

## **Making time to help**

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**By Michele Howey**

*Standard-Examiner* correspondent

KAYSVILLE -- With broken windows in living areas and a lack of warm clothes, orphans in Bulgaria are getting sick and could literally freeze to death this winter.

That is why Jan Wray, a dental assisting teacher at the Davis Applied Technology College, said she and the school's Health Occupation Students of America wanted to help.

They are doing a fundraiser for One Heart Bulgaria, a charity organization, to meet the children's needs.

They are collecting brand-new sweats -- both tops and bottoms -- or one-piece infant sleepers to send to the country this Christmas.

One Heart Bulgaria was created after two sister missionaries from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints visited orphanages.

After seeing the conditions the children lived in and the lack of necessary supplies to keep them healthy, they could not return home and do nothing, said charity co-founder Deborah Dushku Gardner. She and Heidi Glyn Barker served their missions from 1993 to 1995, and they started the charity in 2003.

Gardner said she vividly remembers one experience she had while walking the halls of an orphanage in Sofia, Bulgaria.

"I heard a baby screaming," she said. "I found him in a room alone in a crib, frantic and trembling.

"It was against protocol for me to interact with the infant without permission, so I stood there, my heart breaking, and watched this tiny baby struggle."

Other infants in the orphanage were quiet, having learned that crying would bring no response, she explained.

"He would soon give up trying, like the other orphans lying quietly in their cribs," she said. "Until then, he would be left alone to scream himself into silence before being warehoused with the other babies."

In the post-communist country, Gardner said, most children in orphanages are there because their parents are too poor to care for them. Others have handicaps or deformities like cleft palate and hydrocephalus, conditions that can be surgically corrected.

Children who receive those surgeries early can lead a normal life, Gardner said.

While the country has more than 30,000 children in many orphanages, HOSA is starting out by helping children at just a few. Donations will provide for the needs of three different orphanages -- one for handicapped children, one for infants ages 0 to 3 and one for children ages 7 to 18.

Donated infant sleepers should be one piece and in sizes for up to 12-month-old babies.

"They don't need to be fancy, just basic," Gardner said.

For the older kids, the two-piece sets would be fine, she added.

Almost as important as keeping the children warm will be the gift of knowing that someone cares about them when they receive the brand-new sweats, Gardner said.

"The kids will feel important and loved, like someone thought of them, like it was just for them," she said.

Colors will also brighten the lives of the children.

"They don't have anything with color in their world," she said. "They love color."

The organization also needs cash donations to ship the clothes and provide for other basic needs.

Students have been making Tuscan-style décor clocks that can be personalized with family names and dates, such as "Johnson Family est. 1992," to raise money. A clock can be purchased for \$65.

In the corner of the dental assisting room, there is already a large table stacked high with clocks waiting to be sold. Of the 24 clocks made, 18 have been sold.

With paint-covered hands from adding finishing touches to some of those clocks, HOSA President Kira Neumeyer talked about how important helping the children has become to her.

"After you hear about it, you just have to do something," she said. "It broke my heart."

Neumeyer said she is excited about the difference the project will make for the orphans.

The goal is to get the sweats to the kids for Christmas, but even after Christmas is over, HOSA will accept donations. Wray and her husband also plan to stay involved with the charity and help the orphans in other ways.

HOSA has been able to raise an additional \$500, but has only 15 pairs of sweats so far. HOSA -- and the orphans -- need 300 pairs.

"We are still way short of our goal and are in the process of discussing other fundraisers to raise more money," Wray said.

While the kids have other needs, the sweats are important, Wray said, because they keep the kids warm, and keeping them warm keeps them from getting sick. There are little to no medical supplies to treat the kids when they become ill.

Wray and her husband will travel at their own expense to the area next year. He is a dentist, so they will be working with the Smiles program to provide dental care to the orphans.

"I'm Bulgarian myself," she said. "That is one of the reasons why this means so much to me."

### **To help**

\* Anyone who wants to donate sweats or infant sleepers for the project can drop them off at the Davis Applied Technology College, Room 1114, 550 E. 300 South, Kaysville.

\* To purchase a clock, call Jan Wray from 7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at 593-2428 or after 2:30 p.m. at 792-6791. Proceeds support the project.

\* One Heart Bulgaria can be contacted directly at [oneheart@oneheart-bg.org](mailto:oneheart@oneheart-bg.org) or by calling (435) 764-3093.