

[Mohawk Trail Regional School Key Club spearheads ‘Sharing is Caring Closet’](#)

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BUCKLAND — Mohawk Trail Regional School students now have access to free clothing and toiletry products through the student-led “Sharing is Caring Closet.”

Starting last school year, the roughly 35 members of the school’s Key Club collaborated with the nonprofit Mary Lyon Foundation to launch a free clothing closet. They posted on social media to spread the word and received loads of donated goods for their project.

“I asked the students at the heart of the community what would they like to do,” said Lisa Camarda, a Mohawk Trail Regional School educator and Key Club advisor. “They said, ‘We have a Salvation Army — why not have something similar in the school?’”

Volunteers used an unoccupied room in the middle school for the Sharing is Caring Closet. They organized and separated the donated clothing and set up the room like a small clothing store, where students and families can take as much as they need for personal use. Area stores donated clothing racks to give the room the feeling of a real store when users walk inside.

The closet had a soft opening last spring and is now well-organized for students to use this fall. Students can ask teachers for access to the room to browse and take anything they would like. Students also run open hours for the closet on Fridays during their advisory period.

“People can take whatever they want,” said Mary Lyon Foundation Executive Director Kristen Tillona-Baker. “It is all about trust. I don’t feel like we had a mass exodus of clothes.”

The people running the Sharing is Caring Closet hope to receive coat and boot donations for the winter season, including ski gear as many of the students at Mohawk Trail Regional School are involved in the Berkshire East ski team. They hope to receive donations of new underwear and socks as well. Donations can be dropped off at the school’s front office.

The Mary Lyon Foundation partnered with Hope & Comfort, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit that provides free hygiene products to people in need, to give out toiletry products in addition to the clothing. Tillona-Baker said families are often in need of hygiene products because Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for food do not cover these essentials.

The products include shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, toothbrushes and menstrual products.

“With our food pantry program, I regularly have parents ask me for these things,” Tillona-Baker said. The Mary Lyon Foundation currently helps 50 families in the nine-town school district, delivering food from food banks directly to their doorsteps.

Tillona-Baker hopes the larger community will eventually have access to the resources that are available in the Sharing is Caring Closet, which was named by the students themselves. Camarda said she wanted the students to fully spearhead the project, including deciding on a name.

“I emphasize leaving a legacy for Key Club students,” Camarda said. “They can walk out of school knowing they have done something amazing.”

The closet will be open at the upcoming Mary Lyon Resource Fair, which will be held at the school on Wednesday, Oct. 25, from 3 to 6 p.m.

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