

# Carroll County Area Technology Center Students Involved in “A Place to Sleep” Project

Community service has long been a part of all Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) whether it involves raising funds for charitable causes or lending a helping hand to various community groups.

Carroll County Area Technology Center is involved in a project called “A Place to Sleep” that not only will provide a much needed service to the community but bring awareness to a problem many students didn’t know existed.

The scope of the project is to provide beds to children in the area who do not have one. Mary Stratton, Carroll County ATC principal, said the idea came from Jessica Collins, a student from Shelby County’s Martha Layne Collins High School, who was inspired by the movie *The Blind Side*. She wanted to make sure students in her county had beds to sleep in and, so far, 190 beds have been provided there.

“After I saw the movie, I told my grandmother I was surprised that people really didn’t have beds,” she said. “That year, for Christmas, instead of getting an angel off the Angel Tree, I wanted to give someone a bed.”

Collins’ grandmother, Lynn Whitaker, took the idea to a family resource office in the county and got the ball rolling. The one bed turned into six with the help of her local church and now, with involvement from other local organizations and individuals, the project has grown exponentially.

Collins serves as the project’s “CEO” and is instrumental in all the decisions that go into it. She hopes to continue the work indefinitely.



Pictured from left: Tim Mason, Carroll Co. ATC carpentry instructor; Nick Dunaway and Mike May, Kentucky Correctional Industries; Mary Stratton, principal, Carroll Co. ATC; Jessica Collins, CEO “A Place to Sleep” project; and Rebecca Jew, “Project Linus”.

Stratton said after hearing Whitaker speak about the project at a local Alpha Delta Kappa (ADK) meeting, she thought it would make a good project for her students. She brought together her carpentry instructor, Tim Mason, along with the school’s SkillsUSA advisor, Cory Martin, to develop a plan to get their students involved.

With the help of a Lowe’s Charitable and Educational Foundation grant, the school was able to purchase more than \$5,000 worth of tools and supplies to help make the project a reality. Lowe’s serves as a national sponsor of the SkillsUSA organization.

“The grant in Carrollton represents Lowe’s commitment to career and technical education,” said Marshall Croom, chairman of Lowe’s Charitable and Educational Foundation. “By supporting schools like Carroll County ATC, we believe we are contributing to a cause that’s important to our customers and employees by helping provide improved learning environments and building stronger communities.”

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Stratton said the finished beds will go to needy recipients in the counties in which the school serves.

“We are going to be able to make 10 beds, and we are going to try and give every county of the four counties our school serves at least two beds,” she said. “What we are doing is all confidential, as far as the recipients are concerned. We had students turn in a survey sheet without a name, just a school ID number and an explanation of why they needed the bed.”

Stratton added that the situations are often sad with two or three siblings sleeping in the same bed and some without a bed at all.

“I’ve been surprised at how great the need is, and it’s scary. You don’t think about this being a problem but it is out there, and a lot of kids just don’t have a bed,” she said.

While students at the school were building the bed frames, a plan to get mattresses, pillows and sheets donated had also begun.

Fran Dundon, the SkillsUSA KY Business and Industry director, contacted Kentucky Correctional Industries (KCI) to ask for its help in providing mattresses and box springs, which the organization manufacturers. This donation was made possible because SkillsUSA KY also is involved in a statewide community service project with Kentucky State Parks, and Pam Jarvis, a Maintenance Branch manager in Park’s central office (and former corrections employee), found out about the project and opened the door for the donation.

KCI Operations Manager Mike May said the agency was eager to provide support when given the opportunity to assist young people. May and KCI’s Nick Dunaway recently delivered the mattresses and box springs to the school.

“We saw an opportunity to help enhance the success of these students, and the hard work and dedication that went in to building bed frames is truly admirable,” he said. “We hope through the efforts of everyone involved that these young people who will be receiving the beds will sleep peacefully and awake each morning eager to face new challenges and opportunities.”

Dundon also asked Rebecca Jew, a chapter coordinator with “Project Linus,” for blankets. The organization is a national, non-profit organization that provides new, handmade blankets as a source of comfort and security for local children in need. It is named after the *Peanuts* comic strip character. Jew brought together volunteers to make enough blankets for each bed.



Jessica Collins, a student from Shelby County’s Martha Layne Collins High School began “A Place to Sleep” when she was 10 years old.

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“When asked to provide blankets for ‘A Place to Sleep’ project, I was honored,” said Jew. “It allows me to help children by providing these blankets to keep them warm, feeling secure and to show them that there are people who truly care about them. I can only imagine what it must mean to a child who hasn’t had a bed or a blanket to receive one of their own.”

Dundon, who also wrote the Lowe’s grant, said the project represents the best in human compassion because it benefits those in dire need of a basic necessity in life – a place to sleep –and getting people involved was easy.

“The hard part is accepting the fact that so many kids are without a bed. We must keep working to alleviate this problem,” she said. “Kudos to the Carroll County SkillsUSA chapter for their unselfish act of kindness; to KCI for mattress and box spring donations; to Rebecca Jew for involving Project Linus by giving blankets; to Mary Stratton for accepting the challenge of doing something about this problem; and to the Lowe’s Foundation for the initial grant. We can all sleep better knowing we have helped others to have a place to sleep.”

Stratton said she feels the project has had a big impact on her students, and she hopes they continue to do things to help needy people after they graduate.

Mason said it takes partnerships with community businesses and corporations to make such projects a success, and his students are learning valuable lessons by participating.

“Once I grew up, I learned that givers always come out on top, and I think these students are learning that through this project,” he said.

Mason added that his students are involved in a few other community-based projects, but they are an experienced group and he has no doubts they will finish before the end of the school year.

Martin said that while a lot of children need more than just beds, it’s very important that each of them have their own place in which to sleep.

“It’s something they can call their own, and I think this has been a very good project for the community, and I’m glad we’ve been able to do this,” he said.

Martin added that he appreciates the grant from Lowe’s to make the project happen, as well as the donations received and the mattresses supplied by KCI and “Project Linus”.

He also said that while the carpentry students have headed up the project, students in other programs at the school have become involved.

“Every sector in the school is involved in some way,” he said. “Initially we built one bed as a prototype to see if we could do it and then proposed that everybody be involved, and they were happy with that because it is such a good project.”

The school purchased the tools and supplies for the project at the Frankfort Lowe’s. Logan Hanes is a kitchen designer there and former SkillsUSA state officer. He said many take a bed for granted, but those without one long for a comfortable place to sleep.

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“A bed is an item that can restore a tired body and a tired mind, and in the case of a few ... it restores hope,” he said. “In a society that seems to be a ‘me’ society, these few students and future professionals have proven that is not the case. When the future of today wants to look out for the person next to them more than themselves, the future seems very bright.”

Pictured at left are Carroll Co. ATC students who were involved in the “A Place to Sleep” project. The students used their skills to make the bed frames, then helped unload the truck with donated box springs and mattresses.

