

## Literacy hopes soar on Eagle Scout's wings

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Lowell Sun

Article Last Updated: 10/06/2007 03:19:19 PM EDT

LOWELL -- The wooden shelves are stocked with stories of adventure and magic.

Behind the toys and tiny chairs, a yellow canapé creates a cozy alcove at the House of Hope playroom.

Westford Eagle Scout Luke Coughlan designed the reading area to share his love of literature.

"I knew I wanted to give back to the community," Coughlan said. "Hopefully these kids will grow up to love to read and write."

Coughlan, 17, gathered more than 3,000 adult and children's books for his Eagle Scout project, donated by members of St. Mary's Parish in Chelmsford, St. Catherine's Church in Westford, and area residents.

The House of Hope on Merrimack Street provides emergency shelter for families in Greater Lowell.

While there are 18 families currently living in the 3-family house, the playroom typically serves about 20 children.

House of Hope's executive director, Deborah Chausse, said families come to the shelter in crisis situations, while child development is sometimes put on the back burner.

"Survival is the first priority for these families," Chausse said. "This (project) means people believe in the capacity of the children to learn and become leaders in the community."

Jasmine Saunders, a resident at House of Hope, loves to read to her 3-year-old daughter Ba'tya.

"Reading is inspirational for the kids," Saunders said. "My daughter loves books and now I can lay out and read to her comfortably."

Coughlan has a personal connection to the House of Hope. Over the past decade, he and his family have volunteered by serving meals at the shelter.

"The families are no different than you or I," Coughlan said. "Seeing young families with the opportunities to get back on their feet gives me hope."

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