

SHORTCUTS

GIVING BACK



Teddy Bears that Soothe in Troubled Times

BY RENEE BRINCKS

Nonprofit Teddy Bears with Heart was founded in Monterey County by Susie Hanson and provides comforting stuffed animals to hospitals and fire crews.

In times of illness, accident or natural disaster, small acts of kindness can make a big difference.

Susie Hanson knows this firsthand. Since founding Teddy Bears with Heart in 2008, she's generated more than 140,000 distinct compassionate acts, by delivering free stuffed animals to individuals in need. Recipients include children rescued by firefighters, elderly residents without local family members, youngsters served by international aid missions and local patients undergoing major medical treatments.

"We provide teddy bears and stuffed animals to individuals of all ages. It's something familiar and comforting that you can hug and hold, and it brings a kind of companionship during scary times," says Hanson.

The Monterey County nonprofit, under the Good Bears of the World umbrella, distributes plush toys through more than 175 agencies and seven regional hospitals in a six-county area. Hanson pays close attention to the needs of each agency: fire crews get small bears that tuck easily into a truck full of equipment, while hospitals receive larger stuffed animals free of choking hazards.

Engaged partners with an ongoing need keep Hanson and her dedicated volunteers busy throughout the year.

"Wherever comfort is needed, that's where we try to help," she says.

To volunteer with or donate to Teddy Bears with Heart, please visit www.teddybearswithheart.org.