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Contact: Jennifer Bassett
Founder and Executive Director
Hands4Hope - Youth Making A Difference
Ph: 916.294.7426
jbassett@hands4hopeyouth.org
www.hands4hopeyouth.org

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Youth-led Winter Boutique Provides Warm Clothes for Hundreds In Need

By Gabby Dailey, Youth Event Chair and Tania Thomas, Youth Marketing Lead

[PHOTOS AVAILABLE HERE](#)

From October through December of 2023, middle and high school youth participants with Hands4Hope - Youth Making A Difference planned and implemented the nonprofit's 14th Annual Warm and Fuzzy Drive and Winter Boutique, where they collected warm clothes and handmade blankets and distributed them to families in need to keep them warm and dry for the winter. In total, the effort provided clothing and blankets to more than 750 individuals.

Starting in early fall, youth Hands4Hope Community Engagement Ambassadors worked with 9 local elementary schools and 15 businesses to set up collection bins to gather new and gently used jackets, sweaters, pants, pajamas, and other warm clothing. Through those efforts and additional direct donations, collections totaled 5,827 items with a value of more than \$54,500.

One donor, Judy, hand-knitted 300 beanie hats to contribute to the effort. She wrote, "The world needs the commitment and energy of these young people to help make the world a better place for everyone. I am so grateful that an 80 year old great-grandma can be a part of what they are doing."

In addition, Hands4Hope hosted its annual Blanket Making Party at Camerado Springs Middle School to make no-sew fleece blankets. Blankets made there, by participants in Hands4Hope on-campus clubs, and by participants at home resulted in a total of 123 handmade blankets to add to the distribution.

After years in El Dorado Hills, the Winter Boutique distribution facility moved to an empty office space donated by Aborn Powers in Cameron Park to provide a more convenient location for those served by the program.

The youth-led Winter Boutique Committee planned and coordinated all aspects of the space, from layout to processing and sorting the donated items. The youth leaders included Gabby Dailey, Committee Chair and Logistics leader; Chloe Deiss, Clothing Logistics leader; Taylor Milbrath, Layout and Decor leader; Tania Thomas, Marketing leader; and Addison Hunt, Volunteer Management Coordinator. Additional subcommittee members were Hailey Harris, Addi Merrill, Alex Franzi, Tavian Gutierrez, and Sylvia Zvereff. Kari Bunce, a former elementary school teacher, served as the committee's Adult Mentor, with support from a previous Adult Mentor, Madeleine Vadenais. Two Hands4Hope Staff members, Melissa Placek and Yoko Kono also provided oversight and support.

Throughout the month of November, the Committee held multiple events where volunteers worked to sort and count clothing items into various sizes and categories, and decorated the space to make it feel festive, including many handmade special touches. Sierra Laundry donated laundry services to prepare items for distribution. In total, Winter Boutique offered 21 volunteer events that involved 95 youth and adult volunteers.

During the 6 days the Winter Boutique opened in December, it served 148 referred families, representing 741 individuals, who "shopped" for the warm clothing and items they needed. Partner agencies in Sacramento and El Dorado Counties received the remaining items, further expanding the reach and impact of the Winter Boutique effort.

Committee Chair and Logistics leader Gabby Dailey, a Junior at Oak Ridge High School, shared, "I was nervous to be the Committee Chair because I have never been on a committee before, but I quickly realized that this is going to be such a fun project! I loved getting to see how grateful families were, our community coming together, and making new friends both on the committee and on setup/event days."

Hands4Hope - Youth Making A Difference is a nonprofit, youth driven organization with the mission to inspire and empower youth in leadership and service. Hands4Hope offers hands-on education and community engagement opportunities to youth from K-12th grades through on-campus and after-school programs in Sacramento and El Dorado Counties. Hands4Hope was selected as "2023 Nonprofit of the Year" for California Senate District 4.

For more information about Hands4Hope - Youth Making A Difference, visit www.hands4hopeyouth.org or call 916-294-7426.