

Community Rallies to Save First Day of School for 400 Children

When a fire nearly destroyed a local nonprofit's headquarters less than a week before the first day of school, Store Director Ben Negrón and his Adrian, Mich. Meijer team did not hesitate to lend more than a hand.

They knew the staff and volunteers at Associated Charities of Lenawee County were overwhelmed with concern over how they would help support the nearly 400 underserved children in their community who might not have what they need for their first day of school.

"Our team had just visited the building to pack hundreds and hundreds of backpacks with school supplies we donated to help Associated Charities prepare," Ben said. "So, waking up to hear what had happened, caught everyone's attention. It became something devastating that affected the whole community."

Thanks to incredibly responsive firefighters with the Adrian Fire Department, the fire was contained and never reached the room where the backpacks were stored. But thousands of dollars-worth of clothes, underwear, socks, and shoes were destroyed. It took the organization – which gives everything away for free – months to gather the expansive amount of apparel meant for students in need to wear on their first day ... just a few days away.

"It was heart-breaking to imagine letting those families down," said Delight Creech, the organization's Executive Director. "Those clothes are so important. No one wants to feel singled out because they lack the basics other students have in the classroom. We want every child in our community to feel confident and get a good start for the school year."

Before the end of the week, Ben, and his store team, surprised Delight with an additional \$2,500 to fund replacement items. Our store's donation – along with other monetary donations collected by local radio station WLEN – steadily grew as neighbors and local businesses across Lenawee County chipped in.

Two days before school was to start, Delight and her Associated Charities volunteers were able to set up a tent and hand out gift cards for a shopping trip not to be forgotten. All of the children found the clothing and hygiene items they needed.

The result turned heartbreak into a heartwarming example of how a community can come together when the challenges seem greatest.

"The entire experience was overwhelming and we're a long way from being able to re-open our headquarters," Delight said. "But we are so confident we will be back serving families. The love we were shown makes us just want to work harder."

On the first day of school, more than 400 Lenawee County students woke up with clothes in their closets, got dressed and took a proud first step into the new school year.

Additional assets available online: [**Photos**^{\(1\)}](#)

<https://meijercommunity.com/Community-Rallies-to-Save-First-Day-of-School-for-400-Children>