

“SMART START PROGRAM”

“Education is what remains after one has forgotten everything he learned in school.” – Albert Einstein

This program prepares Southington students entering grades K-12 with new backpacks. Applications start each year on July 1st.

2012 - Present Southington Smart Start Coordinator - Giving Back Girls

The Giving Back Girls came to Southington Community Services to see what they could do for their community. Our office was looking for students to continue working on Smart Start because Ashley Zerbe and Melissa Reid were off to college. The Giving Back Girls were excited to take over the program. Out of Erin Gibney’s love of baking and her desire to get involved with her community grew, The Giving Back Girls, a group originally comprised of her twin sister Emily and their sixth grade friends from DePaolo and Kennedy Middle Schools, in Southington, CT. After baking more cakes than could be eaten, she asked if it would be possible to set up a bake sale, where she could sell her delicious creations and donate the proceeds to someone in need. With the help of Emily and their friends and classmates baking their own delicious creations, the first Giving Back Girls Bake Sale was held in April 2010 in conjunction with The Arc of Southington, a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit corporation whose mission is a leader in the community: educating, empowering, supporting and advocating for people with disabilities. They have since incorporated them into an integral part of their fundraising operations. The bake sales are a continuing effort throughout the year and all proceeds raised are then distributed by The Arc of Southington to local charities.

As their community involvement grew, Janet Mellon from Southington Community Services saw great promise for The Giving Back Girls to take over the Southington Smart Start Program, which is a program that provides 350 - 400 backpacks for Southington kids in need, returning to school each September. By taking over the Smart Start Program, with the mentorship of The Arc of Southington (www.arcofsouthington.org), The Giving Back Girls now have the responsibility of collecting back to school supplies, warehousing those supplies, filling each back pack for a boy or girl in a certain grade and distributing the backpacks to each child prior to school starting. It’s a big responsibility. The smiles on the kid’s

faces are the greatest reward. From their efforts in the Smart Start Program, their involvement with Southington Community Services and their community recognition awards from the Southington Town Council and The Southington Board of Education, numerous calls began to come in asking if the Giving Back Girls could help. They were more than happy to do so. They also received the Home Town Hero award from the United Way.”

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Trisha Gibney