



Comfort Cases 2018-2019

Community Service Project

Briar Woods High School FBLA
Ashburn, VA
Chapter #15398



Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	2
<i>Purpose of Project</i>	3
<i>Research</i>	4
<i>Planning and Development</i>	5
<i>Implementation of Project</i>	8
<i>Evidence of Publicity.</i>	10
<i>Impacts and Benefits for the Community</i>	11
<i>Capitol Hill Recognition</i>	12
<i>Evaluation</i>	13
<i>Appendices</i>	
<i>Appendix A</i>	14
<i>Appendix B</i>	14
<i>Appendix C</i>	14
<i>Appendix D</i>	15
<i>Appendix E</i>	15

Submitted by:
 Suzy Pak
 Peter Nwachukwu
 Tamana Murshidi

Introduction

Briar Woods FBLA members are active within their neighborhoods through their involvement in community service. Our chapter takes pride in our various community service projects conducted throughout the 2018-2019 school year. Being involved in community service is a main part of our mission as a chapter, and it aligns us with our national organization's goal to give back to the community. This year, our chapter teamed up with the Broadlands Community Center to support the non-profit organization Comfort Cases. Comfort Cases is a national organization that provides aid to children in foster care. There are over 437,000 children in foster care in the United States alone, and in our home state of Virginia, there are over 5,000. The children in foster care are often overlooked and are faced with many issues that typical children don't experience. Many children in foster care don't even own a backpack to carry their belongings, leaving them with a trash bag to hold their personal items.



Officer team and advisors sitting in front of the 430 completed comfort cases



Founder of Comfort Cases - Rob Scheer

Comfort Cases was created by former foster child, Rob Scheer, who carried his belongings from home to home in a trash bag. Thirty years later Rob and his husband set out to adopt foster children and were appalled by the sight of the children arriving with the same shameful trash bags. Encouraged by his newest family members and husband, Scheer shared his story in hopes of change and founded Comfort Cases. It is a non-profit organization that packs cases full of necessities and comfort items. The purpose of these cases is to give the children, being rushed into foster homes, a sense of dignity and self-worth. These children are forced to adapt within a matter of hours and usually are left with nothing more than the clothes they are wearing. Through Comfort Cases, they are given something to call their own. In the six years it has been in existence, Comfort Cases has reached 32 states, distributed 12,000+ cases, and impacted the lives of thousands of children in foster care.

Purpose of Project

The purpose of this project was to create “Comfort Cases”, or backpacks/duffle bags filled with necessities including toiletries, such as: toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, as well as comfort items such as: blankets, books, and stuffed animals. These backpacks are then sent to children in foster care within our community, to prevent them from having to carry their belongings in trash bags. To gather donations from the community, we worked on spreading awareness of the organization through different outlets, such as flyers and social media.



Chapter officer with a completed case

The goal of this project was to pack over 400 completed cases to give to local foster homes. This requires us to collect all the supplies that were necessary to pack a completed bag. We also wanted to shine a light on the current conditions of the foster care system because it is a subject that people don't often think about. We wanted people to start talking about it. It is hard to solve a problem if no one knows that it is there in the first place. Another focus of this project was to bring more attention to the Comfort Cases organization because they are primarily based out of the DC, Maryland, Virginia area and they hope to take their organization nationwide. We carried out this project intending to bring the community together and work toward the common goal of helping those in need. We wanted members of the community to realize that not everyone is as fortunate as they are, and to provide aid to children in need.



Comfort Cases' Purpose

Research

In our initial research, we found that Virginia has one of the worst foster care systems in the country. There are several reasons for this -- lack of accountability, kinship divergence, and awareness. Accountability in the Virginia system is almost nonexistent due to poor social service policies. When a child is placed in a foster home, the lack of communication and resources causes the child to be virtually forgotten until the child is adopted, if ever. Children are often found being fostered by adults who use the foster system as more of a business being given \$700 a month for the child as well as an allowance for clothing varying on the age of the child and using virtually none of it for the children themselves.

A second issue involves the lack of kinship divergence or placement. A successful placement only comes when both the child and foster parents are able to coexist in a peaceful and comfortable way. The most successful placements across the country are kinship placements, where a child is placed with known family members which lessens the instability and trauma. In the United States, the kinship placement rate is 30 percent, but in the state of Virginia the rate is a mere 6 percent. This is due to the lack of funding. Virginia House of Delegate Jennifer Carroll Foy states that the biggest reason for the lack of kinship placement is due to the fact that the state of Virginia does not provide monetary aid to the family member. While foster parents are given a monthly amount, family members do not receive this same stipend.

The general public knows that the foster system has issues, but they do not know exactly how bad the system is. Through our research we found that the biggest issue is lack of awareness. In our own community, many foster children and even their closest of friends do not know the true situation their peers face. Take Rob Scheer, for example. Rob's former classmate and close friend, Julie Holstein, did not know that Rob was a foster child, let alone homeless, for the better half of their senior year of high school. Living in an area as affluent as Ashburn, it is easy to sympathize yet ignore the problem thinking it does not apply to our area. Our FBLA chapter found it imperative to raise awareness in hopes of a better future for all foster children.



Planning and Development of the Project

Briar Woods FBLA has worked with Comfort Cases for the past three years, so our chapter is familiar with the organization and what is expected of us to assemble a successful donation drive. Our first time teaming up with Comfort Cases was in May of 2017, and the results of the project wasn't what we had hoped. We packed 60 cases that were then sent out into the community. During November of 2017, we packed 105 cases. Throughout the months of October and November of



First collaborative meeting with Mrs. Holstein

2018, however, we decided to reach out to an audience that was larger than just Briar Woods. We reached out to our community's HOA center and surrounding elementary, middle, and high schools. We



Volunteers folding jammies at the packing party

held a meeting with 12 different organizations in our school (National Honor Society, Student Council Associations, Technology Student Association, etc.) about how they could help contribute to our project. To raise more funds, we had a fundraiser at Chipotle on October 21st and ended up making over \$160. We researched the basics, including what to put in the case, as well as facts about the United States foster care system to give us more context on the issue at hand. We decided as a team that our goal was to pack 400 completed cases. This means that each backpack needed to contain every item on the checklist provided by Comfort Cases. After expressing our goals and familiarizing ourselves with Comfort Cases, we began to plan what we needed to do to reach our goal. We created a timeline that spanned from the day we began the donation drive, to the day of our packing

held a meeting with 12 different organizations in our school (National Honor Society, Student Council Associations, Technology Student Association, etc.) about how they could help contribute to our project. To raise more funds, we had a fundraiser at Chipotle on October 21st and ended up making over \$160. We researched the basics, including what to put in the case, as well as facts about the United States foster care

system to give us more context on the issue at



Susan Pak dropping boxes at helping high schools

party, which came out to approximately a month's length. A packing party is an event dubbed by the Comfort Cases organization where members of the community are invited to gather at a specified location and pack the items previously collected through the donation drive. After the donations are organized and packed, they are checked by an official Comfort Cases volunteer. Our goal was to not only have 400 completed cases, but to also gain as much participation from the community as possible.

To do so, we promoted our project and the organization within the community. This was done by including professional posters, flyers, bulletin boards, displays in our school's showcases, as well as



Officer Team with Elaine Espinola Keltz and her videographer Alex

producing a video with Elaine Espinosa, Mrs. DC, that was aired on the news in order to gain publicity. BRIAR WOODS FBLA didn't just work with Comfort Cases but also with the Broadlands Community, our local community association. We had the opportunity to work with a dedicated associate from the Broadlands Community HOA, Julie Holstein, who had a personal connection to the Comfort Cases organization as a former classmate of Rob Scheer. Through the Broadlands Community, our team linked with a graphic artist to create a design for posters and flyers to spread the word about our cause (Appendix A). These flyers were then distributed throughout multiple schools and were also accessible in many different places throughout the community. In our school's business hallway, we decorated a bulletin board to publicize our project, including information about Comfort Cases as well as what we were looking for in terms of donations. We created a summary variation of the poster and included it on the bulletin board since it included the list of items we were looking for. To effectively promote our fundraiser we held at



Officers in front of the Briar Woods showcase



Member filming for publicity video with videographer



Volunteers building boxes donated by Patriots Disposal Services.

Chipotle, we had created a flyer that we had distributed (Appendix B). Another visual we utilized to promote our project to our school was our school's showcase. The showcase is at the front of our school in a well-frequented hallway. This was incredibly helpful because as opposed to our bulletin board, which would only be seen by business students in the lower level of our school, every student in the school walks by our showcase and had seen our display. In our showcase, we created a large banner and included the same basic details present on the bulletin board. We displayed all the items found in a completed case to show what a completed back consisted of. The last piece of the development of our project was the creation of donation boxes. With the help of Patriot Disposal Services, we were able to place 30 donation boxes throughout each of these locations in order to collect donations (These boxes were then placed in well-frequented areas of Briar Woods High School, the Broadlands Community Center, Rock Ridge High School, Loudoun County High School, Riverside High School, Broad Run High School, Stone Bridge High School, Eagle Ridge Middle School, and Mill Run Elementary School). Susan Pak personally went to each school to communicate our plan for receiving donations of the new items we were collecting. With the 30 different donation boxes in ten different locations, we continued to reach out to potential donors. We decorated the boxes, by putting an enlarged copy of one of our custom flyers on every box (Appendix C).



Implementation of Project

This project ranged over the months of October and November of 2018. Briar Woods FBLA had actively promoted the project through social media and announcements during this period. Briar Woods FBLA used different mediums to implement the project and raise awareness for our cause. Members of BRIAR WOODS FBLA chapter placed donation boxes around the participating schools and the community center, using the boxes decorated with information about the cause. Announcements over the PA system occurred every school day, giving the student body facts about the foster care system and urging them to take part in the donation drive. The Briar Woods FBLA Twitter and Facebook were a main form of communication with members of the community. The tweets and posts ranged from photos of the Comfort Cases team working on the cause to facts about the children in foster care. There were announcements and tweets sent consistently until the date of the packing party. In the days leading up



Vivi Pak and her family who donated the money from the bibimbap.

to the packing party, donations were collected from all the boxes throughout the community and dropped off at Briar Woods HS in preparations for the packing parties on the 10th and 11th of November. The Briar Woods FBLA chapter gathered \$15,000 worth of donations in the form of cash donations, loose items, and 430 completed bags. Vivi Pak dedicated time in preparing and selling a traditional Korean dish, Bibimbap, in order to raise money for Comfort Cases. She raised about \$1,200 and donated it to our cause, helping us complete many of the unfinished bags that were missing items. The leftover money donated from Mrs. Pak and other donors, was then used to create three completed example cases and was also used to purchase any supplies we were short on. With the help of Studio One, we were able to create t-shirts for the volunteers to wear while at the packing parties. The first day of the packing party was dedicated to organizing all the donations by category. Supplies were separated by categories such as backpacks, blankets, pajamas, books, toiletries, and stuffed animals, making it easy for volunteers on the second day of the packing party to move from table to table

to the packing party, donations were collected from all the boxes throughout the community and dropped off at Briar Woods HS in preparations for the packing parties on the 10th and 11th of November. The Briar Woods FBLA chapter gathered \$15,000 worth of donations in the form of cash donations, loose items, and 430 completed bags. Vivi Pak dedicated time in preparing and selling a traditional Korean dish, Bibimbap, in order to raise money for Comfort Cases. She raised about \$1,200 and donated it to our cause, helping us complete many



Vivi Pak and chapter president Susan Pak who raised \$1200



to pack their bags. On the second day of the party, we received a visit from Reece Scheer, co-founder of the organization, who spoke on behalf of his husband, Rob Sheer's experiences as a child in the foster care system. He explained to us that when they were planning on adopting children from the foster care system, they showed up to their home carrying their belongings in trash bags, much like his husband Rob Scheer did as a child. Knowing that no changes had been made to the system, they decided to take matters into their own hands through the creation of Comfort Cases. After Scheer's motivating speech, the volunteers began packing the backpacks. The volunteers moved from table to table, and once a volunteer finished their bag, it was handed to a Comfort Cases official to be double-checked to ensure it contained everything on the list. Across our two days of the packing parties, we had over 200 volunteers that packed a total of 430 completed backpacks, that were then given to local foster home children. In response to the successful outcome of the donation drive, we received a thank you video from Rob Scheer where he shared a little more of his story and thanked us for our chapter's dedication and hard work (Appendix D). As our project came to an end we also wanted to show our community how thankful we were and sent hand written thank you letters to those who greatly contributed (Appendix E).

To the left: Volunteers at the packing parties

To the right: Volunteers holding the custom 2018 T-shirts



Evidence of Publicity

Social Media: Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook



Local News Channel: Reston Channel 28



Custom T-Shirts: In partnership with Studio One



Impacts and Benefits for the Community

- This project impacted our community in more ways than one. Initially, we wanted to positively impact children in the foster care system, but it did more than that. We also raised awareness of the conditions they are facing. Awareness was raised on the issues in the foster care system and its prevalence in the communities across the country including ours.
- The 430+ bags we donated were distributed to children in the foster system within our area in just a few weeks restoring a bit of dignity to these children.
- \$15,000 of donations were sent to Comfort Cases in the form of completed cases, boxes of loose donations, and \$500 in cash.
- Five FBLA chapters were able to come together and work towards a common goal. The project allowed for the partnership between not only schools but an entire diverse community
- Our publicity video was filmed by Elaine Espinola Keltz, Mrs. D.C., and aired on Reston Channel 28 following an interview of Comfort Cases founder Rob Scheer. This interview and video were aired in other areas of northern Virginia reaching a wider audience.



The Young Men's Service League of Ashburn including students from schools all over the county.



The volunteers at the packing party



A picture of the complete bags

The Capital Hill ACTE Reception

Annually, the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) holds a reception as a part of ACTE's National Policy Seminar where students from various CTE organizations are invited to meet and visit with members of Congress.



Officer team with Ms. Cooley and Mrs. Holstein



Officer team with Senator Kaine and Rob Scheer

This year the FBLA National Center invited the Briar Woods High School FBLA Chapter to represent The Future Business Leaders of America at the ACTE Capitol Hill Reception on the 26th of March. Our



Officer team at FBLA Headquarters

Briar Woods FBLA chapter officer team was accompanied by our adviser, Nancy Cooley; the Broadlands HOA Director, Julie Holstein; and the founder of Comfort Cases, Rob Scheer. The day began with a debriefing at the National Center in Reston, followed by a tour of the headquarters. We were then joined by the FBLA Director of Marketing and Membership, Troy White; Sponsors and Partners Coordinators, Ashlee Woodson and Kamal Clark.

At the reception, we were able to raise awareness and present our community service project to those attended. Our Briar Woods Chapter President, Suzy Pak, was asked to introduce Virginia Senator Tim Kaine. Later, the officer team had the pleasure of speaking with Senator Kaine about the work he and his wife had done throughout their political careers to support children within the foster care system. The reception gave us the perfect opportunity to continue showing our support for and raising awareness of both Comfort Cases and the children in the foster care system.



Senator Kaine with chapter officers

Evaluation

Our partnership with Comfort Cases this year was very successful. Our chapter raised over \$15,000 worth of donations and donated 430 completed cases to help out the children that are going through the foster care system that can often be cruel. This community service project embodies the values of Virginia FBLA and its goals to create, lead, and inspire. Below are some of the highlights of how we exemplified these goals.

Create	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for multiple communities to come together as one • Create flyers, posters, and social media posts for publicity and awareness
Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead five different FBLA chapters throughout the project • Lead over 300 volunteers over the course of the two-month period of planning and collecting
Inspire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspire other clubs to create new ways to fundraise • Inspire our community to donate supplies and their time to aid the children within the foster care system • Inspire compassion among those around us

Now that our project is over we have already begun to think of ways to improve next year's donation drive.

- Earlier communication with neighboring schools and FBLA chapters
- Increase involvement from the middle and elementary schools to expose children to the moral benefits of community service
- Contact more local businesses, in person, to ensure business participation
- Contact neighboring HOA's to aid in the donation drive
- Reach out to corporate JanSport and ask for bags that do not meet standards for sales (these defects may include misaligned labels or uneven stitching, but the quality of the bags will remain intact)
- Implement a better system to organize toiletries and the dental supplies, by improving the labeling of boxes to minimize confusion

Appendix A: Comfort Cases Flyer



WORKING TOGETHER TO HELP OTHERS

Support our cause to help provide comfort and support for thousands of children who enter foster care each year carrying little more than the clothes on their backs. By donating one or more of the following items for children in need, you will help bring DIGNITY and HOPE to youth in foster care. Donations can be dropped off in the collection boxes at Briar Woods HS, Loudoun County HS, and Riverside HS in Loudoun County, and at the Nature Center in Broadlands. Donations will be collected during the month of OCTOBER.

Organizing Donations
will take place on

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10th

Packing Party
will follow the next day

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11th

Both events will begin at **9:00AM** at the **Briar Woods High School** located at 22525 Belmont Ridge Rd, Ashburn, VA 20148. Student and adult volunteers are encouraged to help at both events!

Please donate only new items from the following lists:

BABY UNDER 2 YEARS OF AGE	YOUTH AGES 2 TO 8 YEARS OLD	YOUTH AGES 10 AND OVER
Small Duffel Bag or Backpack Pajamas (Newborn to 18-24 Months) Baby Blanket Baby Shampoo, Baby Body Wash Baby Lotion Diaper Wipes Diaper Ointment or Baby Powder Baby Bibs, Baby Washcloths Toddler Safe Stuffed Animal Board Book	Small Duffel Bag or Backpack Pajamas (2T-9) Small Blanket Youth Toothbrush Toothpaste* Shampoo & Conditioner* Soap or Body Wash Lotion*, Deodorant* Stuffed Animal Book, Coloring Book & Crayons	Small Duffel Bag or Backpack Pajamas or Sleepwear (Child Size 10 to Adult XXL) Small Blanket Adult Toothbrush, Toothpaste* Shampoo & Conditioner* Soap or Body Wash Lotion*, Deodorant* Stuffed Animal Journal, Pens & Pencils, Book

* unopened travel-size toiletries only please




THIS SHOULD NEVER BE A CHILD'S SUITCASE.

www.comfortcases.org



For more information contact Mrs. Cooley at nancy.cooley@fbla.org, the BWHS FBLA Chapter, or jane@broadlandsna.com
Comfort Cases is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that provides children, ages 0-18 who are in the foster care system, with a bag filled with essential needs as well as comfort items.

Appendix B: Chipotle Flyer

CAUSE AN EFFECT



Make dinner a selfless act by joining us for a fundraiser to support BWHS FBLA Comfort Cases. Come in to the Chipotle at **43660 Yukon Drive** in Ashburn on **Sunday, October 21st** between **4:00pm** and **8:00pm**. Bring in this flyer, show it on your smartphone or tell the cashier you're supporting the cause to make sure that 33% of the proceeds will be donated to BWHS FBLA Comfort Cases.



Online orders will not be included in the fundraiser total. To ensure your purchase is counted in the fundraiser, be sure to order and pay in-restaurant. Gift card purchases during fundraisers do not count towards total donated sales, but purchases made with an existing gift card will count.

Appendix C: Box Posters





WORKING TOGETHER WITH...



and

- Riverside HS
- Rock Ridge HS
- Loudoun County HS

- Stone Bridge HS
- Eagle Ridge MS
- Mill Run ES

THIS SHOULD NEVER BE A CHILD'S SUITCASE.



DONATE HERE

Backpacks
Duffel Bags

Toothbrushes
Toiletries

Pajamas
Blankets

See flyer for full donation items list

