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## Tots and Tales Reaches Out to Help

By Anna Mulder

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**Kansas City, Kansas** – Everyone in the “Yellow” classroom wore colorful, fleece hats on December 8 at Tots and Tales Montessori School in Kansas City, Kansas. The reason? Their friend and classmate Regan Ryman was coming back for a very special fifth birthday party, and they wanted to make her feel welcome and comfortable.

Regan was diagnosed with Rhabdomyosarcoma, a rare soft tissue childhood cancer, in October and has been in and out of the hospital receiving chemotherapy and radiation treatments since then. Because chemotherapy has caused Regan to lose her hair, she usually wears hats.

The teachers in Regan’s class made the hats from material donated by a parent.

“We wanted to show her that, no matter what, she’s going to be part of this class,” said Ashley Brown, a teacher in the Yellow classroom. “By wearing the hats, it [shows] we’re in this together.”



Regan Ryman and Ellington Persley

During the birthday party, Regan received gifts, cards and several cakes from teachers, families and classmates. The class performed its Christmas program for Regan, and Regan recited a poem about cancer to everyone.

“She’s so fearless and outgoing,” Brown said. “Even with all these hardships she’s going through, she still has a smile on her face. She’s not letting it hold her back.”



Since November, Tots and Tales (TNT) has been collecting money to help the Regan's family. Angie McCarty, Assistant Child Care Director, said that they have raised more than \$1,700, thanks to the generosity of the families at TNT. For more than a month, a box with Regan's picture on it sat at the front entrance to the building for families to donate money.

Shari Stark, a teacher in the Yellow classroom, said they usually passed the box around during their circle time in class. Some of the children are still bringing in money even though they're no longer passing around the box. The children also frequently draw pictures for Regan.

"They've got the biggest hearts," Stark said. "These guys have given so much."

Five-year-old Ellington Persley said she was helping Regan by "putting in lots of money and making lots of pictures for her."

Ellington said it's been hard not having Regan at school.

"She was the first friend I had in this classroom," Ellington said.

Every day, the children in the yellow room pray for Regan to get well and be able to return to class, usually praying this prayer: "Please keep your arms wrapped around Regan."

Not only have the families of TNT been giving to help Regan and her family, TNT has also been involved in several other initiatives to give back to the community. Around Thanksgiving, TNT families donated 380 pounds of food for Harvesters. This was enough to provide 296 meals.

After Thanksgiving, the school started its annual tradition of having an anonymous gift tree to help TNT families in need, whether it a parent who lost a job or a single mom. This year there are eight children from four different families represented on the tree. Paper ornaments on the tree list items, such as clothes, shoes, hairclips, art set, baby doll and educational movies. Families can pick ornaments off the tree, buy the requested item and return it to the school. TNT will then give it to the families in need.

"We're helping those families out through the holidays," McCarty said.

Even in difficult economic times, McCarty has been amazed by the response of the families of TNT in being willing to give to help Regan, Harvesters and other families in need.

Brown said she loves seeing the children at TNT learn the importance of helping people.



“The biggest thing about Tots and Tales is we’re all family here, and when somebody needs something, you don’t hesitate because you love them,” Brown said. “When one of us needs something, we’re all there.”

**ABOUT TFI Community Child Care, Inc.** – Tots and Tales is part of TFI Community Childcare, Inc. TFI Community Child Care, Inc. nurtures children to reach their fullest potential through early education and mentoring. Tots and Tales serves Wyandotte, Johnson, Leavenworth and Platte counties. To learn more, visit our web site at [www.tficcc.org](http://www.tficcc.org).

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