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Teen reaches out to wounded soldiers with care packages

By PAMME BOUTSELIS, Telegraph Correspondent  
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Courtesy photo  
Danielle Biggio is surrounded by the supplies she used to fill 130 gift bags for soldiers and their children who are recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

NASHUA – It's said charity begins at home, and for one young lady in Nashua, the inspiration certainly did.

Danielle Biggio, a 13-year-old who just completed seventh grade at Nashua Christian Academy, used a bit of what she learned at home and brought it to the forefront with an inspiring service project.

It started with Nashua Christian Academy's expectation that students perform a service project each semester. They are encouraged to look at the world around them and act on what its needs might be. For instance, this past year, sixth-grader Molly Mendola from Milford suggested the soccer team coordinate a bake sale to aid the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Danielle – or Dani, as she's known to friends and family – was no stranger to doing good things. Past service projects included baby-sitting for couples who attend her church, donating clothes from her closet to those in need, helping an elderly neighbor with housework, and baking for the fire and police

department members.

With her family, however, Biggio has gained experience in serving others in a broader way. It all began about two years ago when her uncle Brian Moore left his position as the junior high school administrator at Nashua Christian Academy.

He had been deployed with the New Hampshire National Guard to Iraq. Her mom, Carole, started sending care packages to her brother Brian and those in his unit, as well. The family, including Dani's dad, Terry, and sister, Meaghan, 16, also got involved, along with Carole's brother, Nashua attorney Paul Moore and their parents, Bev and Ray Moore of Litchfield.

This extended family did all they could to meet the many requests of the servicemen and women. Enough so that the joke among Brian Moore's unit was that the family had more items than Wal-Mart and began dubbing this service of kindness "Moore-Mart." Brian Moore finished his stint in Iraq and re-enlisted. He is currently serving in Afghanistan.

Paul Moore and Carole Biggio established a nonprofit and named it Moore-Mart. Run from a donated conference room at Moore's 23 Factory St. office in Nashua, the family and volunteers send from 200-250 packages a month overseas. It's truly a family effort and one that has been made possible through the support of the VFW, American Legion, local churches, businesses and volunteers.

#### How to Help

Moore-Mart sends more than 200 care packages a month to soldiers overseas. Volunteers and donations are always needed. For more information, visit [www.mooremart.org](http://www.mooremart.org) or call Carole Biggio at 888-9030.

So it seemed only natural when Dani Biggio began to ponder her latest service project that she would have no problem in thinking big and following through with her thoughts either. According Dani, you might as well "think big or go home."

One evening, the Biggio family watched the television show "Baghdad ER." Dani's parents knew it was a graphic show to view but agreed to watch it with her. The family planned to discuss what they saw afterwards. The show so moved Dani that she felt compelled to do something to let "the soldiers know we appreciate them." She asked her parents what happened to the soldiers once they left Baghdad ER, and they explained that many came back home to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

Dani decided to make gift bags for the soldiers at Walter Reed, not only to show her appreciation for what they had been through but, in her words, "to let people know we still care about them over there."

The family got in touch with officials at Walter Reed to find out how many soldiers might be in residence at any one time and learned that there could be 50 to 80 soldiers. Dani decided to make 100 packages and then chose to carry this special project even further.

Terry Biggio travels quite often to the D.C. area and often stays at a hotel near the medical facility. He sees soldiers' families, many times with young children, staying at the hotel. After conveying this information to Dani, she decided to create 30 packages for kids too.

"My dad told me when he stays there, he sees lots of families. I wanted to bring something that the kids could do for fun," she said.

Creating 130 gift bags took a lot of effort and Dani hoped to obtain most of the items with her own money. Her mom cautioned her that it might not be possible to do it all on her own and the family pitched in to help make her project a reality.

While recovering from their wounds, the soldiers would have time on their hands so Dani's gift bags included a pad of writing paper, envelopes, a pen, playing cards, granola bars, trail mix, candy and a Soldier's Bible, which the family obtained from the International Bible Society. Dani wrote a letter, a copy of which went into each bag, explaining why she was visiting Walter Reed Army Medical Center. She wrote about her gratitude for their service and that they had not been forgotten. Dani told them that she would pray for their recovery.

The children's bags held small games, pads of paper, race cars, super balls, bubbles, stickers and Play-doh. She tied up the gift bags with ribbons of red, white and blue, which were then packed into six 17 inch by 17 inch boxes, ready for travel.

It's one thing to put effort into creating the bags, but it's quite another to get them and the family down to Washington, D.C., to deliver them. Carole Biggio felt that things were definitely working on a higher level for them as her husband's constant travel enabled them to procure three free tickets on Southwest airlines for the trip to D.C. Her husband happened to be working there that same week and fortunately had accumulated enough Hilton points for a free hotel room for the family.

Although the experience proved to be moving for the entire Biggio family, it had an even greater impact on the soldiers.

"The soldiers were very receptive to Dani, asking her questions about herself, and her school," said Carole Biggio. "One soldier held her hand and said what she had done meant so much. He told her that it makes all the difference in the world and how encouraged he felt by Dani."

For her part, Dani felt her project was a simple gesture to let the soldiers know people do appreciate them and what they are doing for the country. She wanted them to know that they are in her prayers and that people do care very much about what they have been through. Hearing those words from a 13-year-old who traveled from New Hampshire to personally say them indeed must have made a real difference for many soldiers that day in June.

To learn more about Moore-Mart, visit [www.moore-mart.org](http://www.moore-mart.org) or call Carole Biggio at 888-9030. This ongoing service project for soldiers overseas relies on the kindness and generosity of time and materials from volunteers and local businesses.

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