



Angela Williamson of Fairfax brought her two 10-year-old sons, Cameron (left) and Christian (right) to the Family Volunteer Day hosted by Volunteer Fairfax on Monday, Jan. 16, a federal holiday celebrating the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.



Karen Schofield of Fairfax helps daughter Dana, 8, create Valentine's Day cards during the Family Volunteer Day hosted by Volunteer Fairfax on Monday, Jan. 16. Dana is a member of the Caring Kids Club at Greenbrier East Elementary School.



Nine-year-old Mackenzie Chase of Springfield reads a story to her mother, Kerri. "We made a New Year's Resolution that we would volunteer somewhere once a month," said Chase.

# United We Serve

Volunteer Fairfax mobilizes more than 1,100 residents to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy.

By VICTORIA ROSS  
THE CONNECTION

Sitting together at large round tables, children and their parents cut out pink and red paper hearts, pasting them on cards for nursing home patients, or stuffed socks and blankets into kits for the homeless. Emily Davis of Volunteer Fairfax circulated among the tables, chatting with the children and their parents about their volunteer projects.

"So what was your favorite activity?" Davis asked Dana Schofield, a second-grader at Greenbrier East Elementary School in Fairfax.

"I liked making the Valentine's Day cards," Schofield said, "Probably because they don't get many in their own mailbox."

Davis said her favorite part of Family Volunteer Day was "Reflection Time." "We want people to have these conversations, and reflect on what they accomplished by volunteering, how they are helping others," Davis said. "This was our best year so far."

**MORE THAN 1100 PEOPLE** participated in Volunteer Fairfax's third annual Family Volunteer Day on Monday, Jan. 16, a federal holiday celebrating the life and legacy

of Martin Luther King Jr. Taking place each year on the third Monday in January, the MLK Day of Service is the only federal holiday observed as a national day of service – a "day on, not a day off."

Volunteer Fairfax, an organization that matches the interests of volunteers with the needs of local nonprofits, expanded its event this

**"I think more people would be fighting all the time if Dr. King hadn't taught people how to be friends and help each other."**

—Cameron Williamson, 10, Fairfax

year to include Herndon and Alexandria, as well as George Mason University's Dewberry Hall, where about 500 parents and their children completed service projects for area nonprofits.

"We wanted to create an event that allows children to experience first-hand how fun and easy volunteering can be, while providing quality family time," said Jeanne Sanders, executive director of Volunteer Fairfax. Sanders said the Martin Luther King Day event is specifically designed to give parents with young children an opportunity to volunteer together.

"The first year we were overwhelmed with responses, and this

room was really crowded," said Sanders. "Last year, we received grants from Youth Services America and UnitedHealthcare that allowed us to purchase more supplies and expand to three locations."

At GMU, children and parents decorated and packed hypothermia prevention kits for Fairfax County's homeless, made Valentine's Day cards for nursing home patients, wrote notes to accompany books for child care centers and made compost bins using clean, hospital wash basins. All of

the projects will go to area nonprofits, such as FACETS, the Fairfax Library Foundation, The Holiday Project and Inova Health System.

"We might be the only people who come in and give nursing home patients Valentine's Day cards, so these children are doing something very special and they should feel good about it," said Bobby Anderson, a board member of The Holiday Project. "They've already made about 100 cards, and these will go to patients throughout the county."

"My favorite part was helping people stay warm," said five-year-old James Prettvett of Vienna, after

putting together one of the hypothermia prevention kits. He attended the event with his three-year-old sister, Josie, and his father, Tyler.

"We want to make giving a way of life, not just a one-time event," said Tyler Prettvett.

"You do have to start that message when they are young," said Angela Williamson of Fairfax, who brought her twin boys, Christian and Cameron, 10, to the event. "You feel good at the end of the day after doing this."

Cameron and Christian, who attend Willow Springs Elementary School, said they thought Dr. King would like seeing people of all races working together to help those less fortunate. "I think more people would be fighting all the time if Dr. King hadn't taught people how to be friends and help each other," Cameron Williamson said.

Robert Saul of Clifton said he and his family attended the event "to foster the spirit of giving back when they are young, so it becomes a way of life." His wife, Kristen, said their family has made it a priority to volunteer more. "Martin Luther King said to judge people on the content of their character, not the color of their skin. Volunteering gives us a way to build character, to show that a person's character does count."

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** on Volunteer Fairfax, go to [www.volunteerfairfax.org](http://www.volunteerfairfax.org).



Area residents spent part of their Monday volunteering with Volunteer Fairfax for their annual MLK Day of Service event, Give Together: A Family Volunteer Day on the campus of George Mason University.



Talía Schmitt, 16, of Fairfax, helps Tyler Prettvett, of Vienna, and his children James, 5, and Jessie, 3, make compost boxes on the campus of George Mason University on Monday morning.



Four-year-old Zachary Barr of Springfield listens as his mother, Nancy Barr, reads him a story. Barr said that she wanted to teach her children the importance of giving back to the community.



Lily O'Donnell of Fairfax Station volunteered part of her Monday morning on the campus of GMU at the Family Volunteer Day event sponsored by Volunteer Fairfax.

VIEWPOINTS

PHOTOS BY VICTORIA ROSS/THE CONNECTION

## Volunteering on MLK Day

"I like to try to help people who need it. I like all the things that Martin Luther King, Jr. did to help people."  
—GAVIN SAUL, 10  
CLIFTON



"I think it's important to find the good in each person and try to make a difference in each other's lives. We're a military family, so diversity is a fact of life. We don't always realize how blessed we are, and how important it is to give back to others, to live the Golden Rule."  
—NANCY BARR  
SPRINGFIELD



"It was our family's resolution this year to volunteer more. We want everyone to have the same opportunities that we have. I think that's what Martin Luther King is about."  
—MADISON CHASE, 10,  
WITH MOM KERRI CHASE  
SPRINGFIELD



"Martin Luther King, Jr. said some profound things. He believed that an individual can change the world with peace, compassion and caring. When you give young children the opportunity to volunteer, they learn an important message, one that will stay with them as adults."  
—JEANNE SANDERS  
VOLUNTEER FAIRFAX EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"We want to be here because if Dr. King was never alive, black and white people couldn't be together, or eat at restaurants together or play sports together. We want to celebrate his birthday by helping others."  
—CHRISTIAN WILLIAMSON, 10  
FAIRFAX



"It's a day to do something for other people. I liked making the Valentine's Card for people at nursing homes, because I don't think they usually get cards. I also liked putting the bags together with socks and blankets to keep people warm. I wrote a note inside that said 'Hope to you and all others.'"  
—DANA SCHOFIELD, 8  
FAIRFAX



"Whoever you are, or wherever you come from, you can share your time and do small things that make a big difference to other people. I think that's the message of this day."  
—NURHAENI  
A NORTHERN VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT AND VOLUNTEER FROM INDONESIA