

On Giving Tuesday in Worcester, Country Bank employees make beds for children

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WORCESTER - On Giving Tuesday, 30 Country Bank employees and other volunteers spent the morning and early afternoon at the DCU Center building 50 beds for needy children.

Jodie Gerulaitis, vice president for community relations for the Ware-based Country Bank said the bank is partnering with A Bed for Every Child, an initiative of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, to build beds for children who might not have them. She said she learned of the initiative when the bank received a request for a donation and decided it would be something worth participating in.

"This is all about giving back," she said. "This was an opportunity for us to help children in need."

Mrs. Gerulaitis said she had tears in her eyes when she learned what A Bed for Every Child and the Coalition for the Homeless do to help children in need, not only providing beds, but also food, clothing and shelter.

At the DCU Center, teams of workers were given precut lumber and hardware prepared at A Bed for Every Child's headquarters in Lynn. They then assembled the bed frames.

Tina Giarla, program director for A Bed for Every Child, said the design for the bed was created by craftsmen working with the organization. It has been replicated over and over.

"This program was started in 2012 to help support a child in Lynn who was just trying to get an education, but was falling asleep in class," she said. "When a teacher reached out to us to see if we could fill this need, we were able to do so. But then burst the larger idea of how many more children living in poverty are living in places inadequate or without a bed of their own."

Ms. Giarla said one in six children in Massachusetts grow up in poverty. She said her organization works with public schools, social service agencies, local businesses and faith-based groups to identify children in need and provide them with a bed. She said their goal is to make it possible for children who might not have a proper place to sleep to wake up every morning in a bed.

Shelley Regan, senior vice president of marketing for Country Bank, said bank employees donate about 1,000 hours of community service each year and about \$1 million to local charities from Worcester to Springfield.

"We're excited to be here today to fulfill wishes for children who do not have a place to sleep or have a good night's rest," she said. "We also invited our business customers here today and we have about a dozen of them helping us make an impact in the different communities."

Once they got the hang of it, the volunteers rapidly put together the bed frames, lining them up to be placed in a truck for transport to A Bed for Every Child's offices, where parents would pick them up, or to be delivered directly to homes of the children who will receive them. Along with the bed frames, the children will receive mattresses, bedding, books and a stuffed animal. All 50 beds will go to children in the Worcester area.