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## Wynnewood girl asks for old costumes haunting your closet

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If you've got cowboys, vampires, fairies and princesses taking up space in your closet, Emma Rose Shapiro wants them.

It seems like a problem a lot of people have — lack of closet space. And sometimes that precious space is taken up with Halloween costumes that are only useful a couple hours each year.

Emma, 11, of Wynnewood, realized this and started an organization to put gently used costumes to better use.

She got the idea by trolling through her own closet.

“I was thinking, ‘Look at all these costumes. What should I do with them?’” Emma said, “And I started thinking that there are other children who can't get a new costume every year, and would really like to celebrate Halloween. Then I started talking to my mom about it.”

The conversation took place around Halloween last year.

“We let it go for a few months, and then started the whole organization,” she said. In March, Emma founded The Halloween Helpers, and she said she hopes to collect 1,000 Halloween costumes to be donated to the Greater Norristown Police Athletic League. Her mother, Ilyse Shapiro, helps organize the program. Initially, Ilyse reached out to Family Services, a nonprofit organization in Montgomery County. While representatives there said the program was a great idea, they said it would better serve the Police Athletic League.

“They had a large network of kids that would benefit from a program like this,” Ilyse said. “There are areas there that are economically disadvantaged, and it would reach a large number of children. This way, they'll be able to get a costume, and they'll feel like every other kid.”

“It was also important that the children who receive the costumes have a place to go trick-or-treating,” Ilyse said, “Fortunately, in Norristown, there are area churches and other community groups that hold organized parties within the community centers.”

Emma said her organization has reached out to schools, businesses, churches and synagogues about collecting the costumes. Each is provided with a big collection box, signs and fliers, and her mother picks the donations up.

Halloween is big in Emma's neighborhood — everyone gives out candy and gets dressed up. And though she doesn't personally know anyone who can't afford a costume, she, her sister, and most of her friends have

already contributed princess, fairy, ballerina, hula dancer and cowboy outfits.

So far, The Halloween Helpers have 70 costumes, and Emma and her mother are expect to collect hundreds more. In the coming months, Emma said she is going to ask her school to get involved in the drive.

“I’m pretty optimistic that we’re going to get to 1,000,” Emma said.

Ilyse Shapiro said she’s looking to turn the program into a full-fledged nonprofit organization, and even jokes that she’s reading “Nonprofits for Dummies.”

While the program is limited to collecting costumes this year, Ilyse said that if all goes well, the charity initiative could be expanded to sponsoring Halloween events for children.

For more information and a list of what to donate, and which organizations are collecting costumes, visit <http://thehalloweenhelpers.com>.