

Hairdresser steps up shoe drive for Ann Storck

■ A Fort Lauderdale hairdresser collects hundreds of shoes to help kids at the Ann Storck Center.

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It may not seem as exciting as a new bicycle or a video game, but kids from the Ann Storck Center in Fort Lauderdale were excited about the brightly wrapped presents Santa and his elves brought them at a recent party - a new pair of socks and shoes.

"All kids need shoes," said Alison Jump, an Ann Storck Center behavior analyst.

When Mariah, 20 months old, received a pair of pink and white sneakers from Santa Claus, her grandmother Barbara Davis said, "It's a blessing for someone to take time to come there, and to think about these kids."

The donations came from the not-for-profit organization called Stepp'n Up, which collects new shoes for needy kids, and sometimes adults.

Eric Perlyn, 33, started the Stepp'n Up program in Boca Raton as a bar mitzvah project, using his gift money to help six South Florida boys. He didn't give up then. Over

the years, his program began donating shoes to charities like the Children's Home Society, Jack and Jill Children's Center, The Boys and Girls Club, ChildNet and the Ann Storck Center, which serves children and adults with physical and mental handicaps.

Valerie Viglione was especially thrilled to see the kids' reactions at the Ann Storck Center - the Fort Lauderdale hairdresser had collected all the shoes for Santa's bag, with some going to adult clients there.

Viglione has been collecting shoes for the Stepp'n Up program for seven years but this was the first time she had seen children receive the shoes.

"It makes me want to do more next year," Viglione said.

She started out collecting 25 pairs of new shoes and last year she had donations of 850 pairs. So far, this year she has collected 1,392 pairs of shoes and her goal is to reach 1,700.

Clients (and their co-workers), friends and family have been bringing shoes to the salon, where shoes were stacked up all over.

"If you ever went to Echo Salon this time of the year it's heartwarming to see



CHRIS CUTRO/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

IN HER SHOES: Physical therapist Leslie Bowers helps Kylie Butts, 2, as she dances during the Stepp'nUp shoe drive at Ann Storck Center.

hundreds of pairs of wrapped shoes for the needy kids," said Pam Masters, director of philanthropic gifts for Ann Storck Center, who told her friend Viglione about the Stepp'n Up program. Another friend, Pam Lu-

cas, played Santa's Helper at the party, helping give out the shoes. But she helps Viglione all year. "I will be starting collecting shoes next month for next year. I use my spare bedroom as a shoe warehouse."

Viglione has found a lot of support just by talking to people about the need in the community.

She recalled meeting a woman in the salon who had lost her children's clothing store due to a recession and decided to give 144 shoes and 60 colorful little socks to Stepp'n Up.

"We both had tears in our eyes and it was a very emotional thing. I met her five minutes before and two hours later, her two sons were there with a truckload of shoes," Viglione said. "I have achieved a lot of success and a lot of goals that I have set for myself but things were not always that way, and I have had a lot of people that have helped me in the past to get me where I am."

Viglione said she will continue to collect shoes or money for shoes until Christmas.

For more information on Stepp'n Up, visit www.steppnupshoes.com. You can reach Viglione at 954-463-8859.