

Area foster children get books, backpacks through Books for Youth program | Local news

Haley Church Kokomo Tribune

3-4 minutes

Most of the children running around the front lawn of Haynes International on Tuesday were just excited to see Blue, the famed Indianapolis Colts mascot. The gift they were going to receive will last longer than that initial excitement, however.

Sixty-one foster kids and their families from the Kokomo community gathered at the grounds of one of the city's leading manufacturers for the 7th annual Books for Youth program. The event, presented by Cargo Services Inc., the Indiana Department of Child Services, the Indianapolis Colts and Haynes International, is held every year to equip foster children with a Colts backpack filled with 25 age-appropriate books.

Children through age 17 were able to get new or gently used books picked specifically for them, stored in color-coded backpacks arranged from preschool-ages through high school.

Throughout the program's existence, more than 8,700 Hoosier families have received books and backpacks, said Stacy Lozer of DCS, with that number expected to rise past 9,000 this summer.

"We have partnered with the Colts for 12 years, and Cargo Services has been our title sponsor for the past 10 years," Lozer continued.

Waves of blue-clad people were playing games on the grassy field, with most families donning their own Colts gear. Kids were able to meet with two Colts cheerleaders, take photos with the Super Bowl trophy and experience the Colts in Motion exhibit.

Kaidyn, 12, said he was a big fan of the Colts and his favorite part of the experience was getting to throw a football through a giant

inflatable horseshoe.

Emily, 6, shyly said she was most looking forward to meeting Blue, who arrived later in the afternoon to hand out the backpacks and perform for the kids. She was also hoping to get a book that featured her favorite character, “Dora,” she said.

Gabrielle, 4, carried her miniature Blue doll with her the whole day.

Through Cargo Services, the Books for Youth program was brought to Haynes International in Kokomo — a company they work with frequently — seven years ago.

“As I always say, (Cargo Services employee’s) hearts are bigger than anything they ship,” Lozer said. “They have been incredible. The Books for Youth program would be nowhere near what it is today without them.”

John Rowe, managing director of Cargo Services, said the company truly wanted to do something that would impact local communities.

“When we hand out the backpacks full of books, I love watching the kids start to dig into them right away and how excited they are to get the books and realize that they are theirs to keep,” Rowe said.

Lozer said DCS and its partners know how important the generous gesture is in the future educational development of these kids.

“Our goal is to get age-appropriate books in the hands of every child. We know the value of reading. We know the impact that reading has on lives, especially young lives,” she said.