

8-year-old donates birthday gifts to charity

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Kay Luna | Posted: Monday, February 9, 2009 12:00 am | (18) Comments

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Camille Thoms (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

When her mom asked what she wanted for her birthday, 8-year-old Camille Thoms knew right away.

The Rock Island girl said she wanted to have a party and ask her friends to bring gifts — but not for her. Instead, she wanted to give gifts to other children, who needed them more than she did.

The second-grader's birthday wish came true Monday, when she and her mother, Cozette Thoms, delivered several bags of children's toys to Bethany for Children & Families in Moline.

With her long brown hair pulled back in a pink bow, Camille said her mother let her choose where she wanted to donate the gifts, and she picked Bethany's therapeutic recreation program. This after-school program serves

children ages 8-17, from school districts in the Illinois Quad-City metro area, who have displayed behavior issues.

Program supervisor Clay Huffstutler said the gifts will be placed in the program's "store," and kids who are celebrating birthdays or other special occasions will be allowed to choose one to take home.

"You're helping a lot of kids here," he said. "This is very, very neat for our kids to see. You're setting a really neat example."

Camille, a student at Eugene Field Elementary School, came up with the idea after watching "The Oprah Show" episode about charity giving last summer, her mother said. She chose Bethany without understanding her family's close ties to the organization.

The girl's grandmother, the late Mary Thoms, was a huge contributor to the agency and a former member of the board of directors. Mary's husband, Stuart, also was one of the agency's benefactors. Camille's father, Ted, is the current board president.

The room where she donated the gifts was furnished with funds from the Thoms family, according to a plaque on the wall.

"You never told me that," the girl told her mom, after someone explained the connection.