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'Kids Helping Kids' makes holiday season brighter

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Just before the holiday season began six years ago, a Boca Raton youngster was watching the movie "Oliver Twist" and asked his parents if poor children like that really existed, or were they only in books and movies?

Realizing that some children can actually go without toys for the holidays, then 5-year old Luke Barron decided to do something about it.

He began small fund raising activities on his own, such as buying bulk candy bars at Costco and selling them door-to-door. Other children joined Luke in his philanthropic activities. Soon, garage sales were being done, toy drives were organized and donations were made.

The funds collected were used to buy toys, gift-wrap them and then given directly to less fortunate children by a pint-size Santa Claus (aka Luke Barron).

This activity has grown over the past six years, and more than 500 toys are given away. With many youngsters and their parents volunteering, the Barron household looks like Santa's workshop when "gift wrapping" parties are hosted by Luke's parents.

Luke's "helpers" are from many different backgrounds, but all have learned a lesson about the "haves and have-nots." His volunteers are mostly from well-to-do households who are learning that giving of themselves can be as rewarding as receiving.

Many volunteer youngsters are touched when they see how excited another child becomes when given even a relatively small gift – realizing that it really is the thought that counts.

"It is eye-opening to see just how much a child will value an inexpensive Nerf football and that the most recent electronic games are not the only gifts that are appreciated," said Gina Barron, Luke's mom,

"And the parents of the children volunteering can sometimes see that realization in their own children, which they feel is a priceless lesson to learn in life."

Beyond the toys, using dollars that were raised, Kids Helping Kids has also "adopted" 50 children at The Florence Fuller Child Development Centers -- and 200 children at the Delray Full Service Center.

This year's "wrapping" party was held Sunday, Dec. 16 at the Barron home. Toys will be given out by a pint size Santa again at the Delray Full Service Center on Dec. 19 and The Florence Fuller Child Development Centers on Dec. 20.

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