

With a Shoestring Budget, 'Bags of Hope' Changing Children's Lives

The Rev. Pebbles Thompson spends much of her time doing something she dislikes—fundraising—to bring hope to neglected and abused children, whom she considers society's most powerless members.

Some 6,900 cases of child abuse and neglect are reported annually in North Dakota, where Thompson's organization, Project Ignite Light, operates—and that number spikes to 3 million annually at the national level.

Launched on a shoestring budget—and still operating without government funds—Project Ignite Light provides a “Bag of Hope” to youngsters who are brought to child advocacy centers in the state so workers can investigate abuse claims. Costing about \$50 apiece, these bags contain fleece blankets, pajamas, socks, underwear, a toothbrush, a copy of Max Lucado's book *You Are Special* and other items.

More than a supply of functional items, the bags provide young children in frightful circumstances with a measure of control and security along with a statement of their value. Since April 2008, the ministry has distributed more than 2,000 of these care bags to children in reported abuse cases as it aims to shine God's light in the darkness of abuse.

The organization hopes to one day host summer camps for foster children on the 40-acre site where the Bags of Hope are packed and distributed.

Thompson has also trained her sights on expanding the work beyond North Dakota through a training program that will take the nonprofit nationwide. Though the organization can ship its

supplies anywhere, she believes prayer and personal support need to originate at the community level.

"We don't have a [starting] date in mind," Thompson says of the anticipated training program. "We're growing and changing and praying constantly. We're in uncharted territory."

But to get there, Thompson has set a goal to raise at least \$1 million a year.

"I didn't get into ministry to be a fundraiser," she says, "but fundraising makes this possible. The Lord was beaten and abused for these children. The cause is worth it."

For Project Ignite Light, this cause comes down to the promise of Micah 7:7-8, which concludes with the words, "The Lord will be a light to me."

"I love that stance," Thompson says of the phrase. "It says to these children, 'I'm going to get back up, and God's going to help me.'"