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Kids learn to be good Samaritans

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By JAMES YOO
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ENGLEWOOD -- Ten-year-old Aliyah Mangan stood patiently in line with a Styrofoam box. There was the turkey, the stuffing, the gravy and other Thanksgiving staples.

But all those good eats weren't for her. They were meant for seniors living alone in apartments on West Street.

Aliyah, her sister, Cheyenne, and other kids skipped cartoon reruns and football to prepare meals Thursday at the Technology Resource Center on South Van Brunt Street.

For their parents, the day's effort was an opportunity to teach them to appreciate what they have today. It also was a way of grooming them to do it again tomorrow.

The event was organized by the Faith Over Fear Foundation, which is housed at the center, and the Bergen County Relief Center.

Event organizers said they were happy that children were volunteering.

"When you get kids that could come out and want to be a part of it, that's a blessing," said Derek Boone, head of the Bergen County Relief Center.

Later that afternoon, Boone, Mayor Michael Wildes and others hand-delivered the meals down the block to senior citizens living on West Street.

Parents who brought their kids to volunteer understand "the value and importance of this day," Wildes said.

Meanwhile, Rhonda Mangan, Aliyah's mother, sat proudly while watching her daughters stand in line with boxes of Thanksgiving eats.

"It helps them to gain that understanding that not everything's a given," she said.

Mangan, 46, of Everett Place, said it was important because once her girls get older, they could take things for granted.

"They can say, 'Mommy, can I have?' anytime they want," she said. "And not everybody can."

But equally important, Mangan said, is getting her kids used to volunteering.

"If you give them an opportunity, that's something we can instill in them to start going back," she said.

Samuel Lee, community outreach liaison for the Faith Over Fear Foundation, backed her sentiments: "We hope that they would be the generation we can pass the baton to."

Attallah Brightwell was on hand with her three children, and all of them were already veterans at helping others.

"What we're doing today is a part of their everyday life," she said.

Brightwell, 40, of Paterson said making her children conscious of others and their situations was important. So that, when they see a homeless person, they understand he or she is not "bad people," just someone who's faced some tough circumstances, she said.

Next on the list for the Mangan girls is Christmas. They'll be volunteering at a home for developmentally disabled adults, their mother said. They also will have to settle for new clothes instead of toys, she added.

When asked about that forecast, Aliyah smiled and said, "It's better than nothing."

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