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Ready to read

Every child in foster care in state to get two books

By ED PIERCE

epierce@citizen.com

LACONIA — No skill is more crucial to the future of New Hampshire than the ability to read.

Bearing that in mind, a new partnership between business, private individuals and the New Hampshire Foster and Adoptive Parent Association has raised thousands of dollars to give children's books to every foster child in the state this Christmas.

According to Carol Varney of Belmont, the "Foster a Love of Reading" initiative is derived from a matching grant program called "Literacy for a Lifetime" sponsored by the Educational Development Corporation.

Leveraging a 50 percent match from that program added another \$3,000 to Varney's initiative,



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A NEW initiative has been launched to give books to every child in foster care in New Hampshire this Christmas. Helping unpack and sort books Monday were volunteers, from left, Betty Ballantyne, Meredith Horton, Tiffany Benton, Penny Pitou, Denise Caristi and Carol Varney.

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resulting in \$9,000 worth of books being given away to foster care children this Christmas.

Varney, works directly with EDC, a Tulsa, Oklahoma, corporation distributor, was able to raise \$6,000 through local sponsors who donated to the cause.

"I was very encouraged when my first contact resulted in a gold sponsorship of \$1,000 from Granite State Credit Union," Varney said.

She then secured additional gold sponsorships from the Bank of New Hampshire, Danconia Media of Weare, and the Concord Rotary Club.

Other supporters who contributed financially included Northeast Delta Dental; the Penny Pitou/Milo Pike Foundation; Northland Restaurant in Berlin; Benson Auto; AutoServe and Andrew Hosmer; Kelly Potenza of Danconia Media; Centerpointe Church; Kiwanis of Laconia; Irwin Motors; Mr. Mac of Manchester; the Merrimack Liness Club; Casella Waste Systems; and other private donors.

"Books take children places, introducing them to new people, cultures, opportunities and potential,"

Varney said. "Children's books change lives."

Working with Kathy Companion of the state's DCYF foster care program and Denise Christianson of the New Hampshire Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, Varney has been able to ensure that age-appropriate books were obtained for every home-based foster care child in New Hampshire along with foster care children in care centers.

"Children with books have more opportunities, in fact, better opportunities than those without books and that is why we focused on the children in foster care, to encourage reading by ensuring that they would receive new books of their own for Christmas," Varney said.

Denise Caristi was on hand Monday as volunteers began to unpack and sort the books in Laconia as part of the distribution process.

"There are books here for infants to teens," Caristi said. "I think 'Find the Puppy' is very interactive and holds up well for use by that age group."

Each child will receive two books as part of the distribution.

Volunteer Cindy Cote said she's honored to be a part of the effort.

"It is hard to sort through them without sitting and reading," she said. "I could buy every book on this table."