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Kerry Wood Visits Hephzibah Kids

When Kerry Wood visited Hephzibah Home in December, the smiles and double-takes from adult staff members were the main clue you'd have that Wood is a famous athlete. The former Chicago Cubs pitcher, tied for the major league record of striking out 20 hitters in one game, is a modest guy with a sincere desire to help kids. Wood, a father of three, put the Hephzibah children at ease by asking questions, listening to their stories and sitting down at a table to decorate cookies.

Still, the young residents between the ages of five and eleven who live at Hephzibah's Group Home in Oak Park, IL, knew Kerry Wood was someone special. The young tour guides were eager to show Kerry their rooms as they vied to hold his hand. Hephzibah's residence is a safe refuge for 26 children who have been removed from situations involving abuse or neglect.

"With the children giving you a tour, you get a look at their daily life and what's offered to them here," said Wood. "I'm so glad a place like this exists. It's amazing."

"I love the kitchen table area because it feels like a real home," Wood said, when he sat down with children in Hephzibah's Diagnostic Treatment Center to spread frosting and sprinkles. The red and blue C that Wood wrote on his cookie drew admiration from fellow cookie decorators.

"That looks good. Eat it!" one boy said. And Kerry did.

Wood and his wife, Sarah, share a commitment to improving the lives of children in Chicago, which led them to start the Wood Family Foundation in 2011. The Foundation supports efforts that empower youth and families, based on the belief that a child's potential should never be underestimated.

Wood's visit was suggested by his friend, Graham Allen, president and CEO of Sloan Valve Co., who has been a long-time supporter of Hephzibah. Yes, that's the same Sloan as Sloan Park -- the Cubs' spring training ballpark in Mesa, AZ. Allen also serves as the president of the board of directors for the Wood Foundation.

Allen's tie to Hephzibah began through his childhood friend, Cuyler Brown, son of Hephzibah's Executive Director, Mary Anne Brown. Friend-to-friend connections are at the heart of Hephzibah's network of support.

"Once you visit Hephzibah, you realize what a special place it is and how it really can change these kids' lives," Allen said.

Hephzibah Children's Association is Oak Park's oldest social service agency, founded in 1897. Our mission is to help children thrive and families flourish through innovative community-based programs. We help more than 1,000 children each year through programs including group homes, foster care, and award-winning day care.