



Supporting Teachers Through Recycling by Betsy Windisch

School Days are here again. Unless you have been a teacher or worked at a school you may not realize how much time, effort, and money gets put into lesson plans, research, and acquiring the necessary materials to make an effective lesson.

The McKinley Citizens' Recycling Council has been helping many of the area's teachers for a number of years with an active e-mail and word-of-mouth network to supply them with recycled and reused items. MCRC had been seeking a way we could make the network more expansive and sophisticated in order to reach more educators. At a Teach for America community Meet & Greet, I met Tori Zapack, a second-grade teacher at Stagecoach Elementary, who shared with me her experience with a teachers' store in Tucson called Treasure 4 Teachers:

“They had a large section of donated recyclable items (like coffee cans, small plastics to use as math manipulatives, egg cartons, jars, binders, toilet paper rolls, etc.) that teachers could take for free. They also had a section of donated items that were fairly cheap (things like books, board games, etc.) and they had a section of new school supply items that were cheaper because of things like damaged packaging. It was pretty great and I think something like this could work really well in Gallup.”

Treasures 4 Teachers is a reuseable resource center for educators that started with its founder storing items in her garage. (Many of us know this scenario with items stashed in our vehicles as well.) T4T has two locations (Tempe and Tucson) and is a 501c-3. Both stores are open limited hours but accommodate teaching schedules with after school and Saturday hours, or by appointment. The store charges a fee of \$35 a year and is available to anyone who works closely with students. Within this space is housed a wide selection of materials and resources educators can access.

How does it work? They rely on the valuable gift of time, items and financial support from the community in order to provide vital resources to those that educate students. Local businesses and individuals donate out of

date or unused office supplies. The generosity of the community makes this possible. Tax-deductible donations are also accepted. The yearly membership fee helps to cover the overhead costs and staff time.

What is the value to educators?

Save time: The facilities have a wide variety of unique and useful materials a teacher might spend days or weeks trying to find. From plastic caps, coffee cans, paper towel rolls, toilet paper tubes, wrapping paper and bubble wrap, to pens, pencils, and office supplies. T4T tries to offer items to make the teacher's job easier and more rewarding.

Save money: For only \$35 per year members can access our store and huge warehouse. There they can fill a huge, reusable bag with all the material it can hold for only \$5 and shop in the free section. On average, the retail value of these materials exceeds \$75...but more importantly, by obtaining these unique learning tools through T4T, our members are helping to save the environment!

Engage students: These are not just egg or milk cartons! From pre-K students to High School graduates, these materials will challenge, enlighten, and stimulate your students' imagination and creativity, as well as their intellects. What's more, educators can provide each child with their own materials instead of relying on shared resources. This reinforces the critical "hands-on" aspect of learning.

The McKinley Citizens' Recycling Council agrees with Tori that this is an idea that would work well in our community. *Teachers are Our Treasure!* MCRC is willing to help organize such an effort for local educators to **reuse** and **recycle** more items, which will **reduce** what is sent to the landfill.

What is needed is a space. An unused garage, storefront, warehouse with or without shelving would be a start. MCRC is a 501c-3 so any in-kind or material donations can be used as an income tax deduction.

If this story touches your heart, fuels your passion for teachers and their great work, combines your zeal for recycling and saving the environment – please let us hear from you. If you have space to donate or would like to help with this effort join us at our monthly meeting at 2 pm on Saturday, September 7 at the Work in Beauty House (corner of Logan & Puerco). Contact Betsy via betsywindisch@yahoo.com / 722-9257 or Linda Popelish at 905-5966.