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Shining his light around the world



The giving spirit of his clients and his belief in letting light illuminate the dark corners of our world are what got Dundee chiropractor Kenny Harless in this situation.

According to him, it's a wonderful place to be.

"I believe in this with everything I have - healthier people, healthier world," said Dr. Harless.

Dr. Harless and his office workers gathered more than 300 pairs of shoes earlier this month to send to kids on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana. Most of the shoes came from those who visit his office.

The community also became involved, with at least one retail store offering a discounted price on shoes if they were being donated.

Dr. Harless took the shoes west and delivered them along with a group of about 10 other chiropractors from around the country during the second week of December.

"We had everything," he said. "We focused on shoes, but the other offices gathered coats, mittens, hats, toys, clothes, everything. And the people were so grateful. When we gave the kids the shoes, they put them on right away. When they went out for recess, they changed back into the old ones. They didn't want to scuff them."

On the wall behind him is a globe shaped like a lightbulb; children of different colors and ethnicities hold hands and stand on top of that globe. All of them are smiling. It's a mural his mother painted for him in one room of his Dundee office.

The lightbulb shape comes into play as Dr. Harless talks more - everyone has a light to shine. His job is to help it remain strong and clear. As a chiropractor, he said, his job is to make sure the body is communicating effectively, to make sure "you're not a dim bulb."

He said his background in healing and prevention led him to help people, either through physical manipulations or something like this - emotional connection.

"Just the reactions of the people, it was incredible," he said.

"There was one kid who had never had anything new. He didn't want to wear the

new coat until he could show his mom."

Dr. Harless had participated in some outreach efforts as a student, but he said the focus was on international populations.

He traveled to Budapest, Hungary, to help teach people about personal wellness. The group from his school had also gone to Nepal and Fiji in recent years.

"Any effort is wonderful, but I thought, why not focus this at home? Why not make a difference in this country when so many people need right here?" he said. "On a reservation (and in a tribe) with about 11,000 people and a 60 percent unemployment rate - it was what we needed to do."

It was then he teamed up with different chiropractors across the United States to gather goods for the reservation. Together they rounded up more than 9,000 individual gifts for the people.

"If we can educate people, they can make better decisions about how they live, and that affects all of us," he said.

The reception on the reservation was reportedly welcoming.

"They told us, 'you may not know the kids' names, but you know their hearts,' " said Dr. Harless. "They told us, 'we needed action, not more words.' "

The donations were just the first step. Dr. Harless and his fellow chiropractors began work on renovating an old theater on the reservation, hoping to create a place where kids can hang out. They plan on finishing the renovation on another trip this summer.

There are also plans to build a skate park and create a community wellness center.

The doctors got together and created a scholarship to send a person to school for chiropractic science with the stipulation that she comes back to the reservation to help create the community center.

As thanks for the generosity, Dr. Harless gathered the pictures from his trip on a CD and distributes it to his clients so they can see where their donations went.