

Feeding the hungry drive led by 11-year-old

By **BRENDA BARBOSA**
STAFF WRITER

PORT CHARLOTTE — Most 11-year-olds don't dream of changing the world. But then again, most 11-year-olds aren't like Braeden Mannering.

Sure, the Delaware middle school student likes to swim and hike and play video games like most kids his age. But when it comes to making an impact in the world, Braeden defies his tender years.

At the age of 9, after winning the 2013 Healthy Lunchtime Challenge and being honored by First Lady Michelle Obama at a White House reception,



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Braeden Mannering shared his inspiring story of public service with students at St. Charles Borromeo Catholic School in Port Charlotte Friday. The 11-year-old Delaware boy began Brae's Brown Bags as a way to feed the homeless after winning a

HUNGRY

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Braeden launched Brae's Brown Bags, a public charity that delivers nourishment and inspiration to the hungry. Since launching in 2013, Brae's Brown Bags (3B for short) has delivered more than 4,100 brown bags filled with clean water, healthy snacks and a personal note from Braeden to homeless people across the country.

On Friday, Braeden and his mother Christy, spoke to students at the St. Charles Borromeo

Catholic School in Port Charlotte and encouraged them to give back to their community. He wanted all children to know; just because they're kids doesn't mean they can't make a difference.

"We already have a lot of power," he told an audience of more than 100 elementary school students and teachers. "Everything I can do, you can do, too."

Braeden recounted his 2013 visit to the White House where the First Lady, who has made healthy school meals a national initiative, urged youth to pay it forward.

Later, on his way home, Braeden encountered a homeless person in the subway station begging for food. He went home, packed some brown bag lunches and started handing them out. Hence, Brae's Brown Bags was born. Braeden distributes about 1,200 brown bags each year.

The bags are filled with a bottle of water, three healthy snacks (maybe a piece of fruit, a granola bar, and some crackers), a note from Braeden offering words of encouragement and a list of area agencies that assist the homeless. Sometimes, Braeden



SUN PHOTO BY BRENDA BARBOSA

St. Charles Borromeo Catholic School student Obinna Edeoga is all smiles during a school assembly Friday afternoon.

packs a toothbrush, deodorant or a book into the bags.

"If you have a passion and you want to make an impact, you can and you should," he told students. "Think about who you

can help and how."

It was exactly the message that St. Charles Principal Tonya Peters wants to impart to her students.

"We're a Catholic school, we're about

service and giving, and I really feel that the students need to know that at their age they can give, and they can make a difference," Peters said. "Kids have a tendency to think that it's only adults that can make a difference, but kids can make a difference too."

To show its support, the school donated \$650 to the 3B foundation. Each brown bag costs about \$1.25 to make, and most of the funds are raised through grants or donations, Christy Mannering said.

In closing, Braeden urged students to get involved and give back to their community.

"You can do anything. You're already doing it, so dream big and be changemakers."

Email: bbarbosa@sun-herald.com