

The year of giving back. NCS students connect with others through community service work

By David Dolmage Newton Daily News – May 1, 2018



Christmas might be in the rearview mirror for most, but students at Newton Christian School are still giving back. Last Friday students from the school spent the afternoon working on service projects with several organizations in the community.

After kicking off a fundraising project last December to support different community organizations students wanted to come back and do more to support each organization. Mary Patterson, the principal at Newton Christian, said the project started when the school decided to try a different tack with their holiday giving project. Previously the school had raised money to donate to a former student's family, now working as missionaries in Africa. Patterson said the idea is for students to take the project beyond the holidays, however.

"It's not just a Christmas giving project, this is a relationship, they're building relationships with these people," Patterson said. "Your heart is transformed when you start seeing real people."

The students didn't just come to volunteer, they also came bearing gifts. Each team presented the organization they've chosen to support with a collaborative artwork they created. Bringing students back to meet the organizations helps them understand the positive impact volunteering has in the community, Patterson said. She doesn't think dropping off a box of donated items won't give her students the same understanding.

"We want to achieve the school's vision to give students the skills and insight to serve God and the community and feel that this is accomplished by fostering a connection throughout the school year and not with just one visit," Patterson said.

On Friday the students fanned across Newton, helping with different community projects. They helped staff members at **Progress Industries do yard work**, picked up trash at the Jasper County Animal Rescue League, helped with remodeling work at Discover Hope, prepped for the Salvation Army's community meal and sorted through donations and cleaned the toy room at the Pregnancy Center.

By visiting each organization, students had a chance to see firsthand the impact their efforts were making. Nico McBride, a third-grader at Newton Christian, said he was surprised to learn how much giving back could be.

"I learned that if you help somebody, even if it doesn't get you anything, it still feels good," McBride said. "It can be fun."

Working in a team with students of all different ages also helped students grow their leadership skills, Patterson said. When students went out to meet with groups in Newton they couldn't rely on their teachers to do the talking for them.

"We want them to develop their leadership skills, we want them to own it," Patterson said.

Practicing those leadership skills meant older students had a chance to work with their younger peers. One of Patterson's goal for her students was to make sure they were actively involved with each project, she wanted them to learn how to work outside organizations as well as working together as a team. Morgan Peterson, an eighth-grader said she learned how much her team could accomplish by working together.

"I enjoyed watching everyone working even the little kids," Peterson said. "I learned that you can get things done a lot quicker if everyone works and if we work together."