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School, community help family after fire

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Third grade students at St. Thomas took charge when one of their classmates suddenly lost everything.

On Saturday, Oct. 13, 10-year old Audrey Giesler's home on Tremont Avenue was destroyed by fire.

The youngest of five, Audrey, like the rest of the family, lost everything.

"She lost all her toys," said Molly Giesler, her mother. "A few American Girl dolls, Barbies, clothes - everything."

On Monday, her classmates approached their teacher, Jan Calme.

"They came to me to see what we could do for Audrey," said Calme. "They were thinking on her level and what they would feel like if they lost all their toys and books."

"I talked to the principal and she said 'Let them tell you what they want to do and how they would go about it.' They said they wanted to ask the rest of the class to bring in new or gently used toys, books, and art supplies."

The class decided to make it a surprise for Audrey. Letters written by the students were sent home with each student asking for donations.

The following Friday - with Audrey's mom in attendance - they surprised her.

The students also put together a book of pictures of themselves with Audrey since family scrapbooks had been destroyed. The book also included notes and drawings with each student contributing a page.

"She was absolutely surprised. We were stunned," said Molly Giesler. "I can't imagine a class that age keeping that secret. They gave toys, games, pajamas. One especially great gift - they made one of those scrapbooks."

Giesler was stunned by the charity of the community at large.

"At first it was a big shock and then you get overwhelmed by the generosity of people - it's incredible," said Giesler. "It's kind of embarrassing. Everybody's been really supportive and I can't get over the kindness of people - people we don't even know."

Her older daughter, a member of the Newport Central Catholic soccer team, lost all her soccer gear.

"Two of her coaches came over the next day and took them to Soccer Village and replaced all that for her," Giesler said. "The soccer team at Highlands - girls she plays against - sent donations."

"The giving went all across school barriers and community barriers."

No one was harmed during the fire and the family is staying with grandparents who lived nearby.

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