



Do you remember your first day of school? The excitement you felt showing off your new clothes, cool sneakers, and backpack? Well, that's not what it's like for Shaquille and the 25,000 kids just like him that we serve each year. You see, they face embarrassment and ridicule just because their families cannot afford new clothes. Instead, they must put food on the table and pay this month's rent. Shaq, shows up at school wearing the one shirt he owns, worn-out shoes, and you can forget about a backpack.



For five decades, Back to School Clothing Drive has helped break down barriers to early childhood school success by providing new school uniforms and outfits, backpacks and school supplies to K-6 grade students who desperately need them. These children whose family are living at or below the federal poverty level (approximately \$30,000 annual income for a family of four) attend Title I public elementary schools throughout the Valley. Our products are school uniforms, but what we deliver is self esteem, self confidence, and a successful start to school for Shaq and thousands more just like him.

School officials and teachers report that if students do not have uniforms, they often stay home since they know they are required each day. Parents confirm they are embarrassed to send children to school without appropriate attire. The U.S. Department of Education says partnerships between schools and social service agencies are vital to student success. Our successful partnerships span more than 260 schools and 40 school districts. That's quite an impact!



The Arizona Education Association reports Arizona has cut kindergarten-through-12th-grade funding by more than \$1 billion since 2009. Undoubtedly, cuts that deep affect everyone, but they're lethal to the low-income families who can't afford to make up the difference. Over the years, these families have relied on Back to School Clothing Drive to ensure their children have the clothes and supplies necessary for a good start to each school year.

BTSCD offers help through two signature programs: "New Clothes, New Beginnings" clothing distribution and "Student Attire for Education (SAFE)". Our services are simple yet

effective, and they positively impact the student, family, school, and community. Our teachers and districts confirm that when students have clean clothes to wear and grade appropriate supplies to use, it greatly reduces absenteeism. And research shows that consistent attendance in elementary school leads to lower dropout rates in high school.

"New Clothes, New Beginnings"

Our annual clothing distribution takes place over the course of five each July. More than 2,500 volunteers are on hand to help 5,000 kindergarten through 6th-grade students from 140 Title I schools in more than 40 districts throughout Maricopa County participate in this event.

Each day children are bused to our partner location transformed into a large "department store" for their back-to-school shopping experience. Upon arrival, students are matched with a volunteer personal shopper who helps them select a new wardrobe including: two pairs of shorts or skorts, two polo shirts, one sweatshirt, one belt, three pairs of socks and underwear, one pair of sneakers, one backpack, one hand-made item sewn by a Stitches-of-Love volunteer, dozens of school supplies, and many personal hygiene items. Of course, the best thing about this shopping trip is that it's free! Each child happily takes home about \$350 worth of merchandise. By week's end, \$1.8 million (retail value) in clothes and supplies have been distributed by exhausted but beaming volunteers.



“Student Attire For Education (SAFE)”

It isn't unusual to hear children complain they “don't have a thing to wear,” but in thousands of Arizona homes this isn't an exaggeration. Some children actually stay home because their families can't afford the required attire – perhaps they can only afford one uniform set, so only one sibling goes to school each day. To give these working poor families the help they need, some schools have limited onsite clothing closets.

Back to School Clothing Drive has helped Title I public elementary schools purchase school uniforms for their clothing closets. This is important because when a kid like Shaq goes to school without the required uniform, the school is able to keep him that day by giving him the clothes he needs from their clothing closet, which he gets to keep.

We quickly recognized if we created our own retail store and provided a matching grant to the schools, we could build a social enterprise through which we could generate new revenues for our organization to help us serve even more kids, plus build our operating capacity reserves.

Now when a school chooses to receive our matching grant, instead of going out into the retail market to buy the uniforms, they purchase them through our online retail store, giving them a two for one deal they cannot get anywhere else. We reinvest the net profits from those sales back into the program to serve more children in more schools and build long-term sustainability for our organization. And it's working. Today, we have over 260 schools in the program.

The Future

We believe the impact we make today is just the beginning. Our ambition is to move beyond just school uniforms and supplies to help break down those systemic barriers that students face in their pathway to early school and childhood success. Our goal is to serve more children by expanding our SAFE program to the 800 eligible schools outside of Maricopa County and ultimately becoming a nationwide school uniform service provider. This expansion is a critical step in our growth, as all proceeds from the store are used to fund additional SAFE grants and secure operating capacity. The more uniforms we sell, the more students we can help. It is an exciting time!



Of course, the reality is that no matter how worthy our cause or honorable our intentions, we can't capture the opportunities ahead of us if we're concerned about funding our day-to-day operations. Therefore, we're asking our long-time supporters to help us attain our immediate goal of solidifying our financial ability to deliver our mission to thousands of deserving children. We are careful stewards of all of the funds we raise. With a staff of only three people, we diligently use all resources to help as many children as possible.

Back to School Clothing Drive helps break down barriers that prevent or diminish the success elementary school children can achieve. Not only will your support change a children's life today, you will also make a difference in the future of Arizona's economy, solidifying our future workforce. If you would like to stay updated on our organization's success with children, please visit www.btsacd.com or contact Executive Director, Karl Gentles, at (602) 256-9408 or karl@btsacd.com.