

MOUNT LAUREL — Township students gave the gift of science to patients at Camden's Ronald McDonald House on Wednesday.

Led by Lenape sophomore Carter Taylor, third- and fourth-graders from the Parkway and Fleetwood Elementary Schools dropped off kits that would give House guests something fun and educational to do during hospital downtime.

The Ronald McDonald House provides various resources to families facing medical difficulties, including providing accommodations so families who live far away can take a patient to local hospitals. The nonprofit is one channel Carter can reach hospitalized kids, whom he began sending science kits to when he was in middle school.

His passion for science goes further back. He has sickle cell anemia, a condition where oxygen is not transported through the body properly because there are not have enough healthy red blood cells for that process, according to the Mayo Clinic. Carter said he was always disappointed to miss elementary school science class if he had to stay in the hospital, but now he can solve that problem for others.

"It's a way for them to get education while they're not in school, because they really are missing a lot of learning opportunities," he said. "And then just building ideas in their heads like, maybe once they're better they'll think, 'That was fun, maybe I'll do this, maybe I'll do that' — just giving them a creative outlet."

The kits range from do-it-yourself parachutes that demonstrate physics concepts, to duck call toys that show the reverberations of sound waves. Most of the kits are assembled by Carter and his brother, but he was happy for the elementary students' help.

"It's been a great experience to see old teachers and get to share with kids who are going through (Parkway) now," he said. "And as for Fleetwood, it's just been a great experience. The kids are great, they're so nice, and they're really supportive of Science for Sick Dayz."

The kids used LED lights, clothespins and pipe cleaners to make bugs that lit up if a circuit was arranged properly. The students carried their colorful, glowing creations throughout their tour of the Ronald McDonald House, then dropped kits for the same project at patients' doors.

The kids' collaboration with Carter began when gifted education teachers Stacy McCord and Kelly Schew wanted their students' lesson in financial literacy to show the impact motivated kids can make by starting a business. Each step of the lesson simulated real business, from job interviews to manufacturing sale products and donated kits. The classes eventually raised about \$400 each for Carter's charity by selling handmade accessories to their peers.

McCord said the endeavor helped enhance students' financial literacy, but it also helped them hone compassion and collaborative skills. One student even held a weekend lemonade stand benefiting Science for Sick Dayz.

"I think that the charitable part is also vital to learning because they need to understand that they need to give back," McCord said. "All children have gifts they were given, and we talk about how they need to use those gifts to give back."

Giving back is important to Carter, too.

"It's something I try to do because when I'm not feeling so good, giving back makes me feel better," he said "It's a good way to kind of make yourself feel better and make someone else feel better, to kind of pay it forward."