

Comfort zone

A VIRGINIA CLUB EASES TRANSITIONS FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE.

Words **CINDY CONOVER DASHNAW**

Imagine a child being picked up from school and suddenly discovering that she's going to a new foster home. As often as not, she won't have the chance to return to her last home to get her clothes, her books or even her favorite stuffed animal.

Barb Ritter of the Kiwanis Club of Charlottesville, Virginia, empathized with how lonely such a child would feel. So she decided to take action.

"I saw the Sweet Dream in a Bag (bedding) project at a Kiwanis district meeting, and I was determined to bring it to Charlottesville," explains Ritter. "Establishing the Kiwanis Club of Charlottesville Foundation gave

us the perfect vehicle for getting support."

Through its Kiwanis Cozy Comforts Kits, the Charlottesville club delivers backpacks to children moving into new foster

homes. The kits are filled with age-appropriate items to soothe the young transfers: a nightlight, books, a blanket, personal care items and a stuffed animal or journal.

Ritter coordinates the collection of no-sew blankets for every bag. "No sewing skill is required,

and members of the community are encouraged to make the blankets too."

Mott is working to expand the program through partnerships. The club has coordinated deliveries with three foster-care organizations and is poised to make another connection. Soon, children

arriving at a domestic-abuse shelter will be greeted with a Cozy Comforts bag too.

To support the program, the club has held a few fundraisers and carefully watches expenses, buying in bulk and accepting clean used books. Its long-term plan is to safeguard the program's capacity and sustainability.

"These children are coming in and out of foster homes all the time," Mott says, "and I think it's valuable to have those bags always on hand when they arrive to show them they're loved."



so it's a way for our club members to really put their hands on the project," says Heather Mott, who joined Ritter as co-chair nearly two years ago. "Every member is asked to participate,