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Help students get ready for school

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About 8,000 students who are headed back to Fayette County schools on Aug. 12 need your help.

That's the number of children in need that LexLinc has identified, an increase of 2,000 children since last year's Ready! Set! Go! back-to-school rallies held in neighborhoods throughout Fayette County.

This year, though, LexLinc is not asking that you go out shopping for various school supplies to donate, much to my chagrin. I love buying school supplies.

This year — the organization's fourth in hosting these rallies — LexLinc wants your time and your money.

It needs volunteers to help with activities at the 18 sites in Fayette County that will offer some relief for parents facing the financial stress of preparing their children for the school year.

LexLinc also needs your money; any amount will do.

This year, all the supplies for all grade levels — kindergarten, elementary, middle school and high school — are pre-packaged in kits and will be available at all sites. Last year, supplies for just the lower grades were neatly configured that way, and not all sites catered to all grades.

Because of the kits, Catherine Warner of LexLinc said there will be no need for volunteers to stuff bags at Transylvania University as in years past.

Once the supplies arrive on Aug. 3, members of the Paul Laurence Dunbar High School football team will unload the supplies and help organize the kits for distribution.

"We're asking for volunteers to get involved at each site this year," Warner said. "That's where the rubber hits the road. We don't have a lot to do at Transy."

The cost for each kit averages \$10. Despite a lot of generous donations, LexLinc needs \$10,000 more.

Warner wants not only citizens who can donate the amount of one kit or a partial kit, but also businesses and the faith community to join in getting the school year off right.

"We want to get everyone vested in our children and taking an interest in the community," Warner said. "Last year, they put us over the top."

Kentucky Utilities has already donated the 8,000 backpacks that will be given out with each kit.

LexLinc — a partnership of citizens, government services and other agencies that targets neighborhoods and families struggling to survive — took charge of the back-to-school efforts three years ago and put dispersals in parks, churches and neighborhood centers instead of in one central location. The change gave neighborhoods more control, Warner said.

The theme this year is "Living Green." The city's department of Environmental Quality will be on hand to educate the children, families and the neighborhoods about recycling and its impact on our future.

Warner said low-income populations nationwide have not fully embraced recycling. "We need to save this planet for our children, and it starts with the children," she said.

Parents can register from 8:30 to 10 a.m. Aug. 8. Their children will then receive bracelets that are color-coordinated for their grade level. Those not registered or those who are unaccompanied by their parents will not receive supplies.

At 10 a.m., each site will feature speakers who will focus on that neighborhood's concerns, such as truancy or issues concerning immigration. There also will be inflatables, games and family activities.

Lunch will be served at 11 a.m., and school supplies will be distributed between noon and 1:30 p.m.

A friend and I volunteered in the Winburn neighborhood last year. The parents who attended seemed grateful, and the students beamed. But I think my friend and I got more out of it than did they.

Try it for yourself. It's a good value for very little money and very little time.