



Annual Christmas Program is a Success Some Stories...

By Betsy Sherwood, President / Focus on the Children

Perhaps the first story we can share about this year's Christmas Program is that of the boy who wanted a train.

We received a request early this fall from a mom stating that her son wanted only one thing - the train on display at Wegmans in Geneseo.

Knowing those items may go quickly our volunteers set out to find the train, purchased it and it was the first item ready to go for 2011.

The program began to pick up momentum and the train was soon gobbled up by the hundreds of other presents gathered by staff and volunteers.

FOTC distributes the gifts in a couple different ways - families come to pick up presents collected just for their children and they are also allowed to browse and select extra gifts and stocking stuffers. The program has become a very casual, non-frenzied event. Many times there are only a handful of parents wandering around the room and choosing from the many extra items donated by generous contributors.

The mom who's son asked for the train - came and collected her gifts and left without notice. An hour later she returned. Eyes filled with tears and her hands in motion as she thanked each of us. She could not believe we had granted her son's wish! An older boy (14 years), he was well aware that his mom and dad did not have the ability to afford such a gift. She stood and thanked us repeatedly for 15 minutes. Needless to say, we were speechless and our own tears started to pour.

FOTC also delivers gifts to families. The U-Haul is rented and

loaded and we set out through Livingston County.

Ellen is being raised by her grandmother who is only known as "Mom." Ellen is a bright but shy girl. She participates in sports and clubs in school and does well in her classes. Ellen and Mom have been through a lot but Mom has always worked hard and been able to take care of the two of them - until now. Since moving up to Livingston County from the South East, Mom has been struggling to find a permanent job and debt has piled up. As she has told us many times, she has NEVER had to ask for help before! The is a proud and very "together" lady. With many of our families, the experience of asking and receiving help is very new to them and very difficult. Not only are they unfamiliar with how to get assistance, they are ashamed that they are now in the position to have to ask.

Mom was given help earlier in the year with a rent payment on their new apartment which is a tidy home for she and Ellen and their cat. She has been working hard to find employment as a home companion. We at FOTC know that she will find the right job and she will be back on her feet. FOTC has done more than provide her with Christmas gifts, we have provided her with some time. Precious time to find a job.

Mom and Ellen were sponsored by employees from a local business. Many of these employees know what it means to struggle with the cost of living and coming up short on cash-flow. These same good and generous people work all year to raise funds to buy Christmas gifts for families - sometimes families just like their own. On Christmas day, Mom will

be able to give Ellen a new pair of ice skates, new clothes (she hasn't had 'new' clothes in so long), and all the little extras added to their list by their Christmas angels. They will also be able to enjoy the beautiful Christmas tree provided by FOTC.

The last story is the story of a family helping family. Tim and Liz are a young couple expecting their third child. All was good. They both had jobs that afforded them just enough to support their family - until - Liz's younger sister came to live with them - and then Liz's younger brother also came to live with them - and eventually Liz's mother. Now this is a family that will be just fine in another couple of months. Liz's mom is now employed and together they are beginning to catch up on the expenses.

The sponsor for this family provided beds for the brother and sister, a couch for their little family room, a bedside lamp for Nana and gifts for the younger children.

In addition to these stories we also have stories of success. More than ever before, FOTC has had contributions come in from families we have served in the past. More than ever before we have heard the words, "No thanks, we're doing OK."

We hope you will find time during this busy season to take a look around and notice your Christmas blessings. If you participated in the Christmas Program this year - you were just that, a special Christmas blessing. Thank YOU and Merry Christmas to you and yours from the staff and volunteers of Focus on the Children.