



MOLLY MACMILLAN PHOTOS

**CLOTHING OUR KIDS** founder Mary Rio is shown with some of the extra clothing she keeps on hand to help students and school nurses in need of school clothes in Sussex County.

# Fundraising to clothe our kids

Organization supplying school-age children with appropriate school clothes

By Molly MacMillan  
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After Clothing Our Kids founder Mary Rio learned, when her husband became an elementary school principal, how many young students don't have sufficient clothing for school, she decided this was unacceptable.

Rio, a Millsboro resident, set to work immediately - first collecting hand-me-down clothing from her grandchildren and neighbors, then shopping the clearance racks for extra clothing in case of emergencies - stocking clothes in the extra bedrooms in her home and distributing the items to schools county-wide.

By 2012, she founded Clothing Our Kids, a nonprofit organization that provides extra clothing for school nurses in case of accidents and school-appropriate attire for counselor-referred kids who have been going without.

Since January 2012, Rio has supplied students in 19 schools

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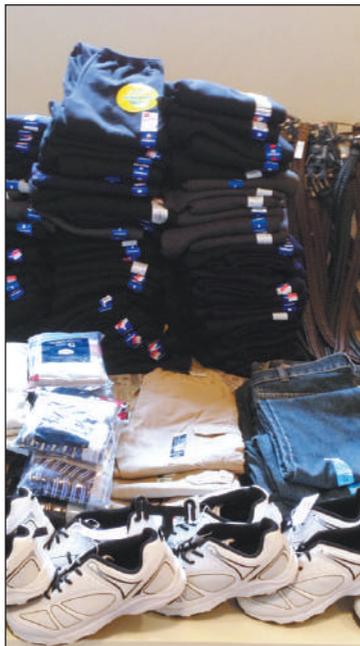
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Employees at Jersey Mike's subs in Midway, including (l-r) Jackie Deckelman, John Asche and Destiny Woodward show the sales receipts from their fundraiser for Clothing Our Kids on the first Wednesday of each month.



Clothing Our Kids volunteers shop sales and stock an inventory of clothes to provide students and nurses in case of accidents or emergency.

## Clothes

Continued from page 3

across Sussex County with more than 10,000 items of clothing through Clothing Our Kids, with the demand only continuing to grow.

"It is unbelievable; this school year it has grown 10 times," she said. "It is growing in leaps and bounds, and it is just so wonderful when you can give a child new clothes when they've never had that before. Their eyes just light up like Christmas morning."

Rio believes supplying students with clean, school-appropriate clothing that fits will not only promote regular school attendance, but will also affect self-esteem and a young student's ability to learn.

Long Neck Elementary School nurse Tami Beam said the organization has become a go-to for her at work. Before Clothing Our Kids, she often spent weekends scavenging sale racks just to have backup clothing for her office at school.

"From my perspective, it makes my job so much easier to know that I have someone who is reliable with what I need," she said. "She's very particular to make sure the kids have things they will feel comfortable in, that they will like and enjoy."

With the temperatures dropping, Rio said there is always more work to be done. She has been the beneficiary of several coat drives and is still collecting, but said right now she mostly needs boys' gloves and wrapped Christmas gifts - \$20 or less - by Saturday, Dec. 7, for a Christmas Joy drive she sponsored through Clothing Our Kids.

The day before Thanksgiving, Rio said she gave out 49 coats to help kids have a warmer holiday as the temperatures took a nosedive.

"I feel so blessed to have her in the community to get what the kids need, especially with the holidays coming up," Beam said.

The nonprofit now operates

with the help of grant money Rio has earned from organizations such as Sussex County Council and the Carl M. Freeman Foundation, donations and the help of more than 50 volunteers.

The COK founder has also had luck reaching out to businesses in the Cape Region to host fundraisers. In fact, Rio has a Clothing Our Kids fundraiser scheduled at Bethany Blues in Lewes Tuesday, Dec. 10, when customers can pick up a coupon to donate 10 percent of their check total to the organization.

As an ongoing fundraiser, the mention of Clothing Our Kids at Jersey Mike's Sub Shop on Route 1 the first Wednesday of each month will funnel a percentage of the check total to Rio's organization as well.

At the first fundraiser, Jersey Mike's General Manager John Asche said the store was happy to help a worthy cause.

"At Jersey Mike's, we're all about giving back to the community," Asche said. "We've had a lot of mentions already and it's looking like a pretty good day with the fundraiser."

According to the COK website, the money raised that day, \$125, will provide more than one full set of school-appropriate clothes for students in need.

For Rio, working to clothe kids in Sussex County has been an unexpected, but fulfilling endeavor.

On the COK website, she writes: "We cannot fix all of their problems; however our goal is to assist these children to receive an equal start in their education and assist them to become successful students and successful adults."

For more information about Clothing Our Kids, call 302-864-5437 (KIDS) or go to www.clothingourkids.com.

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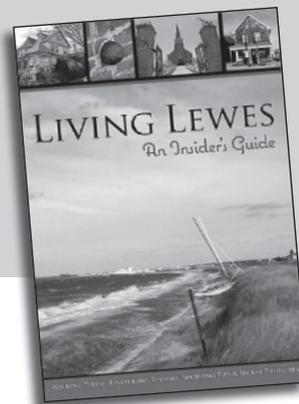


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