

March 2020 Client Corner: Pillows and Plenty

“A world with no room for hunger and things, but only for pillows and plenty” - Nineteen Speaks, by Grace Healey, 1922

These are words Stephanie Rizzardi is all too familiar with. As a child her father would recite poetry to her and her siblings, and this poem was one of his favorites. When it came time to name her charity in 2004, her father suggested “Pillows and Plenty,” which sums up her mission perfectly. The goal is to reach out to children, like the girl in the poem, and help create a better life for them in some small way.

Pillows and Plenty was sparked by a revelation Stephanie had one Christmas. She went down to the basement looking for decorations and noticed a pipe dripping water from the ceiling. It had damaged a rack full of expensive clothing. With closets already bursting upstairs a wave of shame hit her. She was so disappointed that she had let these clothes sit idle when they could have been donated to a family in need, and now it was too late.

That was the last Christmas her family exchanged gifts. Moving forward they vowed to provide Christmas to other families, as many as possible. They gathered close friends and through one put together a list of families who lived in a local apartment building that needed help. The apartment building was a converted hotel with single rooms consisting of one bathroom and a kitchenette. These rooms housed whole families, many with closet doors removed to create makeshift beds for children. Stephanie and her group came bearing the gifts that so many of us take for granted; new pillows, pajamas, and basic clothing. The pure joy and excitement of a child opening a package of new pajamas is one of the memories she cherishes most.

Self-esteem is vital to children’s healthy development. It helps kids to learn to try new things, even if they fail at first. As studies show, children with good self-esteem do better in school and grow up to be independent and responsible adults. For this reason, Pillow and Plenty provides brand new items. Stephanie has seen first-hand how new items boost a child’s self-esteem and contribute to a healthy view of themselves. They see themselves just like other kids, regardless of their background and socioeconomic status.

A story that stands out to Stephanie happened several years ago when the director of La Casa de San Gabriel Community Center reached out to her. A local family had a young daughter who had recently had her leg amputated due to a serious infection. During her long hospital stay her mother never left her side. The father continued to work but without additional income they were in a desperate situation. Stephanie was asked if she could provide new clothing for the children, two girls, and one boy. She worked quickly and packaged up brand new clothing items, sized appropriately for each child. When she arrived to deliver the items the family was waiting, eager to greet her. They lived in the living room portion of a house they shared with three other families. Stephanie sat on the floor with the parents as they watched the children open the packages, gleefully holding up their new clothes, and visibly excited to have new underwear, hoodies, and socks. She witnessed that so little made a huge difference for this family, and wished she could have done more. She left thankful for the opportunity to be a part of that family’s life for a brief moment.

Stephanie came across that family once again at Pillows and Plenty’s annual Christmas party. It was a cold, rainy night, and most families walked there from their homes with children and babies in tow. That special family arrived on foot with their oldest daughter, walking proudly with her newly fitted prosthetic leg.

About five years ago Pillows and Plenty established a “Community Closet” at a nearby community center, stocked full of school uniforms, undergarments, socks, jackets, and most recently school supplies and backpacks. Parents

can “shop” there for items they need but cannot afford to buy at the time for their children. It has provided for hundreds of children in that community. Stephanie’s vision is to open these Community Closets in more community centers in areas of great need in Southern California.



A Pillows & Plenty “Community Closet.”

Stephanie is a relatively new client to KFM that we have actually known for quite some time. She is the sister of one of our long time clients. Stephanie is a business owner and mother of three college students. She is greatly looking forward to the “raise” she will get when all three graduate. Stephanie enjoys live music performances of all kinds, especially blues. A relaxing day for her includes staying home and reading, or meeting up with a friend to try a new restaurant or see a play.

For more information or to donate please visit www.pillowsandplenty.org