



VOLUME 1, ISSUE 7

Erie UpLink is Blessed to Be a Blessing

By Jan Sciacca

Lexi Cire, Stephanie Short and Lisa Knudsen started Erie UpLink, a charitable (501c3) organization in 2011 as a link between needs in the Erie community and folks wanting to help. Their motto is “See a need, fill a need.” Their mission is to connect Erie families with resources to fulfill their basic life needs. Their desire is to provide hope and to demonstrate care for one another. The founders affirm that Erie is a very generous and compassionate community.

Erie UpLink has narrowed its focus as it's grown. Erie UpLink serves children and families in Erie who are in need of temporary assistance, meeting basic life needs such as food and clothing. Much of their

“I don't think she'd ever had a new pair of shoes right out of the box before and she was just so happy and thankful. It brought tears to my eyes, does still just thinking about it” – Lisa Knudsen, Erie UpLink Co-founder

serving is based through the Tiger Packs program. They started with eleven food-filled backpacks at Erie Elementary and are now serving over 100 students each month though six Erie schools. Each Fall, Black Rock Elementary, Summit Bank and other groups collect new hats and gloves which are distributed to every Tiger Packs recipient as well as to Erie school health offices. Erie Family Dentistry provides dental care packages, Christmas stockings are filled with toiletries, books, socks and holiday treats and go home in December packs. School supplies, boxes of Girl Scout cookies, boxed Valentines and other seasonal favorites are also distributed through the Tiger Packs.



A group of kids enjoy the Summer fun at Eagle Lake camp on location at Calvary Bible Church in Erie.

Erie UpLink also partners with local schools to provide scholarship funds for field trips and enrichment activities, special classroom supplies and snacks, a hot lunch account for students experiencing a temporary need outside of the free/reduced lunch program, and seasonal clothing (PE shoes, snow boots, winter coat, etc.) Lexi, Stephanie and Lisa think the key to their organization's success is that they focus on doing a few things very well rather than lots of things. They ask for help and strive to be a good partner to the schools, groups and organizations serving Erie.

Erie UpLink is run solely by volunteers. The founders share responsibilities equally, though there are

some areas of “specialization.” Stephanie Short does the banking and accounting. Lexi Cire lends her experience as a special education teacher at Erie Elementary to help the Board understand the needs of many of the families and students served. Lisa Knudsen maintains the website and does much of the electronic communication. All of the food, which equates to about \$13,000 a year, is donated by local groups including Calvary Church, Black Rock and Red Hawk Elementaries and Rocky Mountain Christian Academy. The drives are run by volunteer groups, and the Tiger Packs are assembled and often filled by local student groups including Girl Scout Troops, 7th grade boys

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Calvary youth group, and several Erie High School student groups including Student Council, Select Choir and Tiger Football seniors.

Erie UpLink is also responsible for bringing Eagle Lake Camp to Erie for the first time. In the past, the organization was responsible for sending kids to the camp near Woodland Park. This year, they wanted to bring the camp to Erie so more kids could participate in the camp experience. The founders didn't know how they would fund the Eagle Lake program, including twenty-five need-based scholarships, but the nonprofit Board decided to step out in faith. At their next board meeting, a check arrived in the mail for the exact amount needed. The donation came from a family that had received five scholarships for their children to attend Eagle Lake Camp at the on-site program outside Woodland Park. The family had received a great financial blessing and they wanted to share it with Erie UpLink.

One special moment for Lisa was sitting down on the floor in the hallway at Erie Elementary with a young lady who needed tennis shoes for PE. As Lisa took the shoes out of the box, the girl's eyes got huge. She tied them on her feet and jumped up so excited. Lisa shares,

"I don't think she'd ever had a brand new pair of shoes right out of the box before and she was just so happy and thankful. It brought tears to my eyes, does still just thinking about her."

Erie UpLink would like readers to know how very appreciative they are for the encouragement and financial support they receive from the Erie community. They encourage those interested to visit their website at erieuplink.org regularly for ways to help, to donate via PayPal and for upcoming event information.

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