

Columbia Bank Foundation and Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey Team Up to Warm the Hearts of the Homeless with Blankets of Hope

Blankets Delivered with Children's Handwritten Notes of Encouragement to People in Need

(FAIR LAWN, NJ APRIL 9, 2021) — Columbia Bank Foundation, Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey, and Blankets of Hope, have joined forces to make a difference in the lives of the homeless in New Jersey, by wrapping the less fortunate in the comfort of warm blankets. Together, the organizations have delivered 1,440 "Blankets of Hope", to community members to help uplift spirits and offer compassion.

Purchased by the Columbia Bank Foundation, the blankets were distributed to nine Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey chapters, where youths participated in Blankets of Hope's "Kindness Workshop." Children were led through an empathy exercise to imagine what it's like to experience homelessness, then created colorful, handwritten notes of hope, love and encouragement, to pair with each blanket. The heartwarming, inspiring gifts were delivered to local shelters and organizations in need.



Member of Boys & Girls Clubs of Newark, NJ participates in Blankets of Hope Kindness Workshop. Photo Credit: Courtesy of Columbia Bank Foundation



Members of Boys & Girls Clubs of Union County, NJ with their warming Blankets of Hope. Photo Credit: Courtesy of Columbia Bank Foundation

Columbia Bank and the Columbia Bank Foundation are always seeking meaningful ways to give back to the New Jersey community. Team members worked together to blend their networks and launch a meaningful, rewarding project. In this case, EVP of Consumer Banking, Allyson Schlesinger, also a board member of the Boys & Girls Clubs in NJ, helped kick off a statewide project by leveraging relationships fostered through community banking.

Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey contributors and blanket recipients are as follows:

Boys & Girls Club in NJ Chapters:

Camden County
 Clifton
 Cumberland County
 Garfield
 Newark
 Paterson and Passaic
 Hawthorne
 Hudson County
 Union County

Shelters/Organizations in Need:

Joesph's House, Camden, NJ
 NJ Family Promise of Morris County, Morristown, NJ
 Cumberland Family Shelter, Vineland, NJ
 Center for Hope and Safety, Rochelle Park, NJ
 Covenant House, Newark, NJ
 Eva's Village, Paterson, NJ
 St. Paul's CDC, Paterson, NJ
 York Street Project, Jersey City, NJ
 St. Joseph's Social Service Center/Elizabeth Coalition, Elizabeth, NJ

(more)

Currently, approximately 9,000 New Jersey residents are without homes, and due to the pandemic, the number is rising. The Columbia Bank Foundation recognizes now more than ever, its continual commitment to help citizens overcome challenges and gain a renewed sense of hope is paramount. "As one of the largest private giving foundations in the state of New Jersey, the Columbia Bank Foundation is consistently looking for ways to maximize our impact", said Thomas J. Kemly, President and CEO of Columbia Bank and President of the Columbia Bank Foundation. "Through our partnership with Blankets of Hope we are proud to have provided the Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey with a free kindness workshop and an opportunity to give back. These Blankets of Hope offer life saving warmth, as well as an encouraging mental health boost to those in need."

About Columbia Bank Foundation

Columbia Bank Foundation is one of the New Jersey's largest charitable foundations with roughly \$60 million designated in funding for future community-based projects and charitable programs. The foundation was created to serve the needs of local communities, and provide grants and contributions to organizations recognized as tax-exempt under Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The Columbia Bank Foundation actively seeks to provide support in seven major areas: affordable housing programs, community investment and economic development opportunities, financial literacy and educational opportunities, health and human services, food insecurity, environmental sustainability and the arts. Special consideration is always given to programs that provide a measurable community impact. For more information regarding the Columbia Bank Foundation and grant eligibility requirements, please visit www.columbiabankonline.com/columbia-foundation.

About Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey

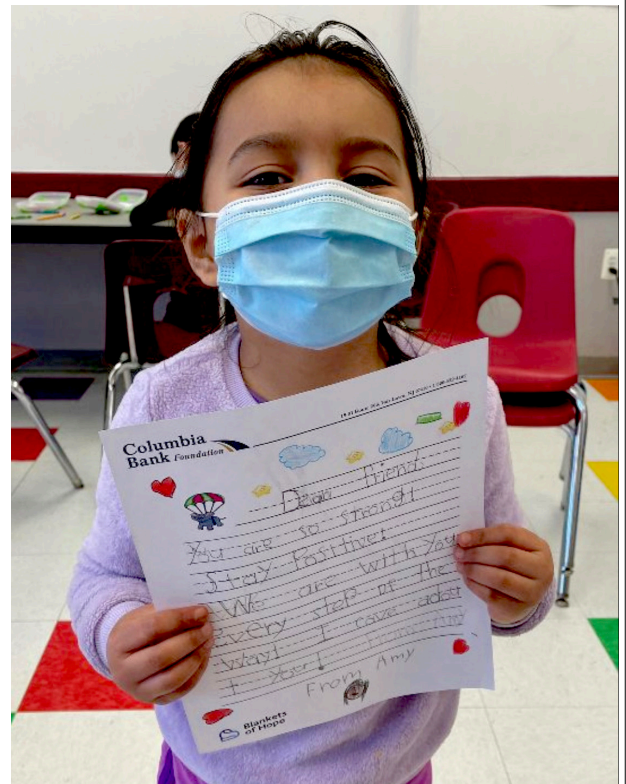
Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey is an alliance of 22 Boys & Girls Club organizations serving over 70,000 youth ages 5-18 throughout the Garden State. Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey is a collaborative effort representing all 22 Clubs with the purpose of building local Club capacity; raising public awareness; and securing resources and financial support to increase the impact and reach of local Clubs. Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey works to strengthen and grow the mission of Boys & Girls Clubs which is: To enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring responsible citizens.

About Blankets of Hope: Story - Why two brothers from Brooklyn quit their jobs to inspire a global movement of kindness:

Blankets of Hope is an educational 501(c)3 nonprofit helping students practice empathy and kindness by donating blankets - each paired with an inspirational handwritten note - to those experiencing homelessness. Its mission: To inspire a global movement of kindness, one blanket at a time. Its Vision: To live in a world united in love.

It started as a small family project... It was Summer 2016 when Brooklyn brothers Mike and Nick Fiorito quit their 9-5 jobs in search of more meaningful work. For months, they jumped from one entrepreneurial venture to the next, failing miserably every step of the way. By the time Winter came around, Mike and Nick were losing all hope. To get their minds off their failures, Mike and Nick started a GoFundMe campaign to raise money to buy blankets for people living on the freezing cold streets of NYC. With the helping hands of friends and family, they hand-delivered 100 "Blankets of Hope" to those in need.

Little did the brothers know, their good deed would pay them back in ways they couldn't imagine... On the other side of the country, a video portraying Blankets of Hope had captured the heart of top Forbes-ranked venture capitalist, Todd Chaffee. Their guardian angel had arrived... With Todd's mentorship and financial support, the brothers transformed their small family project into a globally recognized non-profit organization! Blankets of Hope has now donated over 31,000 blankets and handwritten notes to those in need - and counting.



A member of Boys & Girls Club of Hawthorne, NJ with her encouraging letter, to be delivered with a Blanket of Hope. Photo Credit: Courtesy of Columbia Bank Foundation