

In Jacob's Shoes®

Every Sole Counts

BY RACHEL GALVIN

Did you know that over 20 percent of children in Florida are living below the poverty level? One of the first indicators of low income is their shoes, according to Harlene Zweig, president and co-founder of In Jacob's Shoes®, which provides shoes to children in need.

Some kids are truant because they don't have the proper footwear or their parents are wearing their shoes in order to go to work. Others are bullied for not having decent shoes.

"Children who don't have nice looking shoes feel ashamed and are teased. Sometimes, a child needs something to feel better about [his or her] self," says Zweig.

The Jacob S. Zweig Foundation, Inc., - In Jacob's Shoes® was created by Harlene and her husband Murray in honor of their son, Jacob, who was killed in 2008 at the age of 17. The foundation has donated over 45,000 shoes since its inception. It has also donated 3,200 backpacks and given \$165,000 in grants for camp, aftercare, sports and enrichment programs.

Shoes can be dropped off at their warehouse, located at 3450 NW 27th Avenue, Pompano Beach, as well as at various business locations throughout Broward and Palm Beach. Once shoes come in, they go through a three-step cleaning process. Volunteers scrub them by hand, put them in the washing machine and disinfect them again with Lysol before checking them over to make sure they have laces and insoles. If not, they add them before the shoes are "cabled and labeled," tied together with zip ties, labeled with shoe sizes and have their laces tied into a bow. Next, they are sorted into bins, according to size.

The multi-room warehouse has over 1000 shoes stacked up and ready to distribute. If shoes are in too much disrepair, they can sometimes be recycled; for example, they can be sent to Nike Reuse a Shoe, which recycles rubber shoes and turns them into things like a basketball court.

"We have never said no to a child," says Zweig. "If we don't have enough shoes, we will go out and buy them."

She adds that they do not give to individuals, but always go through schools or charities, who pre-qualify recipients.

Jodi Samson, team leader for Broward County School Social Workers, says, "We have been working with them since their inception. They do a lot for us all

through the year. The School Board refers families to us. It is a very efficient and amazing organization."

Samson adds that they also donate shoes and backpacks for their yearly Harvest Drive.



They work with many different Back to School events and nonprofit groups like Spirit of Giving, Children's Services Council, Henderson Behavioral Health, Orange Bowl Kicks for Kids, SOS Children's Village, 4Kids of South Florida, Boys & Girls Clubs, Becca's Closet and more. There is a referral form on the website that charities and schools can fill out to indicate children's needs.

Sometimes, organizations already have received donated shoes, but can send them to In Jacob's Shoes® to have them cleaned before distribution.

The sole employee of the volunteer-run organization, Maddy Chusid, says that they also make sure to give kids a few different types of shoes, not only sneakers, but also maybe a pair of flip flops or Crocs, so they have a different pair (and to extend the life of the sneakers). She adds that certain groups that have sporting events sponsor kids to be on the team and they provide the cleats.

"The kids are so excited, so happy to have shoes," says Chusid.

Many groups bring their members in to volunteer to clean shoes.

"So many high school and college kids come in every year. Sometimes they will have a field trip here or we bring shoes to them. Also a lot of churches and synagogues come in," says Zweig, who adds that the



PROVIDING SHOES TO CHILDREN IN NEED Murray and Harlene Zweig (back row) with Maddy Chusid, and volunteers Maggie Kline and Cynthia Freedman. After a thorough cleaning process, donated shoes are sorted into bins and ready for distribution at the warehouse. Photos by Rachel Galvin



cleaning area accommodates 40 people. If more want to help, they will bring the shoes to them. They are always seeking volunteers.

They also always need donations. They are holding a 5th annual celebration April 23rd from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. which will honor two individuals who have also given back to the community: Ali Waldman and "Alligator" Ron Bergeron. Held at Boca West Country Club, 20583 Boca West Dr., Boca Raton, the event will include cocktails, dinner, a silent and live auction, and raffles and entertainment for \$100 per person. 100 percent of proceeds benefit In Jacob's Shoes®.

For more information about the event or about In Jacob's Shoes®, call 954-905-2505 or visit www.injacobsshoes.org. Financial contributions can be made online. Checks made out to The Jacob S. Zweig Foundation, Inc. d/b/a In Jacob's Shoes® should be mailed to 3452 NW 27th Ave., Pompano Beach, FL 33069.