



HUY RICHARD MACH / POST-DISPATCH

**Volunteers (from left) Ashley Pfitzinger, Lauren Herbig and Calliecha Taylor, all fifth-graders at Harry S Truman Elementary in the Lindbergh School District, load donated items into a storage trailer Monday. The items will be sold at a garage sale to benefit Sarah Jane Smith, 3, of south St. Louis County.**

## Sarah Jane

*After seizures, tot gets help from many*

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increasing oxygen levels in the areas of damage. The therapy is not approved by the FDA for brain damage in children and not covered by insurance. It has cost the family about \$10,000 and ultimately could cost \$60,000.

The Smiths said their insurance won't pay for the long-term care Sarah will need at home, including nursing care, physical therapy and occupational therapy. Sandra and Sarah Jane plan to return to Crestwood this week.

Slowly, in tiny increments, Sarah

Jane is making progress. She can see a little now and track some movement in a room. She can smile. She is making sounds. She can push buttons on a toy to make it play music. She can hold up her head for several seconds and has begun to move her legs.

"She's in there," said her father.

Three of the fifth-graders in McArthur's class were present when Sarah Jane said her first word after the seizure. The students were asking the Smiths what they could give Sarah Jane for Christmas. The Smiths told them that the sound of their voices was enough, because Sarah Jane loves to be with other children. But the three — Leah Efken, Curt Williams and Chrissy Hazelwood — insisted, so Sarah Jane's parents said she would enjoy anything connected with Elmo, from Sesame Street.

Sarah then chimed in and clearly said: "Melmo," the name she had called Elmo before the five-hour seizure. Sarah Jane hasn't said the name since; Sandra Smith said sporadic progress is common in brain damage recovery.

Candace Bingham of Kirkwood is one of the many people raising funds for the Smiths. Her daughter, Alyssa, was one of Sarah Jane's friends in day care. Bingham finds it hard to explain why Sarah Jane's cause so touches people, but she said part of it is that Sarah Jane is so appealing.

"I just fell in love with her eyes," Bingham said. "She is just a beautiful little girl."

Bingham helped the Vietnam Veterans of America, Bevo Chapter 611, organize a barbecue in October for Sarah Jane's benefit. At the barbecue, one of the veterans, Ken-

neth Unger, pinned his purple heart on Sarah Jane's pillow. He said the little girl needed it more than he did.

Bingham also helped organize an evening of dining, dancing and a silent auction at Orlando Gardens Banquet Center in November. The band Sh'Boom donated its time. None of the people who organized the evening knew the Smiths. Some 325 people attended the benefit, and it raised more than \$16,000.

Sandra and David Smith say they have been overwhelmed and strengthened by the outpouring.

"We feel very, very thankful and very appreciative," Sandra Smith said. "It's very amazing that so many people have come forward to help and made a horrible situation more bearable."

Reporter Theresa Tighe  
E-mail: ttighe@post-dispatch.com  
Phone: 314-340-8129