



A RESPOND NOW CHRISTMAS STORY

The best way to understand the impact that Respond Now has on families during the Holiday season is through a story. It involves a family with 3 children and a Mom and Dad, who visited Respond Now's Christmas Store last year. Dad works nights cleaning office buildings from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. Mom cannot work outside the home, as all of her time, and much of Dad's time, is spent taking care of their children. Their family includes the oldest child, a healthy boy in 8th grade, the middle child, a beautiful, 10 year old girl who walks slowly with leg braces, and

the youngest, a tiny 2 year old daughter, born prematurely, and still suffering from pretty serious medical



problems, not yet walking or feeding herself.

What struck me about this family, besides my sympathy for the time they spend taking their two daughters to various therapies and medical treatments, was their dignity and gratitude. They were not looking for any particularly expensive toys for their children, but were very happy to have something to put under the tree for Christmas morning. They seemed especially pleased with the coats they selected for the kids, something they could not afford themselves. And, as they told me a bit about their family, it wasn't to complain about their situation. They

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Those who helped make our Back to School Festival a success, including:

- Tinley Park Boy Scout Troop 380 & Andy Durbin
- Angels R Watching
- Cardinal J Bernardin School
- A Ranch 394
- Skyline Disposal
- Operation Blessing
- Mr. Phipps and Hair Trends
- DJ Fioretti
- Sr. Madonna and St. James Hospital
- Mr. & Mrs. Krueger, Mr. & Mrs. Morris, and Mr. & Mrs. Yozzi

Grace United Protestant Church in Park Forest for their continued support

The McCormick Foundation for \$20,000 from the Chicago Tribune Charities-Holiday Campaign, a fund of the McCormick Foundation.

The Emmaus Community for their heartfelt grant.

Flossmoor Community Church for their donation

Winpak Corp for recommending Respond Now to receive a gift on their behalf through their business partners at Lee & Associates

The Abby Foundation for Women for their support

HUNGER IS CLOSE TO HOME

There have been a number of studies released lately, describing the state of poverty and the growing income gap in the United States. Each and every press release decries the situation in which more and more people find themselves essentially unable to make ends meet. One study released by the Greater Chicago Food Depository (available on their website at www.chicagos-foodbank.org) showed the increased level of food insecurity by city (food insecurity indicates that you do not know where your next meal is coming from). The percentage of population that is

food insecure for some cities in our service area is:

- Calumet City—22.5%
- Chicago Heights—25.9%
- Country Club Hills—22%
- Ford Heights—55.5%
- Sauk Village—23.9%

Last year, Respond Now started a program that connects more of our clients to the SNAP (food stamps) Program, known in Illinois as LINK. Volunteers work with clients to complete the SNAP application. We submit the application for processing and follow up with the client to ensure they

received the benefits they were eligible for. Over the past year, we have assisted 67 families access close to \$17,000 in benefits. These benefits directly address the crisis of food insecurity in these families face. The SNAP Outreach Program is a great complement to our Food Pantry. Times will continue to be hard for people in the coming period. In the meantime, Respond Now will continue to implement programs to address the crisis' people are facing. With our help, families will hope in getting back on track, as they weather the storm of insecurity that far to many people face today.

CHILDREN READING ROOM A GREAT ADDITION

Did you know that studies show that by the age of 4, children from professional families are exposed to 45 million words, while children living in poverty are exposed to only 13 million? Also, more than two-thirds of poverty-stricken homes do not own a single book developmentally appropriate for a child under the age of five. Unfortunately, by the time poor children begin school, they are an average of 12 to 14 months behind their peers from higher income brackets.*

Although breaking the cycle of poverty is complicated, at Respond Now, we believe that one important step is to improve a child's education. We do that by providing nutritious food and keeping a roof over their heads so that parents can concentrate on keeping

them well and in school. But we also have a new, exciting Program for children and beginning readers that takes place in our Children's Reading Room, donated by Zion Lutheran Church. There is now an area in our waiting room that contains a play area and age-appropriate books for young children. When volunteers are available, they read to the children waiting with their parents (often for long periods of time). Every child may select a book to take home that day. We are so excited about the new Reading Room and about sharing books with the many children who cross our doors. We would like to extend a big thank you to Andrew Issacson, Jennifer LeRose, Sharon Cooper, and the other volunteers who have

worked to get the Reading Room up and running. If you would like to help out by donating books or being a volunteer reader, please call Anita Alvarado at 755-4357. You will be giving a gift that may last a lifetime.

*Jennifer Rokosa. "Fighting the War on Poverty with Early Childhood Education." Center for American Progress. October 20, 2011. americanprogress.org



(see XMAS story pg 2)(XMAS Story continued)

were quite insistent that they felt blessed in many ways. They just wanted to explain why they needed a little help from us - because Mom could not work outside the home and the children had many expenses that were above the norm. Working with them at the Christmas Store was a highlight for me, as I truly felt that they were giving me the best gift I received last year.

(as told by Sharon Grill)

Over 1000 children benefit from our Christmas Store each year and that is why it is one of our favorite Programs. These are not children asking for the latest smart phone or video game. These are kids who would like a job for mom or dad, but will be happy with a toy or two under the Christmas Tree. Here is how the Store works: families with children under the age of 16 who live in our designated area sign up to participate in the Store. On December 21st, our staff and numerous volunteers set-up the Store. On December 22nd or 23rd the qualified families visit the Store. Each family is

assigned a volunteer shopper assistant. They can select new or gently used coats for their children, toys for each child in the family, have pictures taken with Santa, and enjoy homemade cookies, coffee or hot chocolate. Each family leaves with a food basket that contains a certificate for a Christmas ham or turkey and a selection of food. Our staff and volunteers are exhausted but joyful at the end of the months of preparation and 3 days of frenzied "shopping."

How Can You Help?

- * Donate new toys, or new and gently used coats.
- * Donate funds and we will purchase toys, clothes or food for the baskets on your behalf.
- * Host a toy party or sponsor a toy drive and ask your co-workers, friends, neighbors and family members to donate a toy as well.
- * Volunteer to set-up, work at the Store, or help with breaking down the Store on December 23rd.

Call Liz Wisnasky at 708-614-6475 or Anita Alvarado at 708-755-4357 to sign up as a volunteer.

We Have A Secret!!

If you received our October letter, you know the exciting news about the \$10,000 Matching Grant from an Anonymous Donor. While we cannot reveal the donor, we can tell you about the amazing offer for Respond Now and our clients. Here it is: Our donor will match, dollar for dollar, every incremental dollar that is donated this year **(an incremental donation is every dollar donated over your past year's donation)**. Also, the donor will match every dollar donated by a new donor up to \$2,500 **(a new donor is someone not donating in the past 2 years)**. If you would like to donate, you may use the envelope provided in this newsletter or go to our website. If you have any questions, please call Amy Weber, Associate Director at (708) 755-4357 or email her at 6respondnow@sbcglobal.net. Thank you for your past generosity. You help us keep our clients stable and make Respond Now a place of hope.



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PLEASE HELP RESPOND NOW

DOLLAR CONTRIBUTIONS help us provide money for rent & utility assistance, medication, food and our major program expenses.

WINTER COATS all sizes (adults, teens, and kids) new or gently used.

SUPPLIES FOR RESPOND NOW—printer paper, paper towels, toilet paper, and cleaning supplies.

TOILETRIES—especially toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo, and bar soap.

NON-PERISHABLE FOOD ITEMS—especially peanut butter and tuna fish.

IN MEMORY OF PATRICK BURKE

Marge & Jack Hayes	Anonymous
Mary Monahan	Dennis & Magda Condon
Thomas McGinn	Janet Nolan
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HONORARIUMS & MEMORIALS

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