

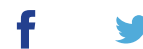
Boys and Girls Club members stuff 600 bags, so Harford homeless children have breakfast over Thanksgiving break



The We Canerve Movement partnered with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Harford County and Giant Food to stuff bags with breakfast items for homeless children Thursday. (David Anderson, Baltimore Sun Media Group)

By **David Anderson**
The Aegis

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Harford's Grace Callwood oversees her organization's latest service project, stuffing breakfast bags

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Most school-age children in Harford County don't have classes this week, courtesy of a public school system calendar that gives them off Monday through Friday (while teachers have professional development Monday through Wednesday).

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ould normally depend on their schools for

Within about one hour and 15 minutes late last week, children from Cecil and Harford counties stuffed 600 paper lunch bags with breakfast foods so children in need have something to eat over their week-long Thanksgiving break.

The children gathered at the Havre de Grace Boys & Girls Club on Thursday night for the Breakfast Bags Bonanza "stuffing party," a joint effort of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Harford County, Giant Food and the We Canceve Movement Inc.

"It's really fun and really exciting, and I can tell everyone's having a lot of being here and enjoying community service," Grace Callwood, the 12-year-old founder of We Canceve, said.

She said it was "very exciting" to break the goal of stuffing 500 bags.

Grace, a resident of Abingdon, is a survivor of pediatric cancer who has dedicated herself to helping other children in Harford County. Grace is the board chair, and her fellow board members are children and teens.

We Canceve has multiple initiatives to support children who are homeless, in foster care or are going through medical treatment. The nonprofit partnered with the Harford County government and public library system this fall for "SOCKtober" to collect winter clothing for the homeless and veterans.

Grace has been recognized by Harford County Executive Barry Glassman and the County Council for her efforts, and she has been named a 2016 Nickelodeon HALO Awards Honoree. The previous week she was in New York City to shoot the awards ceremony, hosted by entertainer Nick Cannon.

She spent Thursday evening with her parents, grandmother, friends and members of the Havre de Grace and Aberdeen Boys & Girls Clubs, plus members of The Boys and Girls Clubs of Cecil County.

"That means a lot to me, as a parent, to see how much Gracie's mission is swelling in the hearts of children," T'Jae Ellis, Grace's mother, said.

Seventy-nine children participated in the stuffing party, according to Angela Beckman, program director for the Havre de Grace club.

The children could either fill the bags, assembly-line style, with food and drinks purchased with a \$500 donation from Giant, or they could decorate the bags in the art room.

"We have plenty of kids to fill and decorate the bags," Beckman said.

She noted Havre de Grace club members have a separate service project, through which they have raised \$100 that will be donated to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital on Thanksgiving.

Beckman worked with We Canceve to coordinate the stuffing party.

The bags that were filled are being distributed through organizations in Harford County that work with homeless families.

Grace said organizers of the stuffing party want to "let [children] know they could still eat over Thanksgiving break, because we believe no homeless child should be hungry as well."

The bags were filled with non-perishable foods such as Pop Tarts, Nutri-Grain bars or boxes of raisins, as well as boxed drinks.

Charles Kersey Jr., the club's teen coordinator, supervised the decorations. Participants colored and cut out paper Thanksgiving decorations, such as pumpkins and turkeys, added personal accents and glued them to the paper bags.

"They're learning how to be creative," Kersey said.

Club member Alayna J. – the Boys and Girls Clubs only give out the first names and last initials of their members for safety reasons – said she was "deconstructing" an artificial harvest-themed floral arrangement as she separated the orange and yellow flower petals and brown leaves to put on her bag.

"It's fun," she said. "I really like art and I like being creative."

Alayna, 12, said she enjoyed the stuffing party.

"I think it's fun because you get to help out other people," she said.

Laura Milcarzyk, a resident of Harford Family House in Aberdeen, brought her son, John, to help stuff bags.

"Grace [Callwood] is such a good example of what a young person is capable of doing, and her friends," Milcarzyk said.

Harford Family House assists local homeless families through its transitional housing program. Milcarzyk is a graduate of the program who still lives there as she works toward becoming a children's librarian.

She said she wanted to teach her son the importance of giving back, especially when one has been through homelessness.

"We don't have to stay in poverty," Milcarzyk said. "We have the ability to get out of it and give back."

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