Program Established: 1995

Purpose of Program: Assistance League of Charlotte, through its Operation School Bell Program (OSB), provides new clothing for children in need in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools (CMS). The program’s goal is to enhance self-esteem, promote learning and encourage regular school attendance.

Changes to Operation School Bell due to COVID-19: During the COVID-19 Pandemic, we remain committed to serving the needs of children in poverty in Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools system. We are coordinating with our school liaison to modify and update our delivery procedures to meet CMS’s requirements. Distribution of uniforms will be our highest priority this year as we are the only consistent and reliable source of new uniforms in the CMS district. We will continue to provide coats, underwear, socks, hygiene supplies and shoes to meet the needs of these children.

Procedures

OSB: OSB is targeted to meet the needs of specific children identified by their counselors and social workers. To adapt to school budget and safety requirements, the counselors and social workers from high poverty elementary schools will “shop” at our Assistance League Center for these students. We will provide new uniform pants and shirts, as well as coats, underwear, socks, and hygiene supplies. Middle school students will benefit from our Target program. Children are identified by their counselors and social workers and are invited with their parents to shop at a local Target store for school appropriate clothing.

Outreach OSB: This outreach allows Assistance League to support children in need who are enrolled outside the uniformed schools. OSB donates new clothing (pants, shirts, socks, underwear) to Crisis Assistance Ministries for distribution through their counseling program. The CMS Homeless Closet, a McKinney-Vento program serving grades K-12, receives these same clothing items plus hygiene supplies and quarterly donations of menstrual products. Studies show that young girls and teens, without access to these menstrual products, may lose 3-5 days of instruction monthly. Bulk shipment of uniforms in assorted sizes (and different colors) are delivered to schools. New shoes will be distributed to all children at selected high poverty schools. Book donations will be coordinated with reading specialists at individual schools and given to children coming from low income families with little or no access to public libraries.

Funding: Operation School Bell is funded through foundation grants, private and corporate donations, chapter fundraising events and the Assistance League Thrift Shop.

During the 2019-2020 school year, OSB served 2,000 elementary children in CMS schools at the Assistance League Center, 33 Middle School students at Target and an additional 7,212 children in K-12 schools through outreach initiatives. Schools/organizations: 46. Children served: 9,245.