

Southington Smart Start



"During our lives we're faced with so many different elements as well, we experience so many setbacks, and fight such a hand-to-hand battle with failure... just trying to stay upright and to have a little hope."

- Lance Armstrong

Now in its 7th year, Southington Smart Start is committed to helping the less fortunate students in town. It is a program run in conjunction with Southington Community Services and is designed to give those less fortunate students in town the necessary supplies to compete in school. Each year, families can apply through the Community Services department to receive a brand new backpack filled with supplies such as paper, pens, coloring utensils, folders, and much more. In addition to the bag, each student is given a \$25 shoe voucher redeemable at Wal*Mart for any type of foot-related item: sneakers, sandals, boots, shoe laces, socks, stockings, etc. To schedule your appointment call Community Services at (860) 276-6271.

History

(By Rebecca Michlin)

From the first day of Kindergarten, I have always loved school. I enjoy the challenge which it brings me. The summer before 6th grade, I realized how lucky I was to be able to acquire the tools necessary to receive a proper education. Yet, I was concerned about those kids who may not be able to purchase those supplies necessary, so a back-to-school program for the less fortunate seemed to be a perfect project for me to make my own.

The first year, Smart Start seemed big for what is known as an affluent community. About 150 bags were packed and \$3,750 was given out in shoe vouchers. Giving out the bags and vouchers was so gratifying to me, to see the work which I put in being received with such relief by the parents, and joy by the kids. The look on the students' faces showed they knew that they

wouldn't be singled out any more because of their supplies. They knew they wouldn't be different than all the other students.

All the joy and thankfulness which I saw that first year made me realize just how vital this program had become. Over the next few years, the number of backpacks and the vouchers increased over 100%, which was when I realized that this program could turn into something great with the right help and guidance. Six years after those first backpacks, with the help of Kathy Reinhard, Cheryl Dumont-Smith of the Main Street Foundation, and Janet Mellon, Smart Start has moved to that next level.

The next step is a tuition-assistance program for those students who think college is out of reach. Every student should have the opportunity to receive an education or career training. With "Inside Rebecca's Backpack," those graduating seniors will be given money to help defray the cost of college or career training.

[Inside Rebecca's Backpack](#)

Many high school seniors dream of continuing their education at the next level, whether it is at a big university, a local community college or at a certified trade school. Becoming a high school junior, I realized that



these less fortunate students may have abandoned their dream of continuing their education because of a variety of financial factors.

I wanted to help these kids achieve their dreams, so I have established a tuition-assistance program. Beginning in 2007, every graduating high school senior who has received assistance from the Smart Start program can qualify for assistance with their school books, boarding, or tuition for college or technical school. As long as the student is enrolled a college, trade school, university, or technical school for one semester, they will receive our help with their next semester.

Inside Rebecca's Backpack, a fund managed by the Main Street Foundation, was established to provide every graduating senior who is enrolled in an institution for higher learning with money to help defray the costs. With this money, every Smart Start student in Southington now has the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and continue their education.

Memorable Moments

I would like to share with you a story that always stands clear in my mind. A young girl was very excited to start her first day of Kindergarten. She practically skipped into the building to get her backpack. Words don't even describe the twinkle in her eyes as she proudly told us that she and Barbie



would be starting Kindergarten in just one week! With Barbie in hand, I took her to pick a bag. It took a little while - she couldn't decide between the Barbie bag and the Care Bears bag - but she finally picked the perfect backpack for her. She chose the Barbie bag, so she and her Barbie could go off to school with matching accessories.

Ways to Help

100% of your tax-deductible donation to either Southington Smart Start or Inside Rebecca's Backpack will go to help the students!!

Please send your **tax-deductible** contributions to:
Southington Smart Start
Southington Community Services
75 Main Street
P.O. Box 610
Southington, CT 06489

Do you have Questions? Call Community Services (860) 276-6271

Please help these underprivileged students achieve their potential!!