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East Brunswick 2nd-graders enjoy the gift of giving

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EAST BRUNSWICK — It was a sight not too common at an elementary school: dozens of second-graders packed in a room, clamoring to give their toys away.

But this was the scene at Irwin Elementary School on Monday afternoon, as four second-grade classes came together to donate their toys to a local organization.

About 70 pupils were guided by Second Chance Toys, a community-based initiative that recovers and refurbishes discarded toys to give them to children in need.

The pupils assembled in the school's music room to present their toys to representatives from the Head Start program of New Brunswick.

After a brief ceremony, the students lined up to drop their donations in boxes that were taken by Head Start, which will distribute the toys throughout the area.

The project started in the class of Rochelle Rosen, who was teaching her second-graders about addressing needs in the local area.

"The lessons challenged students to think of a problem in their community and come up with a way they could solve it," she said.

Rosen, a teacher for 14 years, said she has taught similar lessons in past years, but "it's never been this particular."

When the pupils came up with the idea, she searched for an organization to help with the project, found Second Chance Toys, and then recruited the other second-grade classes at the school. Rosen said the group helped make the donating very rewarding for the children, who collected and cleaned the toys themselves.

"It's not just something mom picked up," she said. "It just seemed more meaningful because it was their toys."

Second Chance Toys was founded in 2006 by Sasha Lipton, a senior at Governor Livingston High School in Berkeley Heights. The initiative has donated nearly 1,000 toys to organizations serving needy children throughout the state, according to the group.

People interested in donating can visit www.secondchancetoys.org.

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