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SAC charity drive brings cheer to youth in need

By Jake Courtepatte

Not all of Santa's elves are at the North Pole: it seems some are at St. Andrew's College.

SAC students and staff wrapped up their annual ?Holiday Hero? drive last week, an initiative that has provided a Christmas to youth in the community who would otherwise go without one.

Working with the Children's Aid Society for the last decade, Holiday Hero sponsors 125 youth between the ages of 16 and 21, many of whom are living with no family to rely on, or proper homes for the holidays.

With few goods of their own, many of the youth ask for simply the basic goods that most take for granted, like toiletries, winter clothing, and gift cards to buy food.

?Youth buying for youth definitely helped raise awareness and understanding of those who have less,? said Melissa Tackaberry, Holiday Hero Coordinator.
The Holiday Hero program is a school-wide initiative, with the entire staff and student body contributing, totaling around 700 helping hands.

?Our students read through the profiles of the 125 Youth in Care and choose one or two youth that they would like to support,? said Tackaberry. ?They then shop for the youth and return the gifts to SAC to be wrapped.

?The faculty and staff help support the students through the process as well as ?adopting' youth of their own to help support.?

Then came the difficult task of wrapping the gifts. Tackaberry said more students helped wrapped this season than ever before, totaling about 25 students, as well as faculty and staff.

With an estimate topping a staggering $1.25 million in donations raised over ten years in the program, SAC has helped out over 1,500 families and youth. Tackaberry estimates this year's haul to be around $125,000 worth of items and gift cards alone.

Looking to the future, however, Tackaberry said the program will be looking next year to partner with any business connections the students may have through their families, and bring the initiative to the next level.

?We would love to have connections with any businesses that produce items that youth could use [who] live on their own,? said

Tackaberry. ?This includes toiletries, clothing such as pyjamas, socks, sweaters?kitchen items such as dishes, microwaves, cutlery?linens such as towels, and bedding...as well as items youth would need to go to post-secondary school such as laptops and school supplies.?