

## Sunbeam students donate to Soup Opera



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Students at the Sunbeam Early Learning Center smile after collecting more than 100 cans for the Soup Opera. After 32 years, the staff still finds the yearly tradition just as rewarding as ever.

Contributing more than 100 cans shows the value of sharing

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TIMES WEST VIRGINIAN

FAIRMONT — Parents were in for a special treat when they picked up their pre-kindergarten children from the Sunbeam Early Learning Center last week.

With the help of their teachers, they prepared vegetable soup (stone soup) for their parents. As part of a week-long activity, the students were not

just showing their gratitude for them but also the community.

More than 100 soup cans were collected by Sunbeam students and donated to the Soup Opera.

"This helps children build empathy for others," director Helen Brown said.

For the past 32 years, the center makes this project a priority during the Thanksgiving week for that reason. Initially started by Brown, she knows it takes more than just telling the children it's important. Reading a

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classic folk story "Stone Soup" by author Jon J. Muth only enriches their understanding even more. In the story, it discusses the importance of teamwork and the impact a contribution can make for a group effort — or even individually.

"One person has only one thing for the soup, and someone else has a carrot or a potato, and you can't make soup with just one item," lead teacher Tracy Cline said. "But if everyone puts it in together, then you can have soup for everyone."

Listening to the story, all of the students were entertained.

"They loved it," she said. "All through the story they have the travelers going to different people and different people donating things to the soup, and they got a kick out of what this member of the community would donate. It teaches them about working together."

This story not only garners more attention but also more understanding, as children start to look at donating their soup cans as more than just an instructed assignment.

"It's just a very small lesson to learn at a very young age that will carry through hopefully the rest of their life, and that is to share what they have with others," Cline said.

"They really enjoy being able to have that knowledge and that satisfaction that they're helping other people."

Although they are giving back to the less fortunate, Cline and Brown also know that their center may have a few children whose families can relate. By including this activity into their Thanksgiving week, it's teaching those children that they are not alone, that people do want to help.

"There's an unfortunate amount of people out there that won't have a Thanksgiving, and we kind of try to explain to the kids that not everybody out there will have something," Cline said. "By donating to the Soup Opera or even donating to somebody else, it shows their compassion for people. That makes everybody feel good."

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