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STUDENTS PARTICIPATE IN NATIONAL JARED BOX PROJECT

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As part of their community service project, eighth-graders from St. Vincent Ferrer School in Delray Beach recently delivered 52 boxes containing playthings for young cancer patients at St. Mary's Hospital in West Palm Beach.

The delivery was part of the Jared Box Project, a nationwide campaign to bring toys and other gifts to children with cancer.

The Jared Box Project was started in memory of Jared McMullen of State College, Pa., who was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 1999. The 6-year-old died on Nov. 12, 2000.

"This program allows Jared's spirit to live on," said his mother, Ruth McMullen. "It also helps us through the grieving process."

When Jared was undergoing chemotherapy, his family would bring him a backpack filled with toys to occupy him. He'd always ask his mother why other children didn't have toys and games, she said.

Shortly after his death, McMullen family friend Cindy Kolarik started the Jared Box Project at a State College church and the idea has been a success since.

"I knew we wanted to do something to honor Jared and his family and I thought it would be nice to create something that is kid-friendly so youngsters could work on them as projects," she said. "The idea was targeted to help children who are going through what Jared went through."

Children in 17 states have made more than 6,000 Jared boxes. The idea is so popular that it's become a nonprofit organization.

"The organization likes to deliver locally," McMullen's aunt Barbara Fox said. "Since we made them in Delray Beach, we knew they'd be given to patients in Florida. It's nice to know that we are helping kids in our communities."

The students from St. Vincent Ferrer School began putting the Jared boxes together in January. Businesses in Delray Beach and surrounding cities donated toys and gifts, which included crayons, markers, puzzles, small toys, playing cards, MatchBox cars, Silly Putty, stuffed animals and Play-Doh.

"We used items that children can use in a sedentary position," Fox said. "This way they can be entertained while going through chemotherapy."

Students also added personalized letters for the children.

"I felt accomplished," student Caitlin Prichard said. "I knew I was doing something for someone who really needed to be recognized and can really use it."

Prichard made her Jared box for an 8- to 11-year-old girl.

"I chose to use nail polish, a diary with a planner, a sketching pad and markers as my gifts," she said. "In the card I wrote, 'Dear friend, I hope using this box will help you forget your pain for a moment. Good luck with your surgery.' I think she'll enjoy it."

Fox and students loaded some vehicles with the boxes and personally delivered them to the children at St. Mary's Hospital.

"We have gotten very warm responses from the nurses and parents because it makes matters easier for them as well as the children," Fox said. "The toys help to calm the patients during a very scary procedure."

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Nathaniel Smith, a patient at St. Mary's Hospital, receives his Jared Box from eighth-graders Brian Fox (left), Elizabeth Lee (center) and Catherine Transleau. PHOTO (B&W)

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