

# ~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

## Making a difference one backpack at a time



Photo provided

Students from Cesar Chavez Elementary in Richmond receiving their backpacks and supplies thanks to the generous donations to the Contra Costa County drive so far.

By Diane Claytor

Driving through the 19 cities that make up Contra Costa County is a study in contrasts. From the multi-million dollar homes with pools and expansive yards to the small, rundown apartment buildings butted up to other small, rundown buildings, the differences within our county are glaring. According to city-data.com, the median income in 2017 of Orinda's 19,655 residents was \$200,553, while Richmond, only 10 miles away, has a population of 110,000 and a median income of \$67,000. This, of course, translates to many in our county having much, while others have very little. More than 36,000 Contra Costa County elementary students qualify for the free/reduced lunch program available to low income families, and, sadly, the Mt. Diablo Unified School District reports they have over 750 homeless students.

These numbers break Courtney Brockmeyer's heart and she is not one to sit on the sidelines doing nothing to improve things if she can. The Moraga mom and founder of Sydney Paige has been providing high quality backpacks to low income students for six years. Originally started with a "buy one, give one" concept, Sydney Paige - named after Brockmeyer's two daughters - would donate one filled backpack for every one sold. Since its beginning, the company has donated more than 50,000 supply-filled backpacks.

Then the Paradise fires happened and Brockmeyer wanted to do more. She did what she had been wanting to do for some time - Sydney Paige became a 501 (c)3 nonprofit organization, allowing for larger tax-deductible donations. Partnering with Angie Guidi, a Rheem Elementary teacher who grew up in Paradise, Brockmeyer started a

fundraising campaign and was able to donate and personally deliver 250 brightly colored, supply-filled backpacks to Paradise students.

Brockmeyer's goals grew along with her passion to help underserved children learn. "Education equals success and quality equals dignity," Brockmeyer repeats often. "We want to give underserved youth the tools and confidence needed to thrive in school, as well as to spark a lifelong love of learning. Education is the pathway to long-term economic security."

With her 501(c)3 status, Brockmeyer is hoping to partner with more corporations so a greater number of children can receive the tools they need to help succeed in school. "There is so much need out there and all students, regardless of economic circumstance, should have equal access to quality tools and supplies," Brockmeyer says.

"We'd love to bring in corporate sponsors, do employee pack out events, get local businesses more involved," she says. She'd also happily schedule give events with schools. "I want to open people's eyes to what's going on out there and the impact their generosity can have."

Sydney Paige manufactures their own backpacks, along with many of the school supplies they place inside, thus ensuring quality and reducing costs. There are 40 different backpack styles and colors and many of the school supplies include messages of kindness and encouragement.

Brockmeyer's current campaign is quite local. "Here we are, three months into the school year, and there are thousands of kids in our own county still needing backpacks and supplies so they can do their homework," she says with great sadness.

Through research, Brockmeyer found 19 neigh-

boring elementary schools where 90% or more of the students qualify for the free lunch program; she contacted the principal at each school to see how many students did not have the necessary supplies to be able to complete their school work. Fourteen schools responded and sadly, 1,500 students were identified as needing materials. So Brockmeyer went to work because, as she notes, without crayons or erasers or paper at home, they can't do what they need to do. "When making a decision to put food on the table or keep the lights on, school supplies are typically not all that important to parents," Brockmeyer acknowledges.

She has partnered with several generous local companies and is now hoping community members will step up and help these underserved students. It's so easy. A click of a button on [sydney Paige.roonga.com/cc](http://sydney Paige.roonga.com/cc) will ensure that these kids have the tools they need to do their work. A donation of less than \$15 will purchase a colorful premium 16-inch backpack, perfect for the primary grades; an additional \$10 will fill it with a full set of quality supplies.

A teacher in Antioch reported back to Brockmeyer three months after her students received Sydney Paige backpacks. "What she said made it all worthwhile," Brockmeyer recalls. "She told me that since her students had gotten backpacks, attendance rose and their homework completion rate, which had been at 33 percent, increased to 100 percent. The kids are excited to do their work."

As Brockmeyer says, "By giving back together, the opportunities are endless. We are forging new ground by donating only quality items, and my heart bursts every time I hear the real and tangible impact we are making."

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