

Saugus junior Julia Azzari supports Mass. Coalition for the Homeless 'A Bed for Every Child' program

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Julia Azzari is motivated to do whatever she can to help disadvantaged children after learning that many local kids don't have their own beds to sleep on at night.

Azzari, a junior at Saugus High School, volunteered four hours on Jan. 12 painting beds that will be delivered to children in need through the A Bed for Every Child initiative.

Assisted by her mother Michelle, Azzari painted two beds at the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless warehouse in Lynn.

Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless launched A Bed for Every Child with the mission of providing free twin beds to children in need. The organization has formed partnerships with numerous school districts in an effort to achieve that goal.

For Azzari, a big takeaway from her time at Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless is that every child really needs their own bed to get enough rest to reach their full potential.

During Azzari's time at Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, the point was driven home about how important sufficient sleep is to a child's academic performance. A child having his or her own bed is critical, she noted.

The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless cites research from the American Sleep Association that shows a lack of sleep has a negative impact on a student's concentration, memory and ability to learn.

"Studies have shown that for children, the amount of sleep they are able to get directly impacts their academic potential and children who have more sleep achieve higher in math, science, and reading," the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless website reads. "In contrast, children who get little sleep are more likely to have behavioral problems, be prone to general moodiness, and have difficulty living up to their potential."

Since its inception nearly five years ago A Bed for Every Child has delivered more than 4,000 free beds to Massachusetts children, according to A Bed for Every Child Executive Director Robyn Frost.

Due to financial circumstances, Frost told the Advertiser the unfortunate reality is that some parents cannot afford a bed for their children.

On a daily basis Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless receives referrals from school districts, churches and social workers for children who don't have beds. Demand is growing annually for the services provided by A Bed for Every Child, Frost said.

A Bed for Every Child has been fielding 160 referrals per month for beds, Frost said. She expects that more than 1,900 beds will be distributed to children this year alone.

It costs about \$250 to deliver a bed, mattress, sheets and pillowcases to a waiting child. A Bed for Every Child requires upwards of \$40,000 to accommodate the 160 bed referrals that come in monthly, Frost said.

People under the age of 18 seem to be the most passionate about helping children in poverty who don't have a bed to sleep on, Frost said.

During the holidays A Bed for Every Child ran a program called 250 Beds for 250 Kids. High school students were the driving force that helped to raise around \$30,000 for the initiative, Frost said.

"When young people hear about other kids without a bed it is impactful," Frost said. "It empowers them to want to help."

Students like Azzari who volunteer their time with A Bed for Every Child are key to the program's success, Frost said.

Azzari acknowledged that the gravity of the situation hit home after staff at Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless spoke about local teens that don't have their own bed.

"It made me realize how grateful I am to have a home and so much support from my family," Azzari said. "It motivated me to want to do more to help give kids opportunities to get a good night's sleep so they can start every day fresh and energized."

The experience at Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless had Azzari's mind racing with ways to help the organization. She is organizing a teen clothing drive at Saugus High School the week of Jan. 29 through Feb. 2 as part of the coalition's Teen Closet Initiative.

A partnership between Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless and high schools, the Teen Closet Initiative strives to secure seasonably appropriate clothing for disadvantaged children.

The public is encouraged to drop off winter coats, pants, skirts, sweatshirts, T-shirts, sweaters, hats, gloves, scarves and hooded sweatshirts for all genders at Saugus High School from Jan. 29 to Feb. 2. This clothing will then be picked up by Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless to be delivered to underprivileged kids.

"My hope is that the clothes can help [the kids] feel better about themselves," Azzari said.

A member of Girl Scout Troop 60555, Azzari is also planning to spearhead a community service project to benefit A Bed for Every Child that will qualify her to receive the prestigious Gold Award for Girl Scouts.

Michelle said that she could tell her daughter was becoming very concerned during the visit to Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless.

"Julia is a very compassionate and inspired young lady," Michelle said. "She sees a challenge and transforms it into an idea and a goal. We are very proud of her."

A Bed for Every Child is looking for community sponsors to help pay for and build beds that are delivered to children in need. The organization regularly hosts sponsored groups for Build a Bed projects in Lynn. For more information about participating in the program, call Robyn Frost at 781-595-7570, ext. 12, or email

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