this mid-year event quite simple.”

There are a fair number of logistics that go into preparing this kind of an event. First, there needs to be a location capable of hosting the tables and racks to set out the clothes and make the “shopping” experience as convenient as possible for the families who visit. Then, of course, there is donation and volunteer coordination. Volunteers are needed to sort and display the donated clothing prior to the event and also to keep the clothing organized during the event.

In the same spirit as ACAP’s Community Cupboard, the Second Chances Kids Community Closet works on a philosophical system of “leave what you can, take what you need,” and is open to anyone in the community who may benefit from the clothing exchange. There is no application process and no qualifying criteria.

For more than a decade, ACAP and United Way have helped kids in the County with their back-to-school clothing needs. Having clean, comfortable, fashionable, and weather appropriate clothing helps children return to school with pride in their appearance and, more importantly, confidence. Confidence helps to build a positive attitude around learning and increases overall success in school. Locke says that need doesn’t always stop at the beginning of the school year, so that makes this February event even more
vital as children grow and seasons change, requiring additional clothing needs at a particularly tough time of the year.

“Winters are already hard on families with increased costs for heating fuel, snow removal and energy consumption. Kids don’t stop growing because it’s winter, though, and in the winter, there is also a need for warmer clothing. This year, some families have been hit particularly hard because of the early onset of the cold and snow and the government shutdown on top of that. With budgets already stretched, this is our way of helping. Families can come shop at no cost with their kids to find clothes that they like and that fit well and that will help keep them warm during these trying months,” said Locke.

For a complete list of clothing donation sites, sponsors, volunteer needs, and event news – including location updates, visit us on Facebook or contact Sherry Locke at 207-764-5197.