

## Tiger Closet Coat and Clothes Exchange

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*John Tyler Elementary School  
Hampton, Virginia*

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Tyler Elementary is always looking for projects that will meet the needs of its students and their families. Hurricane Katrina gave them the opportunity to repeat a highly successful activity: the Tiger Closet Coat and Clothes Exchange, named after the school's feline mascot.

Four families displaced by the hurricane joined the school family this year. Along with a number of other families, these new residents often found it hard to keep up with their fast-growing children's clothing needs. At the same time, the children of many other families outgrew their clothes long before they wore out. To help out all of these families, the school set up a clothing exchange, collecting gently used clothing and inviting needy families for a free day of "shopping." ATP members and volunteers made a special effort to collect winter essentials, such as hats, coats, and gloves; some families bought new clothes to donate to Tiger Closet. In its second year, this project was so successful that the donated clothes spilled out of the Parent Resource Center and had to be moved to the cafeteria. "It's as big as a Hecht's sale!" exclaimed the principal, referring to an area department store.

Items were set aside for families unable to come to the school on "sale" day, and the school nurse even offered to deliver the items. Volunteers worked in shifts to set up for the event and helped shoppers find just the right bargain. "As with many other efforts, parent volunteers made all the difference," said the parent involvement coordinator.

This program also allowed Tyler's ATP to reach out to the community and expand existing partnerships. For example, local dry cleaners and clothing stores donated hangers, bags, and clothing racks. And, to make sure everything went to good use, all items remaining in the Tiger Closet after the "sale" were donated to a shelter for battered women.

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