

Connecting with CARE PACKAGES

Cy-Fair Reaches out with Adopt a U.S. Soldier

Written by Laurie Roddy and Photos Courtesy of Adopt a U.S. Soldier and Kylie Hinger

In today's hurried world, it often seems hard to stay connected, even if you live in your hometown with your family a few miles away. For U.S. troops serving overseas, staying connected to friends and family is even more difficult, and some may experience loneliness or even depression. To help them cope, Cy-Fair resident Kylie Hinger sends boxes full of letters, snacks, and hygiene products through the Adopt a U.S. Soldier program, making a big difference with a small gesture. "You know there are soldiers over there, but I didn't realize they are so cut off from everything," she says. "So many of my soldiers ask that I send things to other soldiers who receive nothing."

Adopting a Caring Attitude

Hinger first became involved with the program in 2008, when her brother expressed interest in the military. Even though he was unable to serve, she began adopting soldiers to support. "A co-worker told me about the program and I adopted a soldier," she says. "I now have six soldiers that I've adopted." Colorado resident Ann Johnson created the volunteer organization in January 2005 out of love

for her son, Paul, who was serving overseas. When she asked some friends to help support him and his fellow soldiers by sending letters and care packages, she received an overwhelming response. After receiving almost \$3,000 worth of goods, Johnson created Adopt a U.S. Soldier as a national non-profit dedicated to connecting Americans at home with deployed soldiers. The organization now has over 347,000 supporters, and is growing every day.

Gathering Community Support

When Hinger first learned of the program, she was so impressed she called Johnson to express her gratitude and was quickly recruited as the local ambassador. "I try to get the word out in the media by attending Rotary Club meetings [and] local events, and conducting interviews," says the 2004 Cy-Springs graduate.

Other community members and organizations are taking notice of the Adopt a U.S. Soldier program, too. Lone Star College of Cy-Fair's community



Simple comforts like pretzels, stationary, and cereal bars make great items for care packages



Volunteers work to gather items for care packages



The Adopt a Soldier program reaches out to U.S. soldiers serving overseas

If you know of an organization doing amazing work in the Cy-Fair community, please email editor@cyfairmagazine.com.



Soldiers enjoy receiving emails from volunteers with the organization



Small tokens of gratitude show soldiers they aren't forgotten

outreach student ambassadors adopted three soldiers representing three platoons of 20. Volunteers recently held an event where more than 250 college students and staff members wrote letters and made donations.

Small Tokens of Gratitude

Making a difference doesn't have to cost a lot, Hinger points out. Most care packages cost between \$5 and \$12 to send and military mail rates are the same as domestic rates. A standard first class stamp will deliver a letter to a U.S. soldier stationed halfway around the world. "With the economy the way it is, people don't think they can take on an adoption, but all they really need to do is send letters to the soldier," she says. "I work for a printing company that donated a lot of Christmas cards and I make key chains and bracelets to send overseas." If you do not hear back from your adopted soldier within a short time, don't despair, she advises. Military mail can take between seven and 10 days to be delivered, with packages taking up to 24 days to be delivered. Some soldiers may also be considered silent soldiers who are disconnected from any outside contact for a brief period of time. While you may not hear from them, they are receiving the letters and packages sent through the program.

"Just to hear from someone in the States is so important," stresses Hinger. "All you need to do is register online and start sending letters." Besides letters, many of the soldiers request news from back home such as newspaper articles, photos, jokes, comics, and magazines. All packages are inspected before they leave the states, so make sure you check the website, adoptaussoldier.org, for approved items, as well as registration information and mailing and shipping instructions.

Letters of Appreciation

Soldiers express their appreciation for letters, packages, and small tokens of care to the organization, which posts their comments online, letting volunteers know their efforts don't go unnoticed. One comment reads, "My last deployment, we weren't blessed with what you guys are doing for soldiers now. I pray that the good lord bless each of you and replace what has been given." Another soldier wrote, "I am actually requesting support for myself and a buddy. He and I both never get any mail or email from home, so we thought it would be nice to have someone to correspond with." A soldier from Texas said that after missing life in the U.S. and watching his daughter grow up, he found solace in the mail as the one life line available to service men and women.

"I can't bring myself to ask for anything, so anything you would like to send or an email every now and again would be greatly appreciated. Once again, thank you, and I will end this with my favorite quote. 'Only two defining forces have ever offered to die for you - Jesus Christ and the American soldier. One died for your soul, the other for your freedom.'" Hinger didn't know what to expect when she adopted her first soldier, but ended up finding a lifelong friend. "I sent out packages, and he was just so grateful that I kept doing it and adopting more soldiers," she says, adding, "He just asked me to come to his wedding next year." CFM

Laurie Roddy has been a writer for over 25 years and authored the book, 60 Hikes within 60 Miles: Houston.



Books, letters, and magazines connect soldiers with news from home



Top requested items by soldiers

- Aspirin & cough drops
- Band-aids & Neosporin
- Batteries
- Beef jerky, cheese, canned meats, & protein bars
- Books, comic books, & crossword puzzles
- Can openers
- Chapstick
- Capri Sun, Crystal Lite, & Gatorade
- Card games and puzzles
- Chips, cookies, crackers, & pretzels
- Chocolate & hard candy
- Dental floss, toothbrushes, & toothpaste
- Dried fruit & nuts
- Footballs, Nerf balls, & soccer balls
- Gum and mints
- Hair brushes & shampoo, soap
- Kleenex, toilet paper, & wet wipes
- Personal letters & cards
- Stationary, pens, & journals

MY SUMMER TO-DO LIST:

- Make new friends Learn something new
- Visit new and exciting places

Make this a summer to remember with Camp Primrose. Whether it's traveling in a time machine or studying dinosaur bones, Primrose provides a safe environment where the inspiration never ends.

Primrose School of Copperfield
 15550 Ridge Park Drive
 Houston, Texas 77095
281.858.5600
www.primrosecopperfield.com

Primrose Schools
The Leader in Educational Child Care®

Each Primrose School is privately owned and operated. Primrose Schools and The Leader in Educational Child Care are trademarks of Primrose School Franchising Company. ©2010 Primrose School Franchising Company. All rights reserved.