

Local Group Gives Books To Children In Crisis

REACH A Child Teams Up With Madison Police Officer

MADISON, Wis. -- A local group that works to get books to children in crisis is now teaming up with police to help them build relationships and encourage literacy.

The REACH a Child program, based in Waunakee, is providing Madison Police Officer Sam Ward with books once a month to give to children in the Allied Drive neighborhood. Ward, like other officers across the state, had been giving backpacks out to children involved in traffic crashes or other police incidents.

But last year, Ward began giving them out to children in the neighborhood that he patrols in the summer, hoping to give them something to do and keep them reading while they weren't in school

"The reaction that I got from them was way more than I anticipated," said Ward. "The children were running up to me, just flagging me down asking for books. A couple of the mothers told me how the children would make them read all night long and some children slept with the books. I was like, 'OK, maybe I need to get this going a little better.'"

So, he asked REACH a Child for more books to do monthly events with kids and their families in the neighborhood.

"What we're finding and hearing from the officers is a lot of times this is the first time these kids have ever gotten a book. This is the first book they've ever owned," said Erik Gammell, of REACH a Child. "And it allows them to see the officers in a nice, positive light."

Ward and his police partner have given out hundreds of books in the Allied neighborhood in just a year and say it's not just a relationship they're nurturing, it's a love of reading.

"If we can improve the literacy level and the reading level of our children in our nation, that should be a No. 1 priority for a lot of us," said Ward.

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