

**Angels wanted for light pack  
work in Montclair**



Backpacks wait in the car to go to their drop-up point.  
Courtesy Kimya Nilsen.

*Advice from Nilsen:*

- Choose a packing list here: <https://www.voa-gny.org/what-goes-in-a-backpack>
- Monetary contributions can be made to the Montclair Team Crowdwise site [www.crowdrise.com/montclair-community-operation-backpack](http://www.crowdrise.com/montclair-community-operation-backpack)

For more information, go to [facebook.com/MontclairOperationBackpack](https://www.facebook.com/MontclairOperationBackpack), or email [montclairobp@gmail.com](mailto:montclairobp@gmail.com).

By ANTOINETTE MARTIN  
For Montclair Local

“It just seems like the easiest thing in the world to me,” says Kimya Nilsen about becoming a backpack angel, and really, who could disagree with an angel?

Nilsen read an article two years ago about a national campaign that asks back-to-school shoppers to pick up an extra backpack or two full of supplies for kids living in homeless and domestic violence shelters. And it clicked; she was in.

Her own daughter, Maia, then a rising first-grader at Nishuane, would need a new backpack. When they went shopping together, Maia could pick out a backpack for herself and for someone less fortunate. The donations go to children in 12 different Volunteers of America shelters in northern New Jersey.

“I’m super-partial to kids who are the most vulnerable,” said Nilsen, who, with her husband Morten Nilsen, adopted Maia as a baby through the state Department of Child Protection and Permanency.

That first year she joined Operation Backpack, run by the Volunteers of America chapter of Greater New York, Nilsen collected 30 filled backpacks from friends and neighbors in Montclair during the last 10 days of the drive. “I met many of

those people by just posting on Facebook,” she said.



An array of colorful backpacks wait to meet their new owners. Courtesy Kimya Nilsen.

Last year, Nilsen – and Montclair – upped their game. She enlisted the YMCA on Park Street and the Geyer Family Branch at 159 Glenridge Ave. to serve as collection points. “During the four weeks of the drive, our community donated 70 backpacks and over \$2,000,” she said.

This year, the YMCA branches will serve as collection points again during the drive, which began July 10 and continues through Friday, Aug. 4. Nilsen said the last two weeks are usually when the filled backpacks really start rolling in as people focus on their back-to-school buying.

If the Y isn’t convenient, Nilsen said, “I’m always happy to pick up from someone upon request.”

*An earlier version of this article included an incorrect URL for the VOA site.*