



The Pieces of Home Backpack Project was implemented at Boston Medical Center to serve children who are in the first phase of foster care, the emergency removal from an unsafe situation. The children are brought to our ED by police officers, emergency medical technicians, or family members. Staff at BMC complete a medical evaluation, assess the child and family, and, if necessary, involve the Department of Children and Families (DCF). In the worst cases of abuse or neglect, DCF may decide that a child must immediately be removed from their present living situation. DCF takes these particular children directly from the PED to an emergency placement. The children do not go to their own homes to collect personal items. These children are exiting situations that have been unsafe and unpredictable. Still, the vast majority of children feel anxiety and fear in leaving the life they have known, regardless of the pain that may have been present as well. It is very important to provide emotional and physical support to these children during the initial hours of an emergency response.

The Pieces of Home backpack project was formed to provide every child discharged to the care of DCF with a stuffed backpack. The backpack provides displaced children with a sense of ownership and brings a small amount of normalcy to an unfamiliar and scary situation. The generous and caring individuals who accept emergency placements have expressed gratitude for the Pieces of Home project, as children often arrive late at night without clean clothes, comfort items, or basic hygiene items. Children can be placed in emergency placements for a variety of reasons; abuse or neglect by a caregiver, injury or hospitalization of a caregiver, incarceration of a caregiver to name a few. Children have been placed after surviving house fires, after suspected or confirmed physical or sexual abuse, and after parents have expressed suicidal thoughts. The emergency placement is a home for one to three nights, a safe place where children can await the court decision regarding the child's well-being. Some children are returned to family members at the end of the placement and some are placed with long term foster placements.

The Pieces of Home program formed in the minds of PED staff members in August 2007 and came to fruition in January 2008. We organize the backpacks by developmental age and gender and maintain a par level in the ED at all times. Each backpack and everything within the backpack is new, allowing the child or teen to be the one true owner. The packs contain a pair of pajamas, socks, underwear, a book, a toy, an expressive activity, and a soft blanket. Infants receive baby bags and staff members add diapers and wipes prior to discharge. Small, colorful backpacks with familiar characters are utilized for younger children and teenage girls often receive tote bags. Every attempt is made to match children's interests to their bags. For instance, a three year old boy recently received a Spiderman backpack, Spiderman pajamas, and a Spiderman plush toy. Children that may be returning to school within a few days are also provided with supplies (pens, notebooks, rulers, markers, etc). To date, the project has made it possible for over 60 children to play, to feel comfort, and to follow a typical bedtime routine. One of the first children who received a backpack happily stated "I can go to school tomorrow now that I have a backpack".

Pieces of Home Backpack Project
Wish List

Infant (Up To 12 months):

Onesies/Pajamas (Non Gender Specific Clothing is Best)
Receiving Blankets
Rattles
Soft Stuffed Animals
Teething Toys
Bibs
Pacifiers
Small Musical Crib Toys

Toddlers (13-24 months):

Footed Pajamas
Socks
Cuddly Blankets and Stuffed Animals
Board Books
Chunky Small Toys (Elmo, Barney, Dora, Caillou)

Pre-School (2-5 years):

Pajamas
Socks
Blankets/Stuffed Animals
Coloring Books, Crayons
Books/Small Toys (Dora, Diego, Blue's Clues, Thomas)

School Aged Children (5-10 years):

Coloring Books, Activity Books, Crayons, Markers and Small Craft Projects
Books (Eye Spy, Waldo, Berenstain Bears, Junie B. Jones, Magic Treehouse, Goosebumps)
Small Handheld Games
Barbie Dolls and Action Figures (SpiderMan, Hulk, Transformers, Lego Bionicle)
Socks and Underwear and Pajamas/Sweats, Bathrobes
Blankets and Stuffed Animals (Beanie Babies)
Hannah Montana, High School Musical, SpiderMan, SpongeBob, American Girl

Pre-Teens (10-13 years):

Activity Books (Crosswords, Soduko, Word Searches), Markers, Colored Pencils
Spiral Notebooks, Pens, Pencils, Calculators
UNO cards, normal cards, travel size board games and Handheld Games
Model Kits (Planes, Cars)
Books (Harry Potter, Twilight, Sports Themes)
Hair Bands, Head Bands, Lip Gloss, Chap Stick, Moisturizer, Nail Polish
Hoodies, Sweat Pants, Pajama Pants, T shirts, Socks and Underwear
Blankets, Small Stuffed Animals

Teens (13-18 years):

UNO Cards, normal cards, travel size board games and Handheld Games
Spiral Notebooks, Pens, Pencils, Calculators
Magazines, Books
Hair Bands, Head Bands, Lip Gloss, Chap Stick, Moisturizer, Nail Polish, Brushes, Combs
Baseball Hats
Hoodies, Sweat Pants, Pajama Pants, T shirts, Socks and Underwear
Blankets, Small Stuffed Animals