

They Bring Brighter Colors To Sick Children

Contributed by Erick Colman

Emily Leinwand, 12
Matt Leinwand, 11
Co-CEO's
Crayons4Kids
Kalamazoo, Michigan, United States

Emily and Matt Leinwand saw children feeling blue. It wasn't long before they and those kids saw more than black and white. Now they see green, which they use to bring out the reds, yellows, pinks, purples, oranges, and browns. The siblings co-run Crayons4Kids, an organization that delivers and ships donated crayons, coloring books, baby rattles, DVD movies, games and toys to sick children in hospitals across the United States. Supported by their parents, Mike and Janice Leinwand, Emily and Matt put a simple and brilliant idea into action. "That's how we were brought up, to give to others," Emily said.

The beginning of Crayons4Kids goes back to 2001, at Los Angeles County-University of Southern California Medical Center. Dr. Mike Leinwand, a pediatric surgeon, was in residency there at the time. He wanted to spend more time with Emily and Matt, so he brought them to work.

Days and nights spent at the hospital gave Emily and Matt time to see sick children who needed ways to pass the time. Enter the crayons and coloring books.

From there, "it pretty much kept getting bigger and bigger," Matt said. "Churches and schools got involved." The Leinwands also lived in Boston and Philadelphia before moving to Kalamazoo. Today, Emily and Matt do most of their work out of Children's Hospital at Bronson, where Mike is a practicing surgeon.

"Normally, we try to go to the kids who've been in the hospital for a long period of time," Matt said. "We're trying to focus on kids with cancer; kids who have to be there for months," Emily said.

From its start in 2001 to mid-January 2008, Crayons4Kids has donated:

- 134,568 new crayons
- 15,319 coloring books
- 1,006 baby rattles
- 325 DVD's
- 7,852 games and toys

In 2006, the Leinwands accomplished one big goal for Crayons4Kids. They were able to send gift packages to one hospital in all 50 U.S. states. Selecting each hospital was mostly done via Internet research and referrals.

Crayons4Kids gift packages also made their way to Honduras and the Caribbean island country of St. Kitts and Nevis. This was done in partnership with Healing the Children, a group that flies children in from poorer countries to the United States for free medical procedures.

Today, outreach and publicity is easier to come by than before.

"Every year, we partner with a radio station [WRKR-FM in Kalamazoo] for 'Operation Scribble,' where they promote it on the radio," Matt said. "A computer store lets us rent out the front of their store,

right next to a toy store during a holiday season.”
Emily and Matt’s latest Crayons4Kids project encourages sick children to sing.

With the help of Shei Althoff, Children’s Hospital at Bronson’s music therapist, and a computer, children can record songs—with or without parents, with or without instruments—for a personal CD.

“If the child were to pass away, the parents have a recording of their child’s songs,” Emily said.

The organization is run almost entirely by the Leinwands, with the help of periodic volunteers. Donated funds go towards purchasing new items to give away.

“I get to see my kids doing something for others,” Mike, the surgeon and proud father, said.
“I’m very proud that my kids came up with it themselves.”

For information on donating money and items to Crayons4Kids, visit the Web site <http://www.crayons4kids.org>. The Leinwands say to send only new items. Used items are not accepted.