

How Cy-Fair's **KIDS 4 R TROOPS** SUPPORT THE TROOPS

Written by Liza Winkler | Select Photography by Jason LeHecka

Escorting military families onto the field of Houston Texans football games, answering countless donation calls for the KPRC phone bank, and collecting care packages to send overseas would be considered proud patriotic accomplishments for any American. For Cy-Fair kids who are members of Kids4RTroops, these charitable acts are simply a way of life.

As part of the United Service Organization, Kids4RTroops members help spread smiles and cheer among U.S. soldiers



From Imagination to Action

Jordan Hayley, a Cy-Fair resident and student at Cypress Christian School, says she grew up with a passion for helping out U.S. military heroes. Several of Hayley's family members defended the country, including her grandfather in World War II and, more recently, her father as a Marine. "I went to all these [United Service Organization] events with my mom, and I saw all these adults and only a few military kids," Hayley says. "I realized that kids could be [more] involved, too, so we got a group together."

Hayley founded a branch of the United Service Organization (USO) just for kids three years ago with the help of her mom, 10 other children, and plenty of volunteers. Originally called USO Kids, the group recently changed its name to the all-encompassing Kids4RTroops, due to expansion in size and ventures. Jordan's mom Barbara Hayley says the move will allow the organization to have more freedom to fundraise across the state. Currently, around 225 kids and teens are involved with Kids4RTroops and volunteer their time at numerous community events for soldiers.

Members Hannah Blang and Emily Weichers have devoted many early mornings and weekends to become some of the most active volunteers within the group. Blang and Weichers both agree that hearing Hayley's inspiring tales encouraged their involvement in the association. "Jordan would come home with all these stories of making people smile, and I wanted to be able to do that," says Blang. "I went to one event, and I just fell in love with it. It just made me look at things differently and made me a better person on the inside."

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—Hannah Blang, age 12

Community Outreach

Kids4RTroops seeks to aid troops and military families in various ways, ranging from little, everyday reminders, like tying yellow ribbons around trees in the neighborhood, to large-scale events, such as helping to feed more than 5,000 troops at the USO Houston tailgate party at Reliant Stadium.

Hayley says the soldiers appreciate care packages comprised of useful items, including nonperishable foods, hats, sunscreen, wet wipes, and gum. "Over there, a little is a lot, because the troops don't really have showers and they sleep on the ground usually," she shares. "It's important to give them a taste of home."

During its lifetime, the organization has successfully raised more than \$70,000 for the USO. Members routinely host community events, such as the Walk for the Fallen in August and Operation Military Salute in November, where kid volunteers arrive at a Houston Texans game three hours in advance to serve tailgate food and cheer with wounded troops along the sidelines.



Kids4RTroops member Hannah Blang and U.S. soldiers Leland Cannon, Derek Dobbs, and Edward Campos



Jordan Hayley, the founder of Kids4RTroops, and her mom Barbara



At a Houston Texans football game last October, Kids4RTroops helped feed more than 5,000 service men and women at a tailgate party

Blang says her favorite Kids4RTroops moment was being interviewed for a radio show. Weichers says she enjoyed meeting Texans head coach Gary Kubiak's wife after one of the football games. "It's important to give back to the community and to make the soldiers feel appreciated for what they've done," Weichers says.

Future Projects

Many new endeavors are in store for Kids4RTroops as the group continues to grow in enrollment and expand activities across the state. One of the organization's main financial initiatives this year is to raise \$25,000 for military children to attend the summer Bandina Christian Youth Camp. The camp is located in the Texas Hill Country near Bandera and has a variety of weeklong sessions during the summer.

The Bandera venture is the organization's first individual fundraising effort outside the Houston area. Hayley attended Camp Bandina for the first time this past summer and was baptized. The organization hopes to send 20 kids to the camp per week throughout the summer.

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-Emily Weichers, age 13

A cable TV show is also in the works for the association. Barbara Hayley says the group will start raising money to purchase a time slot for a show expected to be on the Kingdom Broadcasting Network. The segments of the show are still in progress, but faith will be intertwined into the discussion topics. Barbara is working with a team of people to get the show on cable by January. "The Kingdom Broadcasting is for kids of Christ, and [Kids4RTroops] is for kids of any faith," she says.

Making an Impact

Although members are still in elementary and middle school, the kids and teens that make up Kids4RTroops are making huge strides towards impacting the community and the lives of military families. Men and women lose their lives each day protecting Americans' freedoms overseas, and for young Cy-Fair residents, sometimes the easiest way to lend a hand is by sending a simple gesture of support to the nation's war heroes. **CFM**

LIZA WINKLER is a sophomore at Texas State University and is studying print journalism. She has a great compassion for our soldiers and hopes for the safety of all military heroes.

Get Involved!

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KIDS 4 R TROOPS

at a Glance

- ★ Kids4RTroops members volunteer an average of 50 hours per month, which can be put towards community service hours needed for school clubs.
- ★ Volunteer opportunities include Houston Texans football games, KPRC phone bank fundraisers, community awareness walks and events, care package collections, Christmas card and teddy bear send-offs, and more.

