

TEEN IS A REAL PLAYMAKER



JENNIFER BROWN/THE STAR-LEDGER

Sasha Lipton, 16, of Mountainside, collects and cleans old toys and donates them to needy kids. Above, she helps children at an ARC of Union County child care center in Cranford unwrap the toys she has delivered. Below, Sasha packages toys at her home in Mountainside.

Jersey girl
rescues
old toys
from trash,
then cleans
and wraps
them to
give to
needy kids

BY RUDY LARINI
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

The garage and basement family room of Sasha Lipton's Mountainside home are strewn with toys.

Toddler toys — dozens and dozens of them.

But this isn't a story about a houseful of lucky children. Lipton, 16, is an only child, and the toys are destined for another venue.

For the past several months, Lipton has been amassing plastic toys left out for curbside trash collection, especially unsold leftovers from garage and yard sales.

Her goal is to divert the toys from their ultimate destination — so much non-biodegradable plastic waste in landfills — to needy children.

She cleans them, wraps them and donates them to charitable organizations.

"All these toys we got would have been going to landfills, so that's a lot of toys that are going to kids instead," said the teenager, a junior at



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Governor Livingston High School in Berkeley Heights.

It's a novel approach to a problem, one that drew praise from environmental advocates and the social service agencies who are the recipients of Lipton's so-called "Second Chance Toys."

"It's actually a very nice idea," said Jeff Tittel of the New Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club. "These toys don't disintegrate in a landfill and this allows kids who are less advantaged to have access to them."

Jamie Roszel of the New Jersey Plastic Recycling || SEE TOYS, P. 7

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Network said the market for recycled plastic toys is virtually nonexistent.

"It's almost zero," Roszel said. "When you get down to small items in such small quantities, there's virtually no value when it comes to recycling."

The first recipient of Lipton's donated toys was the Family Violence Center in Newark, which gave them out to children of the abused women in its shelters.

"There were some beautiful toys, just like they were new," said Lamira Reese, the center's donations director. "And the kids really enjoyed them."

"These are kids that don't have anything when they come here, and when they leave, they have something to take with them," Reese said. "I think it's really great."

On Wednesday, another batch of Second Chance Toys were donated to the Bright Beginnings pre-school program at the ARC of Union County.

"It was absolutely adorable," said Debbie Dreher, community affairs director of the organization. "When those children saw that huge collection of toys, their eyes were humongous. One little boy said, 'Has Santa Claus been here?'"

Dreher praised Lipton and her Second Chance Toys initiative.

"I think it's a great idea," she said. "More young people should be thinking like that. I hope she will be a role model for other kids her age."

"Donations like this to us are very welcome," Dreher added. "I'm also a big proponent of keeping as much out of landfills as possible. We're too disposable here in the United States."

Lipton said she came upon the idea of Second Chance Toys while driving through neighborhoods near her home and noticing toys that had been put out for curbside trash pickups.

"I saw so many toys being disposed of at the curb, and many of them looked as good as new," she said. "It got me thinking how these discarded toys were so wasteful and that many children would love to have them."

"How many kids are going without toys, and our landfills are being filled with toys that are basically good," she said. "I didn't know if it would work, but I figured I would give it a try."

Lipton said she is uncertain what will happen to Second Chance Toys once she graduates from high school and moves on to college in another year.

"I don't know," she said. "I'd like it to last, but I really haven't thought much about that."

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