

Sleep in Heavenly Peace

Building Beds for Children in Need

BY AUDREY HANES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELISSA DONNER

Earlier this year, Jonesboro natives Daniel and Hannah Massey set out to address a pressing need in the area by starting a local chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace, a nonprofit organization dedicated to making sure that every child in Jonesboro has a bed. Thirty-two beds later, they are just getting started.

“I was 24 years old when I realized not every kid had a bed,” said Massey, the manager of NEA Baptist’s new Red Wolf Clinic. “I was working at a hospital, and we had an Angel Tree from the Salvation Army. A kid I picked requested a bike and normal kid stuff. When I was dropping off my gifts, I saw two beds under the tree. These were kids that wanted a bed so much that they asked for it for Christmas. It broke my heart, and it stayed with me all these years.”

Last December, a coworker told him about Sleep in Heavenly Peace, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to making sure that every child has his or her own bed to sleep. Massey’s love for woodworking, combined with that realization from several years ago, led Massey and his wife, Hannah, who serves as co-president, to pursue starting their own chapter of the organization in Jonesboro.

Massey, a Jonesboro native who graduated from Nettleton High School and attended Arkansas State University before working in health care for the past 17 years, jumped at the opportunity to make a difference in his hometown.

“I looked it up, and I loved everything about it,” said Massey of Sleep in Heavenly Peace. “I loved their ethos, their motto, everything. I literally applied for a chapter that night. First, I had to go through a series of interviews and a background check. In April, we went to a three-day training in Utah, and we became an

official chapter at the end of April.”

A \$4,000 grant from national sponsor Lowe’s allowed them to purchase building supplies and tools to get up and running, starting with a build day in June. The local team was able to build 13 beds, all of which were delivered to local children without beds, complete with a mattress, pillow and bedding.

“Our first delivery, the mother said, ‘People have helped us, but nobody ever asks where do your kids sleep at night?’” said Massey. “They were sleeping on an air mattress. They were escaping an abusive relationship, and it meant so much to her for her kids to have a bed.”

So far, the Jonesboro chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace has delivered 32 beds to children in the Jonesboro area. The only qualification to receive one of the nonprofit’s beds is that a child be without a bed, period. Anyone can apply on the chapter page, and whether it’s a child sleeping on an air mattress, a couch, with multiple kids in the same bed or in bed with a guardian, that qualifies. If there are five kids, Massey and his team will deliver five beds.

“I call to verify the children and the need,” said Massey. “We are here to focus on kids who have no bed. I vet the request and schedule the delivery. We have about a month turnaround time.

“We currently have 59 beds being applied for. I don’t think most people here in Jonesboro recognize that the need in our city is that great.”

Each bed costs about \$250 for the bed itself, the mattress, a pillow, sheets, a blanket and a bedspread. Those looking to get involved can help build and/or deliver beds, sponsor a bed or even sponsor an entire build day. Massey’s build manager, J.D. Walker, organizes the logistics of the build days; Mandy Young, fundraising



Daniel Massey

COVER FEATURE



Daniel Massey (top photo) assembles one of the bunk beds to be donated to a child in need; each bed donated (center) includes a mattress, bedding and pillow; Hannah Massey (bottom) poses for a photo with one of the recipients of a bed built and donated by the local chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace.



chair for the nonprofit, helps raise the money; and the Masseys' friends and family step in to help. He says they typically have 25 to 50 people help for each build day.

"Starting Sleep in Heavenly Peace Jonesboro has been the most amazing privilege," said Hannah. "Watching our friends, families and neighbors support the cause of getting kids off the floor and into their own beds has been a beautiful thing to see. We are very thankful to the support our community has showed us in these past few months. We are so excited to meet every kid on our wait list, because this is truly an honor and a joy."

Several local businesses have stepped up to help Sleep in Heavenly Peace, as well. J.T White Lumber, Barton's, WinnLake Mattress & Appliance, Chicken Salad Chick – Jonesboro and Craighead Electric Co-Op Cares have all helped sponsor the new nonprofit. Bearcat Storage donated two storage units, and Gamble Home Furnishings has donated 50 mattresses to date.

"We always ask kids themselves if they want to help build their beds," said Massey. "They love that. We want them to have ownership of their bed. We want them to know that the bed is theirs and theirs alone. When we deliver their bed, it's like Christmas morning. Their eyes light up, and they are so happy and proud."

Massey says that every family and child they have delivered beds to so far has made a lasting impression on him and on those who help deliver the beds.

"Our last delivery was to a displaced family," said Massey. "All their beds and furniture were destroyed in a flood in Lake City. They were living with their grandmother at the time, and we were able to deliver three beds to that family."

The nonprofit's local founder says that one of his goals upon starting Jonesboro's chapter was to be able to deliver a bed to a classmate of his 5-year-old daughter, Nora. It wasn't long before he reached that goal.

"One of my personal goals was that I wanted to help one of my daughter's classmates," said Massey. "My second delivery, I already accomplished that goal, but at the same time, it broke my heart it only took the second delivery to make that happen."

"I love that I get to work with my hands and build the actual beds. I think it's cool our donors can help build the bed and deliver it if they want, which is the best part to me. Our donors and volunteers can see their donation in action and how much that impacts these kids. ... Sometimes delivering the beds is really hard for people and it really affects them – and it should. They are confronted up close with the conditions some of these families and kids are really living in. We hope we can make a difference with them having their own bed."

Next up, Sleep in Heavenly Peace is participating in a nationwide event, Deliveries Across America, where the goal is to deliver as many beds to as many kids as possible in a single day on Dec. 10. Massey signed the local chapter up to participate in an effort to push bed deliveries before Christmas.

"For many of the kids we deliver a bed to, it's the first bed they have ever had," he said. "They are just so happy to receive their first bed oftentimes, and it's something that we take for granted. ... I'm very proud we get to do this here in Jonesboro – that it's our own community we're helping."

For more information about Sleep in Heavenly Peace, visit shpbeds.org/chapter/ar-jonesboro, find the Jonesboro chapter on Facebook or contact Daniel Massey at daniel.massey@shpbeds.org.