



back to school
clothing drive

Why Back to School Clothing Drive?

Do you remember your first day of school? The way it felt to get dressed in your new clothes and cool shoes, then head out the door under the weight of a backpack that was filled with everything you needed? It's a vivid memory for most of us because it evokes a sense of excitement and the anticipation of endless possibilities. At Back to School Clothing Drive (BTSCD) we want *every* child to feel like that on their first day, even if their families can't afford to give them those things themselves.

According to the 2019 Huntington Backpack Index, parents can expect to spend \$1,017 on supplies each year *per elementary age child*, not including the \$250 that's estimated to be the cost of a starter set of school clothes. For the families we serve \$1,300 isn't disposable income, it's the difference between paying for rent, utilities, and groceries or going without those necessities. Try to imagine what the first day of school feels like for their children: feeling anxious and shameful, putting on old clothes that don't fit and shoes with holes in them, and making excuses all day about "forgetting" your backpack or calculator because you don't have one. Many administrators tell us this scenario is common and usually leads to truancy.



Two BTSCD students "shop" for bracelets to go with their new clothes!

Our support not only helps the families we serve today, but it also positively impacts the communities where they live tomorrow. Because the feeling of not fitting in at school isn't just bad for self esteem, it's also an indicator of future educational success. A 2018 study* on high school dropout rates of at-risk students showed intervention is more successful when it occurs in elementary school, and that once students are in high school it's typically too late to reach them. It also showed lower dropout rates among the students who were made to feel like they "belonged" at school and who believed

that people cared about their education. The measures that adversely affected academic success were living in low-income households and absenteeism. *These are our students and their families.* Without BTSCD, 25,000 students a year would go to school without appropriate clothes, without proper supplies, and, maybe worst of all, without feeling that somebody cares.

* Long-Term Impact of Systemic Student Support in Elementary School: Reducing High School Dropout, 2018

Then and Now

When the Salt River flooded in 1967 many of the migrant camps that were located along the river's edge were washed away, causing the hard-working families to lose everything they had. Two women, Lucy Allen and Selma Shefler, banded together to raise money to buy the children clothes to go back to school. They helped 871 families that year, and when they saw there was still a need the next year, they rolled up their sleeves and got back to work! Their compassion became their legacies and shaped our mission of eliminating barriers to educational equality by providing new clothes, shoes, backpacks, school supplies, personal care packs, and more to students who need them. Today, about 25,000 of Arizona's students are impacted by our programs each year. The largest population of students we serve are those who attend Title I schools and live in households at or below the federal poverty level (\$26,500 in annual income for a family of four, per the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services). However, we also help students in the foster care system, along with those who are affected by homelessness, and those whose families are serving our country as members of the U.S. military.

Our Programs

Back to School Clothing Drive operates five innovative programs to serve Arizona's families: New Clothes, New Beginnings; SAFE (Student Attire for Education); Stitches of Love; Backpack Buddies; and, Momentum School Uniforms.

New Clothes, New Beginnings

As our signature event, this annual distribution is what most people think of when they hear the words "Back to School Clothing Drive." For five days each July approximately 5,000 students from more than 140 schools come to Grand Canyon University for a back to school "shopping spree!" The students, who are pre-registered by their school administrators based on need, each get a volunteer "personal shopper" who guides them through the various departments and helps them pick out two pairs of shorts, two polo shirts, one sweatshirt, one belt, three pairs of socks and underwear, one pair of shoes, and a backpack that's filled with grade-appropriate school supplies. But that's not all! They also get a personal care pack and health screenings, and they end their day by picking out books and a hand-crafted accessory made by one of our Stitches of Love volunteers. It takes more than 2,500 volunteers to set up, execute, and tear down this event each year and we never have a shortage! In fact, we're routinely told by our corporate volunteer coordinators and our civic organization leaders that *New Clothes, New Beginnings* is the most requested volunteer opportunity they offer.

Even though we've had to make adjustments in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic, we used our expertise and our vast network to execute drive-through events and to deliver all of the promised items directly to our schools. We expect to be back to a bigger and better in-person event in 2022!



Getting measured for new clothes!

SAFE (Student Attire for Education)

SAFE (*Student Attire for Education*) is an online school uniform store that BTSCD has operated since 2000, when we assumed operations from the Stardust Companies. All proceeds from this store help fund our program operations and our *New Clothes, New Beginnings* event.



Our students benefit from uniform policies

It may come as a surprise that a number of Arizona's Title I schools require their students to wear uniforms. However, research* shows such policies result in decreased bullying, increased safety, and fewer distractions, among other benefits. What people often find more surprising is that these same schools have to maintain onsite clothing closets so they can provide uniforms, underwear, and shoes to their students who often show up in clothes that are too small, too threadbare, or too dirty to be worn.

"It's hard for us to grasp the need that exists just a few miles in any direction," says Gerald Wissink CEO of BHHS Legacy Foundation, one of BTSCD's financial supporters. "Some children have to stay home from school because their families can't afford clothes. We've even heard of cases where kids have to share clothes or shoes, so only one sibling goes to school each day."

Stitches of Love

With only three full-time staff members, Back to School Clothing Drive relies heavily on our dedicated volunteers. Without a doubt, some of our most committed are the 600 volunteer seamstresses that comprise Stitches of Love. These women, whom we often refer to as "angels," sew, crochet, and craft all year long in support of our *New Clothes, New Beginnings* distribution. Many of these volunteers make more than 300 items a piece and combined they create more than 30,000 items annually, easily placing them among the most prolific volunteers in the Valley. The Stitches of Love department is a favorite stop for our students! They love to browse the vast selection of items that vary from basic needs, like clothes and hats, to accessories including wallets, hair ties, and purses, and also include personal things like pillowcases that further help their families by reducing overall costs. The best part is they know they can take their favorite item home with them – for free!



Decisions, decisions!

* *School Discipline, School Uniforms and Academic Performance, 2016*

Backpack Buddies

To kids who have them, backpacks are no big deal, but to the kids that don't, it's just another chance to feel like you don't fit in. We're proud to partner with BHHS Legacy Foundation on this far-reaching initiative that delivers more than 10,000 backpacks to students throughout Arizona. Of course we don't deliver them empty, our volunteers load them up with brand new school supplies and personal care packs! We work with our district partners to ensure the contents match the required supply lists for each grade, so our students can go back school ready to learn and feeling good about it because they have exactly what the other kids have.



After Clemson helped stuff backpacks, one Tiger showed his off-field skills!

Momentum School Uniforms



This is our newest initiative and we couldn't be more excited about it! We're taking the high-quality, low-cost school uniforms that we sell to schools in our SAFE store and selling it to consumers in our new online retail site. All proceeds from Momentum will be invested back into our program to help underwrite *New Clothes*, *New Beginnings* and to expand our services to reach more schools in Maricopa County and, eventually, throughout Arizona. The impact we make today is just the beginning. There are so many more families who need the help we offer

and this social enterprise will allow us to reach them. The bottom line is the more uniforms we sell, the more students we can help! And since we've been in the school uniform business for decades, we have the knowledge and resources and to make Momentum a life-changing success.

Partner With Us

For more than five decades the supporters of Back to School Clothing Drive have helped low-income families break the cycle of poverty by eliminating the barriers that hinder educational success. Because of the generosity of corporate and individual donors, our students get clean, stylish clothes that they can feel proud to wear along with the supplies they need to keep up with the rest of the class. But most importantly, they get the message – loud and clear – that education matters and people they've never met think they're worthy and capable. With your financial support, you have the power to change a child's life today and to improve Arizona's future. Please join us on this rewarding journey! You can contact BTSCD's Executive Director Karl Gentles at 602-256-9408 ext. 1001 for more information. It's a decision you will never regret.