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# Students Fill Shoeboxes with Joy of Holiday Season

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Packing shoeboxes with gifts for children around the world, Illinois Wesleyan University's [Circle K International](#) (CKI) showed that it only takes a little bit of love – along with a few toys – to give back during the holiday season.

Founded in 1967, CKI is a Registered Student Organization (RSO) dedicated to service, leadership and fellowship. With an addition of 18 new members during the fall semester, the 26 total members of CKI completed 736 service hours with a variety of organizations, according to the RSO's president Taylor Williams '18.

"I think it is important for people who are able to, to find a way to give back. For IWU CKI, we try to give back in as many ways as we can, whether through volunteering, sending gifts, or making financial donations to organizations," Williams said. "During the holidays, I think it is especially important to help out."

This holiday season, CKI teamed up with [Operation Christmas Child](#), a nonprofit organization that began in 1993 and has provided millions of shoeboxes filled with gifts to children in 130 countries. Having volunteered for organizations such as Operation Christmas Child in high school, Williams said she was excited to get involved and help spread the joy of volunteering when she became president of CKI last year.



Members of Illinois Wesleyan's Circle K International volunteered their time during the holiday season to assist with Operation Christmas Child and Operation Gratitude.



Illinois Wesleyan's Circle K International packed and wrapped 30 shoeboxes with gifts for Operation Christmas Child.

"It is very important for me to help show the group that we can be a part of something much bigger than ourselves," Williams said. "Volunteering for an hour or two does not take much out of our own day, but to the person on the receiving end of our volunteering, it can mean the world to them."

In mid-November, members of CKI dedicated two days to packing 30 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child. With help from CKI advisor and [Action Research Center](#) Director Deborah Halperin who donated the shoeboxes, Williams' mom who donated wrapping paper, and funding from the Bloomington Kiwanis Club, CKI was able to cover the \$200 cost of preparing the boxes.

Williams said CKI purchased approximately 10 items for each box, including toys, personal hygiene items, and a "wow" item, such as a doll, a mini soccer ball, a stuffed animal or an outfit. Williams said this was the first year that members also

included their addresses on small notes and handmade drawings that they prepared for the children. She is eager to see if the children will respond.



After packing the boxes, Williams, along with the vice president of CKI Breanna Walker, delivered the shoeboxes to Cross Pointe Church in Bloomington, which is one of Operation Christmas Child's drop off locations, during National Collection Week in mid-November.

"Participating in projects such as Operation Christmas Child did not take very much time, but I know it will be very impactful to everyone who receives what we made," Williams said. "Each child who opens one of these presents will be so happy and know that there are other people who care for them, even if we are across the world."

Nathan Addis, the secretary of CKI, said that during a time when people are spending time with loved ones, it is important to share the joy of the season with people who may not have the same opportunity.

"It is vastly important to share the love we have," Addis said. "It is so easy to make a person smile, and that is what we are trying to do."

Spreading their love to not just children, but also to military personnel and first responders, Williams said this was the first year that CKI teamed up with [Operation Gratitude](#), a nonprofit organization that sends more than 250,000 care packages each year to new recruits, veterans, first responders and service members.

In addition to stuffing care packages with holiday and appreciation cards plus personal hygiene items, Williams said CKI also hand crafted 30 paracord bracelets which contain 7.5 feet of wrapped-up cord that can be used in emergency situations. Williams said CKI purchased 30 paracords with funding from the Kiwanis Club of Bloomington, before using Operation Gratitude's YouTube video tutorial to learn how to make the bracelets.

"Making the paracord bracelets, cards, and sending needed items is just a small way we can show that we care about and are thankful for the service members, veterans and first responders," Williams said, noting that CKI sent the care packages to Operation Gratitude's processing center in California after packing them.

Addis said that being able to express his love and fulfillment, and send it along to others, was the most rewarding part of both projects.

"The takeaway from participating in these projects is the unspoken theme of giving," Addis said. "Too often, we are focused on receiving, especially during this time of year, but we can provide a message for our members of the importance of giving while also creating a special bond with each other."



Illinois Wesleyan's Circle K International packed 30 shoeboxes with toys and personal hygiene items for Operation Christmas Child.