

“Boutique” at NRO supplies comforts for foster youth

While efforts are made to ensure that children entering foster homes have all necessary belongings, emergency situations can lead to unexpected needs. For those times, an Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) volunteer has created a “boutique” designed to fill the gaps.

Molly DiBattisto, the boutique’s founder, first became involved with the CYF North Regional Office when asked to foster a sibling group of three.

“You really can’t have everything you need ready and waiting when a child or sibling group comes into your home,” said Molly. “In this instance, our foster placement was an emergency, and we only had hours to gather the supplies we needed to properly house these three kids. While we quickly received all of the necessary items through the generosity of our network, we felt motivated to ‘pay it forward’ and make sure that other foster families could have quick, easy access to essential items.”

Through a series of chance encounters, Molly was placed in contact with DHS staff members who were excited about the opportunity to host a free boutique for foster youth. In fact, almost serendipitously, the North Regional Office had created a space for that purpose, but needed a volunteer who could support the operations of the boutique – collecting, sorting and distributing all donated items – before the space could be used. It was a perfect match.

The boutique houses an assortment of new and gently used clothes and play items for youth ages zero to 21. When Molly receives a request from a caseworker, she carefully sorts through the boutique’s inventory to find items to meet the child’s unique needs – often pajamas, toiletries and clothing – while also adding at least one “fun” item such as a book or a toy. Everything is packaged into a tote or duffel bag and delivered by the caseworker to the foster family. More than 25 bags have been distributed since the boutique opened earlier this year.

Although the boutique operates out of the North Regional Office, items are available to families served by any CYF office. Caseworkers who are interested in receiving items from the boutique should contact Tawnya Frederick at Tawnya.Frederick@allegHENYcounty.us for more information.