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Polo Ridge Elementary students learn character education by giving to homeless

First grade students collect hundreds of new gifts for local nonprofit Bright Blessings

(Charlotte, N.C., January 11, 2011) - The first grade team at Polo Ridge Elementary School has chosen local nonprofit Bright Blessings (formerly Birthday Blessings) as their charity to sponsor this year in a character education project; an effort that has already yielded more than 150 new toys for homeless children.

The school's character trait for the month of December was caring. First grade students collected toys to show how they care about fellow Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools students who are struggling through the challenges of homelessness. Bright Blessings' Student Birthdays Project provides anonymous classroom birthday packages for transient homeless students across CMS—students living in motels, cars, campgrounds and other transient situations. In addition to birthday snack bags and party supplies to share with classmates, Bright Blessings also supplies each birthday student with a few new presents, books, and a comfort-and-care kit filled with toiletries, a blanket and a stuffed animal.

Says project organizer Kelly Riley, a first grade teacher at Polo Ridge, "We plan to continue to work with Bright Blessings this year on other projects where they might see a need. The students were so excited about the toy collection and were really happy that they helped make a great birthday for another student."

Polo Ridge Elementary is a CMS school led by Dr. Riska in South Charlotte. Six first grade classes participated in the Bright Blessings project and toy collection. The school's first grade teaching team includes Ms. Kendrick, Ms. A. Earley, Ms. B. Earley, Ms. Parker, Mrs. Sawtelle, and Ms. Riley.

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Bright Blessings (formerly Birthday Blessings) began in 2005 as a family service project created by Mint Hill couple Amy and John Cervantes as way to help children in need while fostering a love for volunteerism in their own young children. In 2008, they incorporated their service venture as a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit, quickly expanding the organization's programs and services. Today, Bright Blessings operates two core programs, Bless-A-Birthday and Bless-A-Baby, and numerous supporting projects that reach more than 2,000 homeless children and families annually. Thanks to success of its volunteer-led infrastructure, thousands of dedicated supporters and participants help this organization brighten the lives of children in need every day.

For more information, go to www.BrightBlessingsUSA.org.

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