



2024
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Case for Support



back to school
clothing drive





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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, and head out the door with a backpack filled with everything you needed? It's a special 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.

The 2019 Huntington Backpack Index calculated that parents can expect to spend \$1,017 on supplies each year per elementary age child. That doesn't even include a starter set of school clothes, which they estimated to cost \$250. For the families we serve \$1,300 isn't disposable income, it's their rent and utilities. So try to imagine what the first day of school is like for these children: feelings of anxiety and shame as they dress in old clothes that don't fit and shoes with holes in them. Once they're at school, they spend the day making excuses about "forgetting" their backpack or calculator because they don't have one. Many administrators tell us this scenario is common and leads to truancy.

Our support not only helps the children we serve today, it also positively impacts the community tomorrow. Because the feeling of not fitting in at school isn't only 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 in elementary school and that once students are in high school it's too late to reach them. It also showed lower dropout rates among students who felt like they "belonged" at school and who believed 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, 22,000 students a year would go to school without appropriate clothes, without proper supplies, and, maybe worst of all, without knowing that somebody cares.

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



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Then and Now

When the Salt River flooded in 1967 many of the migrant camps along the river's edge were washed away, causing the hard-working families to lose everything. Two women, Lucy Allen and Selma Shefler, banded together to raise money to buy the children school clothes. They helped 871 families, and when there was still a need the following year they did it again. **Their compassion grew into our mission of eliminating the barriers to educational equality by providing new clothes, shoes, backpacks, school supplies, hygiene items, and more to students who need them.**

Today, about 22,000 of Arizona's students are impacted by our programs annually. The largest population we serve is students who attend Title I schools and live in households at or below the federal poverty level (\$31,200 in annual income for a family of four, per the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services). We also help students in foster care, 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

For more than 55 years, we have developed six innovative programs to serve Arizona's families: our annual "New Clothes = New Beginnings" distribution, SAFE (Student Attire for Education), Stitches of Love, Backpack Buddies, Momentum School Uniforms, and Project:WEAR.



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New Clothes = New Beginnings

As our signature event, this annual distribution is what most people think of when they hear “Back to School Clothing Drive.” Every summer about **4,000 students from approximately 140 schools come to Grand Canyon University for a free shopping spree!** The students, who are pre-registered by 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, a sweatshirt, a belt, three pairs of socks and underwear, a pair of shoes, and a backpack filled with grade-appropriate school supplies. But that’s not all! They also get a personal care pack, books, a dental screening, and a hand-crafted item made by one of our Stitches of Love volunteers. It takes more than 1,500 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.



SAFE (Student Attire for Education)

Not many people know that a number of Arizona’s Title I schools require students to wear uniforms. However, research* shows such policies result in decreased bullying, increased safety, and fewer distractions, among other benefits. Also surprising is that these same schools maintain onsite closets so they can provide clothes, underwear, and shoes to students who show up wearing things that are too small, too threadbare, or too dirty.

Since 2000 BTSCD has operated SAFE, an online school uniform store where more than a hundred schools and districts use federal McKinney-Vento funds, local grant dollars, and their own budgets to buy clothes for their students and clothing closets. This is a win-win program for the schools. Rather than buy items from a traditional retailer who would pocket the profits, they can buy from us knowing all proceeds are used to fund “*New Clothes = New Beginnings*.” That means **every dollar they spend helps their students!**

“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 top 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.”

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

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Stitches of Love

With only three full-time employees, Back to School Clothing Drive relies heavily on our dedicated volunteers. Without a doubt, some of the most committed are the 300 sewists who comprise *Stitches of Love*. These women and men, whom we often refer to as “angels,” sew, crochet, and craft all year in support of 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 include basic needs like clothes and hats; fun things including wallets, hair accessories, and purses; and personal articles, like pillowcases, that help their families by reducing overall costs. The best part is the children all know they can take their favorite item home with them for free!

Backpack Buddies

To kids who have them backpacks are no big deal, but to the kids that don't it's just another way to feel like you don't fit in. We're proud to partner with BHHS Legacy Foundation on this far-reaching initiative that **delivers about 12,500 backpacks to students each year**. 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 supply lists for each grade so our students can go back school ready to learn because they have exactly what the other kids have.



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Momentum School Uniforms

In 2021 we launched Momentum School Uniforms so we could sell the high-quality, low-cost merchandise available to schools through our SAFE program to retail consumers.

Now any parent who needs to buy uniform separates or clothing basics can help a family in need by buying the items from us! As with SAFE, all proceeds from the sales are used to underwrite “*New Clothes = New Beginnings*” and to expand our services throughout Maricopa County and, eventually, Arizona. The impact we make today is just the beginning. There are so many families who need the help we offer and this social enterprise allows us to reach them. The bottom line is the more we sell, the more we can help, and since we’ve been in the uniform business for decades, we have the knowledge and resources to make Momentum a success.

Project: WEAR

Created in 2022, Project:WEAR is a program that increases our capacity to serve Arizona’s low-income families. We work with funders to provide items to students who can’t attend “*New Clothes = New Beginnings*” as well as older students and adults who need clothes and sneakers for work, education, and recreation.



Partner With Us

For more than 55 years Back to School Clothing Drive has worked to help 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 more importantly they get the message – loud and clear – that education matters and people think they’re worthy and capable of succeeding in school.**

Your financial support has the power to change a child’s life today and to improve Arizona’s future. Please join us on this rewarding journey! You can learn more about corporate sponsorships by calling Karl Gentles at **602-256-9408 ext. 1001**. Individual donations can be made online at **www.btsacd.com/donation**. It’s a decision you will never regret!

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