

Summary Statement: Outfitting 600 Low-Income and At-Risk Children for School in 2021

Clothes To Kids is a small, local, volunteer-based 501(c)3 charity specializing in new and quality used school clothes for low-income and at-risk children, helping them attend school with confidence: ready to learn, participate in school activities, and fit in. These children can shop for free for a complete wardrobe—a week's worth of quality school clothes—twice a year at one of our three kid-friendly stores in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties. Our personalized shopping experience, by appointment only, ensures that these children and their families feel special and maintain their dignity and confidentiality in their time of need. We have been successfully outfitting children in need with quality school clothes in the Tampa Bay area since 2003.

The need in our community is enormous. October 2020 data from the Florida Department of Education shows that 59% of enrolled students in Hillsborough County (ranked 7th in size in the nation) and 48% of enrolled students in Pinellas County (ranked 27th in size in the nation) are eligible for the free and reduced-price meal program. To qualify for this program, a family's income must fall below the federal poverty line. These are the children—including foster, abused, and homeless children—we are dedicated to serve.

In 2020 we noticed an unsettling increase in requests for school clothes and uniforms. We attribute this increase to the effects of Covid-19 in our community. Data published by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity shows that unemployment in Florida increased by 8.3%–10.5% (April-July 2019 vs. 2020) and by 3.6%–4.3% (August-November 2019 vs. 2020) over the same time last year.

Our fundraisers this year were also impacted. Our annual Clothes Matter Luncheon brought in \$94,000 this year as compared to \$126,000 in 2017; \$136,000 in 2018; and \$123,000 in 2019. Our annual Shoed! fundraiser brought in \$38,000 this year as compared to \$47,000 in 2017; \$36,000 in 2018; and \$62,000 in 2019. The impact to our fundraisers coupled with the increased need in the community due to the extraordinary circumstances of Covid-19 are why we are requesting this grant.

Our grant request of \$30,000 will allow us to provide a complete wardrobe of quality school clothes to an additional 600 low-income and at-risk children in 2021.

Mission, Background, and Purpose: Improving Self-Confidence and School Readiness for Children

Our mission is to provide quality new and gently used clothing to low-income and at-risk school-age children in need. This mission was founded on helping children feel confident about themselves so they can succeed in school. Our values—compassion, respect, self-esteem, and service—support our mission and guide everything we do.

Clothes To Kids has been serving the Pinellas County community since 2003 with two stores, one in Clearwater and one in St. Petersburg. In August 2018, we opened a third store in Tampa. Our stores are kid-friendly and cheerful, all run by dedicated staff and by volunteers who consistently donate more than 1,300 hours a month. They give individualized attention to the children, making them feel welcomed and catered to as they shop—free of charge—for a complete wardrobe of their choice, a week's worth of quality school clothes. The children are given an appointment to shop at the store, having the entire store to themselves to browse, select, and try on clothes in a comfortable and fun mall-style setup. The smiles on the children's faces as they roam the store and their thrill at discovering that special pair of shoes or jacket is what we strive for every day.

Our clothes and accessories come to us from in-kind donations, fundraising events, and clothing drives. We rely on the community to participate in our clothing drives year-round. Each donation is carefully evaluated for

quality and suitability for school wear. Two of our annual fundraisers, Shoed! and Drop (Off) Your Drawers, are geared specifically to bring in donations of new shoes, socks, and underwear. We supplement our donations by buying inventory (shoes, socks, uniforms, and underwear) as needed to maintain our store stocked with an array of sizes and styles.

A complete wardrobe includes 5 tops, 4 bottoms, 1 pair of shoes, 1 jacket (in season), 1 dress (optional), and always 5 new pairs of underwear and 5 new pairs of socks. We carry uniforms for children that need them. Accessories such as hats, scarves, backpacks, and jewelry are also available. Each child leaves the store with a handled shopping bag full of clothes they selected, feeling brighter about their future.

Our purpose is to build a community where every child has quality clothing to go to school feeling confident and good about themselves. “Clothe a Kid, Change a Life” is our philosophy.

Population and Numbers Served: Expanding Our Impact Every Year Since 2003

We help all children who are school-age, live in Hillsborough or Pinellas counties, and are eligible for the free and reduced-price meal program. At-risk children such as foster, abused, and homeless children automatically qualify. We operate at the grassroots level, partnering with 145 social service agencies, 17 city and county agencies, 9 shelters, 94 congregations, and 245 schools—we accept referrals from all.

We have provided more than 168,646 wardrobes to date in our community. The table below shows the number of wardrobes we have provided from 2017–2020:

Year	Number of Wardrobes Provided
2017	10,260
2018	10,158
2019	12,195
2020	11,012

Other Recent Successes: Navigating 2020 with Success Amid Hard Realities in Our Communities

- We were able to reach 88% of our goal of 12,500 wardrobes to children in 2020 in spite of having had to close our stores for 7 weeks starting in mid-March due to Covid-19—this attests to yet another year of impactful service to our community.
- To protect the health of our staff and shoppers, we successfully modified the shopping experience for the children we serve in response to Covid-19; we are temporarily providing Clothes To Go bags for the children. Staff and volunteers do the shopping for them based on size, color, and style preferences entered in our easy-to-use online request form. Our typical turnaround time is 2–5 days.
- Our 2019 audited financial statements show that .90¢ of every \$1 donated to us is used for program services (rather than supportive services).

Amount and Purpose of Funds: \$30,000 to Serve 600 Low-Income and At-Risk Children in Need

We request \$30,000 to provide quality school clothes to 600 low-income and at-risk children in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties in 2021. Each store will be positioned to serve 200 of these 600 children.

Serving 600 additional children in 2021 would amplify our reach to children in need by 5% over the 11,012 level achieved in 2020.

Grant Amount = Children Served	
\$30,000	600
\$25,000	500
\$20,000	400
\$15,000	300
\$10,000	200
\$5,000	100

\$30,000	600
\$25,000	500
\$20,000	400
\$15,000	300
\$10,000	200
\$5,000	100

The grant request is based on an average cost of \$50 for each complete wardrobe we provide. As shown on the table, the entire grant will go toward providing clothes for the corresponding number of children based on a cost of \$50. No additional overhead costs are needed to serve the 600 children we hope to help with this grant. Our \$50 per wardrobe rate is calculated based on 17 years of controlling and tracking the costs of providing wardrobes to children in the community. We have developed the expertise to operate our program both effectively and efficiently. Our 2019 audited financials attest that .90¢ of every dollar donated to us is used for program services (rather than supportive services).

We hope the community need normalizes after 2021. This will allow us to continue successfully funding our year-round program through the normal channels we have used in past years: fundraisers, cash donations, and grants from foundations. Over the last ten years, 75% of our grantors have donated to us in multiple years. Their loyalty has allowed us to meet the needs in our community year after year.

Project Time Frame and Duration: Providing 600 Additional Wardrobes for School in 2021

The project time frame for this grant is January-December 2021. With this grant, each of the three stores will be positioned to serve an additional 200 eligible children in 2021.

Our program is year-round as we serve at-risk foster, abused, and homeless children who can be in crisis at any point during the year. As we receive requests for help with school clothes, we set up an appointment for in-person shopping or fulfill a Clothes To Go bag order. Parents can call us or fill out an online Clothes To Go request form describing their child's size, style preferences, and special requests, and we do the shopping for them. For both in-person or Clothes To Go shopping, we ensure the child leaves the store with a complete wardrobe that meets their needs.

This project will alleviate financial strain for parents: relief knowing their children have a quality wardrobe to attend school, including winter attire to keep them warm; less anxiety knowing they can use the funds saved for more pressing needs.

Most important, studies show that positive social experiences build self-esteem, shape character, and motivate children to succeed. The teachers and social workers we work with see these same benefits: children that feel good about themselves respond with better behavior, better attendance, and better grades.