

NEWS NEWS



Department of Human Services

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**Anne Marie Ambrose,
Commissioner**

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Fifth graders raise funds to help children entering care

A donation from a fifth grade class at Thomas Holme Elementary School is helping to make the Child Care Room at the Department of Human Services a more cheerful place for children entering the child welfare system. The class, led by teacher Cathy DiMartino, donated bassinets filled with toys and other comforting items for children who come to the center.

According to DiMartino, the donation was a way to honor DHS workers who have given generously of their time and money to help her students for 11 years. "It began when I was teaching at Philip H. Sheridan Elementary School and many of my students came from very low-income families," she said. "My sister Cindy Curran is a Processing Specialist at DHS and she helped me set up a secret Santa program with DHS staff. The workers were incredibly generous and the kids were thrilled."

The program continued over time and when DiMartino transferred to Thomas Holme it grew to include a pen pal program and end-of-year lunch with their DHS pen pals.

This year, the students wanted to give back. They planned an ambitious roster of fund-raising activities including creating and selling good luck cards throughout the school for PSSA testing; a walkathon, and a pretzel sale, which they marketed by making posters for every classroom in the school. Through these efforts they raised a total of \$630 to help children entering care. .

In addition to raising funds, the class also participated in a variety of educational activities to learn more about abuse, neglect and the child welfare system. Each child completed a child abuse research project for Child Abuse Awareness month. The students also attended an informative assembly presented by DHS staff about the role of the Department and took part in group discussions. DHS presented certificates of appreciation to all of the students for their participation in the project.

DHS Commissioner Anne Marie Ambrose said she was touched by the generosity and initiative of the students and staff at Holme. "While DHS workers do their best to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children entering the child welfare system, it is often a scary and highly emotional time," she said. "Having toys, games and other comforting objects available at intake is a way to make the process less painful."

The students say they hope others will follow their lead. Fifth grader Erin McDonald said, "Hopefully people will see how we have helped others and they will decide to start helping too."

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The Philadelphia Department of Human Services is the City agency charged with protecting children from abuse, neglect, and delinquency; ensuring their safety and permanency in nurturing home environments; and strengthening and preserving families by enhancing community-based prevention services. In partnership with community organizations, DHS provides services to strengthen the overall well being of Philadelphia children, youth, and families using a customer focused approach that is responsive to evolving community needs.