

Providing Comfort and Joy

By Christina Eckert, a staff member at Community Giving Tree

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As 2011 draws to a close, we at Community Giving Tree can't help but feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude to everyone who helped us help thousands of children this year.

We are especially grateful to the women who volunteer regularly at the Giving Center. In 2011 these dedicated volunteers gave over 1500 hours of their time to sort, clean and assemble donated items, creating bundles of clothing that they would be proud to have their own children wear. These women helped Community Giving Tree supply over 3000 children with clothing bundles last year, not to mention crib bedding, bathing supplies, toiletries and school supplies for hundreds more children.



Dedicated volunteers Marla Huntley, Katherine Bagshaw and Heidi Nelson lay out boys' clothes for the Holiday Giveaway.

We also owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the hundreds of people who donated their children's clothes, cribs, high chairs and more to Community Giving Tree this year. Thank you to the moms who lovingly washed their children's clothing one more time, then brought them to the Giving Center so that they could warm another child. If you wiped away a tear as you dropped off your beloved items, we hope it comforts you to know that another mother

cried tears of joy when she received warm clothes for her child.

None of this would be possible without the generous people who contributed financially to Community Giving Tree. Their gifts opened the Giving Center's doors so that we could receive and process clothes and baby equipment, and get them into the hands of people who need them. These contributions allow us to offer a variety of programs, from the just-completed Holiday Gift Giveaway, through Mother's Day Gifts, Back to School Collection, Diaper Drives, Bundles of Kindness and more. These programs not only benefit children in need; they provide concrete local service opportunities to the tri-town community, and get children involved in local philanthropy at an early age.

We are grateful to all of our special events volunteers who participated in these programs. In 2011, 25 different groups of people ranging from kindergartners to church members came to the Giving Center to volunteer their time as a way of giving back. Dozens of volunteers helped set up the Toy Fair, or stuffed backpacks, or filled bags of toiletries for Mother's Day. Forty local teens joined the VolunTeen program over the summer to sort and distribute donated items. Sixteen children and several adults hosted "Care and Share" parties, asking guests to donate new items to Community Giving Tree in lieu of gifts. These Care and Share parties, ranging from diapers to school supplies to new toys for the Holiday Giveaway, provided the bulk of the new items that Community Giving Tree gave away in 2011.

These gifts brought comfort to children in need all over Essex County. A family whose apartment burned to ground received the comfort of a bag of toiletries and diapers for their baby. Two girls whose father lost his job received the comfort of coats, hats and mitten

to keep them warm this winter. A little boy pulled from an abusive home received the comfort of a stuffed animal and a fleece blanket to wrap himself in. And hundreds of people in the TriTown Community experienced the joy of giving and the knowledge that your gift is warming a child's heart right now.

If you'd like to ring in the New Year with the joy of giving, consider hosting a Care and Share party of your own. Ask your guests to bring a pack of diapers or a new pair of mittens instead of a hostess gift. Children can ask their friends to bring school supplies or toiletries in lieu of gifts to their birthday parties; or, if they don't want to give up receiving presents, they can choose one of their birthday gifts and offer it to a child in need as part of the Birthday Buddies program. Turning 40 or 50? What says "I'm still young" more than diapers? Have a big bash and ask your friends to bring a case of diapers instead of a gift; dozens of babies will thank you for it. For more ideas, check out www.CommunityGivingTree.org, or contact info@communitygivingtree.org.

Thank You! For all that this community has done -- and will do -- for your neighbors in need, we are grateful. All of us at Community Giving Tree wish all of you the warmest and happiest of holidays.