



Altrusa International of Gainesville
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ALTRUSA CLUB SPONSORS STUFF THE BUS TO HELP AREA HOMELESS CHILDREN

GAINESVILLE-- Altrusa International of Gainesville will hold its fifth annual "Stuff the Bus" to provide assistance to homeless and needy students attending Alachua County public schools on Saturday, October 24, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Donations will be accepted at the yellow school bus parked at Butler Plaza on Archer Road next to TGI Fridays Restaurant and near Wal-Mart.

Donors are asked to stuff the bus with new school supplies, personal hygiene items and store gift cards in any denomination for clothing and other immediate needs.

Today's tough economic times with unemployment and foreclosures have contributed to the more than 600 homeless children enrolled in Alachua County schools. For these students, school is one of the few stable, secure places in their lives that are often filled with social, emotional and educational upheaval. This project is designed to help these students have a positive school experience by providing them with needed school supplies and appropriate new clothing. The collected items are distributed to the students who need them by Alachua County school counselors.

The Girl Scout Troop 1247 of the Kanapaha Service Unit and several area Parent Teacher Associations are helping the Altrusa Club with this community service project.

Protecting children's educational rights was the focus of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act of 1987, and reauthorized through the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. The 2001 legislation required that every school district appoint a liaison to the homeless.

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“This year we have identified more than 600 homeless children and youth in Alachua County. While this is an alarming number, what is more startling are the conditions surrounding and causes of their homelessness,” said Courtney Allen, coordinator, Alachua County Public Schools Homeless/Transition Education Program.

Despite federal legislation, Congress has provided little money to school districts to serve these children’s needs.

“Every day our teachers and principals see the negative impact of homelessness on the academic achievement of our students,” said Alachua County School Superintendent Dan Boyd. “These children desperately need the support of community groups like Altrusa if they are to succeed in school.”

Altrusa member Kathryn Lehman, who is co-chairing the project with member Bill Baxter, said that homeless children face serious issues in our community and that donations from citizens could mean the difference between a child being in school or being alone on the streets.

“It’s hard to even imagine the chaotic circumstances under which these children live. Altrusa International’s Stuff the Bus project gives all area citizens a way to help the children with the essentials to be able to go to school and to possibly change their circumstances,” Lehman said.

Photo Op: Altrusa International’s Stuff the Bus – yellow bus – will be parked by TGI Fridays Restaurant and near Wal-Mart on Archer Road on Saturday, Oct. 24, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Interview Op: Courtney Allen, coordinator, Alachua County Public Schools Homeless/Transition Education Program, will be making a presentation re: homeless children in our community on Thursday, October 8, noon, Altrusa Club meeting, Paramount Hotel, SW 13th Street, Gainesville.

