

# Backpack project wins national award

## Efforts of Poland Spring Academy are honored

BY BONNIE WASHUK  
*Staff Writer*

**POLAND** — An annual act of charity in which backpacks with personal items are given to foster children has won a “Make A Difference Day” award.

USA Weekend announced that Poland Spring Academy won the award and will be cited in the newspaper’s April 15 edition in a story about people who make a difference.

“This is awesome,” said school administrator Tina Levasseur, reacting to winning the award. Levasseur coordinates the annual “backpack project” at the K-12 school every October on Make A Difference Day.

The backpack project was started in 2001 by Tina Brisbois, who died of pancreatic cancer about four years ago. “She got it all going,” Levasseur said. “She was a foster parent. She had tons of energy and loved kids.”

Brisbois understood some of what they went through. When children are taken into state protective custody, many are pulled out of their homes in a hurry.

Often they arrive at the foster home with few or no belongings.

The backpacks are stuffed with personal items such as toothbrushes and toothpaste, shampoo and other necessities. Some are packed for little girls and boys, others for teenage girls and boys. Most also include a frame for pictures and a toy or stuffed animal, Levasseur said.

Students and staff at Poland Spring Academy collect dona-



SUN JOURNAL FILE PHOTO

Angelica Getchell, left, a student at Poland Spring Academy, asks a question while helping stuff backpacks full of goodies for Maine foster children in October. The backpacks were delivered as part of USA Weekend Magazine’s national Make A Difference Day. Helping Angelica are, from left, Poland Spring Academy administrator Tina Levasseur, Amanda Brasier and Patricia Hoover.

tions during the year, then give out between 25 and 50 backpacks, Levasseur said. This year they gave out 50.

The backpacks are picked up by the Maine Department of Human Services, which gives them to children after they are removed from their homes. The goal is to let the children know

that somebody cares about them, Levasseur said.

The project was continued in Brisbois’ memory after she died. If Brisbois were alive, “she’d love” that the project is receiving recognition. “This is a great way to remember Tina,” Levasseur said.

[bwashuk@sunjournal.com](mailto:bwashuk@sunjournal.com)