



For Immediate Release
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Silver Dollar City Foundation's *Care For Kids* Serves Over 25,000 Kids, Donates Over \$1.25 Million Since 2006 Program Launch

(Branson, Mo 9/2015) **Over 25,000 kids in Stone and Taney Counties have received a needed boost from the Silver Dollar City Foundation's Care For Kids program, with over \$1.25 million in donated funds from the program targeting physical needs since the program launched in 2006.** According to Foundation President John Baltes, this year's commitment of \$157,000 will continue to ensure that resources are available to help area kids.

Care For Kids funds are donated to the 14 school districts serving Stone and Taney counties in a unique partnership to assist kids whose needs are often visible to school staff. Kirbyville Elementary Counselor Leanne West described the impact of the program at the program's mid-August launch event. "For the past 10 years, I've had the privilege of disbursing Care For Kids funds for medical care, rent payment, clothing, food, utilities, car repairs, school supplies and field trips – all tangible love," West said. She described one situation where the family of a student faced the shut-off of water and electricity during the hospitalization of the father. Program funds paid the utilities, allowing the family to focus on the medical issues. "Care For Kids is a difference-maker," West said.

Care For Kids works on the principle that school staff who see kids every day are often aware of crises or issues needing attention but have no resources with which to provide immediate help, Baltes said. Program funds, given to school administrators at the beginning of the school year, can be used to immediately address these needs, lifting kids out of problem or painful situations and allowing them to focus on learning.

Care For Kids also focuses on kids' intangible needs, pairing volunteer mentors with kids who could benefit from some extra help or attention, Baltes said. Volunteers serve as tutors, "lunch buddies" or "book buddies." "Care For Kids is a wonderful program," said recently retired Reeds Spring Elementary teacher Ruth Selby, describing the impact of volunteers working with second graders in her class who were reading at below-grade level. "By the end of the year, the students were already reading at a third-grade level. Talk about self-esteem – it went through the roof. It actually changed the lives of my students," she said. *Over...*

The mentoring programs are an area where more volunteers are needed, Baltes said. Volunteers, who agree to spend 20 minutes per week with a child at one of the schools, can assist by being mentor “buddies” with kids who could benefit from extra attention, such as with reading, Baltes said. **Care For Kids trains the mentors, with upcoming training sessions set for September 17 and October 22.**

“I have had the opportunity to witness what a program like this can do in the life of a child,” Branson’s Cedar Ridge Elementary Principal Dr. Michelle Collins said at the August launch, encouraging others to volunteer. “Shine your light and give hope to someone, that their tomorrow will be brighter than today. You have that power.”

Care For Kids is funded by an ongoing ticket donation program with partner businesses and tourism-related neighbors of the Silver Dollar City properties, plus donations. Fundraising events held by the SDC properties benefitting Care For Kids include the upcoming **“White Glove” set for November 6 at Silver Dollar City, a preview event on the eve of *An Old Time Christmas***, with a dinner and the final dress rehearsals of *Rudolph’s Holly Jolly Christmas Light Parade*, plus the acclaimed productions “It’s A Wonderful Life” and “A Dickens’ Christmas Carol.” Tickets for this event will go on sale in October.

For more information on the Care For Kids program and volunteering opportunities, call 417-336-7077 or visit www.silverdollarcityfoundation.com.