



OKDHS And Donors Reach Out To Oklahomans

Editor's Note: The counties listed in the story below are not comprehensive of all 77 counties that reach out to those in need during the holidays, but are representative of OKDHS' six area locations across the state.

There's nothing unusual about the fact that OKDHS employees constantly reach out to others during the holidays. But the recent outpouring of compassion and generosity demonstrated by thousands reflects more than just public servants doing their jobs – it mirrors the core values and mission of the Agency.

The stories below are just some of the many ways OKDHS employees and various corporate donors touched the lives of others during the holidays.



(L-R) OKDHS Director Howard H. Hendrick and Dianne McDaniel, supervisor, Deborah Rothe Group Home, enjoyed festivities during the home's Old Fashioned Christmas Celebration on Dec. 18, 2003.

Area III Highlights

Deborah Rothe Group Home Celebrates 'Old Fashioned Christmas'

Holiday festivities were in full swing on Dec. 18 at the Deborah Rothe Group Home, where residents, OKDHS employees and guests celebrated their "Old Fashioned Christmas Open House."

The Deborah Rothe Group Home is named in honor of Deborah Ann Rothe, who was a career social worker and OKDHS administrator for more than three decades. She was also an outspoken advocate for Oklahoma's children. The home accepts

OKDHS custody teen girls who are adjudicated deprived. The program serves to meet each resident's educational, physical and emotional needs. The goal is to give young ladies the life skills they need to integrate into the community and live independently once they are no longer in OKDHS custody.

More than 125 people attended the celebration, including OKDHS Director Howard H. Hendrick. There was plenty of food, fun and even a

few Christmas carols. Dianne McDaniel, the group home supervisor, said that during the open house, local businesses and individuals left gifts and money for the residents. Donors included the Chesapeake Energy Corporation, Eaton Corporation, Jack and Nancy Coleman, Allen Webb, Terri Watkins, The Angel Tree, Local Federal Bank and the Deborah Rothe family.

Ann Robl, quality manager with

ROTHE continued on page 2

Area III Highlights



Holiday Bazaar Cheers Senior Citizens, Family

Cecilia Tannehill, administrative programs officer I, Office of Planning, Policy and Research, prepares to help a customer take a spin at a the wheel of fortune during the Holiday Bazaar on Dec. 10, 2003, in the Sequoyah Building in Oklahoma City. The game was just one of dozens of ways the Holiday Bazaar Committee used to raise money. The committee raised more than \$1,627, which was used to buy gifts for 44 nursing home residents of Elmwood Manor Nursing Home in Wewoka and gifts for a widowed mother of two in Seminole. Employees from Office of Planning, Policy and Research, the Executive Office, the Office of Communications, the Office for Civil Rights, the Human Services Centers, the Office of Administration, the Office of Information and Referral and the Office of Client Advocacy participated in the fund-raiser. – KGP

OSSD Contributes To Holiday Cheer

The Office Support Services Division Employee Recognition Committee recently helped add holiday cheer to the lives of 30 independent living teens and a family of four. The division supplied toiletries, gloves, hats, clothes, food and children's items, as well as provided more than \$600 in Wal-Mart gift certificates.

"The unit has responded just fantastically," said Millicent Combs, OSSD ERC president. "We had everything from candy canes to Boston baked beans to canned hams."

The teens, ages 17-19, are part of the Supporting Kids in Independent Living (SKIL) program of Youth Services of Oklahoma County. All the teens live away from their parents and are committed to finishing high school. One teen has a toddler and another has a baby due in the new year.

"We know we've done something to help the teens along the way," Combs said. "Most of them are A and

B students, and hopefully we have encouraged them to stay in school and continue to do what they need to do to become excellent citizens."

This marked the fifth year OSSD adopted the SKIL teens. The family included a mother, two teens and a four year old. The sections that make up OSSD held fund-raisers and provided donations. On Halloween, Print Shop and Publications staff trick-or-treated for canned goods.

Meanwhile, those sections, along with Records Center staff, provided toiletries for the teens. The Supply Warehouse and Architecture and Engineering provided food and canned hams. Contracts and Purchasing supplied hats and gloves and items for the expectant mom. Debbie O'Bleness, administrative programs officer, Departmental Services Unit, crocheted a blanket for the baby. Commodity Distribution also donated clothes, shoes, toys and grooming supplies for the toddler. – SMB

Rothe continued from page 1

Eaton, said Eaton Corporation has provided gifts to the group home's residents for the past three years.

"Eaton really is committed to helping the local communities," Robl said. "We were made aware of the Deborah Rothe House, and we think it is a wonderful endeavor to help girls and get them on their way. We enjoy it as much as they do."

The largest gift came a day later from O'Reilly Automotive, which contributed a \$4,000 shopping spree – \$500 for each girl. Wal-Mart also allowed the girls to shop tax-free.

"Five hundred dollars for a youth at 16 is like \$1 million to you if I were to give it to you right now," McDaniel said. "You would be blown

away. They were speechless.

"It was more than I hoped for. Everything that every child would dream about – that there is a Santa Claus, there is a good fairy and that there are people who love them and want them to have the very best."

An additional gift came in the form of the recital of the poem, "Touch of the Master's Hand," written by Myrna Brooks Welch and performed by Director Hendrick.

"Like that poem that the director recited, in the right hand, even a child who has been battered and abused can turn out to be a priceless gem," McDaniel said. "The generosity and outpouring of love made this a Christmas to remember." – DD

Area III Highlights

Hartford Adopts Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

For the second year in a row, the Hartford Financial Services Group, Inc.'s employees adopted "Grandparents Raising Grandchildren" during the holidays. The insurance company assisted 50 families, including 98 children, by providing a traditional meal during Thanksgiving and by delivering food and gifts during Christmas.

Earlier, Hartford also donated school supplies to grandfamilies serving nearly 100 children. Aging Services Division Community Relations Director Judy Leitner said that historically, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren was identified by OKDHS during the late 1990s as a group with many unmet needs. ASD began working with grandfamilies

and has provided informational materials and established an annual grandparent conference that is held each September. Support groups were later established throughout the state through a grant provided by the Brookdale Foundation in New York.

"ASD was also involved in creating and funding the Oklahoma Respite Resource Network," Leitner said. "Now, through the federal funding available through the Older Americans Act, we have more than \$1 million available for the National Family Caregiver Support Program. It includes a provision that at least 10 percent of the dollars be dedicated to grandparents raising grandchildren."

Darlene Sapp, programs field

representative, Community Relations Unit, ASD, said approximately 19 of the recipient families in the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren organization receive funding through the Oklahoma Respite Resource Network. She said she is grateful for the Hartford's generosity to this important population of Oklahomans.

"The Hartford is an outstanding company that has done much for grandfamilies in central Oklahoma," Sapp said. "We, and the state of Oklahoma, are grateful to our good corporate citizens for their dedication to these families with whom they have established a relationship. Their efforts extend beyond the holidays and mean so much." — KGP

Forget Santa, TAFB Delivers With Christmas Toy Drive

Tinker Air Force Base soared to the rescue again this holiday by donating toys for 540 of the more than 2,000 children under the jurisdiction of OKDHS in Oklahoma County.

The Dec. 19, 2003, issue of "The Tinker Take Off" stated in a story titled "Foster Santas" that during the past three years, Tinker has grown from sponsoring 120 children to 540 — making the air force base the largest contributor to the OKDHS toy drive. Tinker began supporting the toy drive 21 years ago and an estimated \$35,000 worth of gifts were purchased this holiday season by civilian and military personnel.

The paper said that on Dec. 10, 2003, the 10th Flight Test Squadron unloaded a semi-truck full of toys. A family of adopted OKDHS children also visited and enjoyed toys, lunch and fun with the pilots. Generous thanks goes to Project Officer Maj. Michael Tamez with the 10th Flight Test Squadron for his continued leadership in assisting OKDHS.

"We do this for the children," Tamez said. "It is something we can do that we know will make a difference. If nothing else, at least on Christmas day that a child will have a gift.

"We may not be able to readily give them a new life or a better home or a safe, secure loving family, but if nothing else we can give them a smile on Christmas day and a little bit of hope that there are so many people out here who truly care about them."

Additional thanks to the dozens of other donors who made the Christmas Toy Drive a success, including gifts



Capt. Clay Robinson, 10th Flight Test Squadron, listens closely to three-year-old Brea detail each new toy in an early Christmas present she received at the squadron on Dec. 10, 2003. Approximately 540 children in the OKDHS custody had presents to unwrap Christmas morning because of donations from Tinker Air Force Base organizations. An estimated \$35,000 worth of gifts were purchased this holiday season by civilian and military personnel. (Photo courtesy of Tinker Air Force Base).

from Citizens Caring For Children (400 children), the Oklahoma City Fire Department (220), BancFirst (200) and many more. — KGP

Never A Lump Of Coal Delivered During Coal County's Holidays

After the Wrangler sewing plant closed down in 2003 in Coalgate, it was little surprise that the need for presents and other necessary items increased during the recent holiday season. But Coal County OKDHS employees were prepared and helped 200 families thanks to their partnership with the Salvation Army.

Sherry Loudermilk, administrative technician III, Coal County OKDHS, and her co-workers have worked for years with the Salvation Army headquartered in Ada to drum up support during the holiday season. The Salvation Army's Angel Tree project works with Coal County OKDHS to gather applications to identify families and their needed items. When families come into the Coal County OKDHS office, they are encouraged to fill out Angel Tree applications.

Children under 12 include their clothing and shoe size and a desired toy. The Salvation Army then takes the information and the child's first name and requests are hung on Christmas trees at area stores. Good-hearted Oklahomans then take the applications and buy the gifts for the children. Meanwhile, Loudermilk solicits area businesses to ring bells for the Salvation Army to raise additional money to buy food

for food baskets for families. Angel Tree items for children are delivered with the food baskets.

"We don't turn down anyone," Loudermilk said. "Local schools also hold food drives for the food baskets. This project is important because Coal is a very small county. Working with the Salvation Army is a tradition here."

She said Coal County is so small that no traffic lights exist in the entire county. They have just one bank and one football team.

"It is basically a retirement county, and there are not many jobs," Loudermilk said. "We work with county leaders and businesses, and food and gifts are distributed at the Coal County Fair Barn. If we didn't do it, there would be a lot of people who wouldn't have a Christmas."

In addition to the Angel Tree and food baskets, Oklahoma State University's Extension Club and the Coal County 4-H Club make Christmas stockings for area foster children.

"You love it," Loudermilk said. "Distribution day is the best day of the year when you see the families and children pick up their gifts. It is just wonderful and words simply can't describe it." – KGP

Foster Moms Hit The Streets For Christmas Fund

The selflessness of foster parents is pretty much a given because such parenting can be a pretty challenging job, so when two foster mothers in Hughes County began dreaming up new ways to raise money for the Foster Children's Christmas Fund, they quickly became the county's newest "angels."

Linda Hurst, Child Welfare specialist I, Hughes County OKDHS, said foster mothers Brenda O'Kelly and Joanne Sullivan, both of Holdenville, were determined that the county's approximately 60 foster children would have a happy holiday.

"These two ladies walked up and down community streets requesting donations from individuals and businesses," Hurst said.

She said local businesses and individuals were recruited to help, including school children, area bands, various stores and civic organizations. The two women also performed an appreciation concert for the citizens of Hughes County. Eventually, the foster mothers raised more than \$2,700 and each foster child received four gifts.

Sharon Ramsey, Child Welfare supervisor, Hughes County OKDHS, describes O'Kelly and Sullivan's efforts as "wonderful."

"Foster parents are often underappreciated by most and not always recognized," Ramsey said. "The work they put in toward being foster parents is considerable and in Hughes County we truly appreciate all that they do. They're our angels. They really and truly are." – KGP

Area V Highlights

Latimer County Shines Bright With PICK-A-STAR Program

Some stars shine brighter than others, and those viewing Area V's Latimer County OKDHS office may soon need to wear sunglasses.

Latimer County OKDHS has been helping people in the community for more than 21 years through its "PICK-A-STAR Program" – a fund-raising volunteer program designed to help those in need during the holi-

day season.

Latimer County Director Ronda Glenn said that while OKDHS started the project in 1982, PICK-A-STAR is now widely embraced and supported by the community. Today, it has a steering committee that works with the community to assist with fund-raising requests. Donations are gathered from OKDHS staff, the community, civic organizations, corporations and churches.

This year, PICK-A-STAR provided gifts for 184 children, 101 families and 11 nursing-home residents. They also created and delivered 86 food baskets during the holiday season.

"I'm proud of the hard work and PICK-A-STAR's continued efforts to give back to our community," Glenn said. – KGP



(L-R) Latimer County OKDHS' Kim Underwood, administrative technician III, and Ronda Glenn, county director, Latimer County OKDHS, check referrals for the Pick-A-Star Program.



Woodruff Family Medical Clinic was a major donor this year to Pick-A-Star. In the photo above, (L-R) clinic owners Dr. Robert and Karin Woodruff present their annual donation to Sue McCasland, president of the 2003 Pick-A-Star board of directors.



Wilburton's Latimer Nursing Home contributed this year to the Pick-A-Star program. (L-R) Administrator Robert Reager recently presented a check to Sue McCasland, Pick-A-Star board president, for the community holiday program. The gift from Latimer Nursing Home was donated on behalf of former patient Inez Hill.

Area I Highlights



Angels In Action' Warm The Holidays

Pictured above are just a few members of Kay County OKDHS' "Angels In Action" – a group first created by Kay County OKDHS social workers who desired to make a difference beyond the services provided by the Agency. During their recent "One Warm Coat" project, Kay County OKDHS' "Angels In Action," area businesses and volunteers collected more than 300 coats and distributed them to school-based social workers, school counselors, churches and others in need. Kay County OKDHS' Timilyn Crank said a local dry cleaners also cleaned, stored and packaged the coats for free. She said the One Warm Coat organization was very supportive in assisting volunteers with their organization of the coat drive and said valuable information is available at their Website located at www.onewarmcoat.org. "This organization assists groups such as ours in planning and implementing coat projects," Crank said. "Their guidebook gives groups the tools for putting articles in the newspaper, radio public service announcements and flyers, as well as organizational tips for your event. With their sponsor, Glad Products Co., the organization will send your group a banner, magnets to give out when someone donates a coat and a coupon for free trash bags for bagging up the collected coats. I encourage any group interested in starting a coat drive to go to their Web site." – KGP

Washington County Hosts Foster Care Christmas Party

Washington County OKDHS joined forces with the Washington County Foster Parent Association and cooked up a delicious meal for 350 foster children and party attendees during their recent Foster Care Christmas Party.

Washington County Director Arvella Donahue said the annual event is such fun she often brings her grandchildren to attend. She said community partners donate gifts for the party and Santa delivers them. She praised Washington County



Sarah Barker, a volunteer for the Retired Senior Volunteer Program in Coal County, is just one of the volunteers who helped prepare food for the Washington County OKDHS' Foster Care Christmas Party.

OKDHS Foster Care Specialist III Debra Patterson for her hard work in cooking for the party and for assisting the foster care association as needed.

“It is just so heart-warming because our partners in the community donate gifts and services for the children,” Donahue said. “We are very blessed to have our local foster care association because they are such an involved group. They all work well together to ensure that our children are happy, well-adjusted and have a good Christmas.” – KGP

Tulsa County's 'Christmas For Kids' Provides Gifts For 1,200

Tulsa County OKDHS Child Welfare employees aren't the type to watch children go without during the holiday season. They work with a tax-exempt volunteer organization known as the Children's Services Advisory Board (CSAB), and through its "Christmas For Kids" Program, they and various donors provided 1,200 children with gifts.

OKDHS Tulsa County Volunteer Coordinator Nancy Hill said that through CSAB, donations are received from individuals, corporations, schools, churches and foundations. The program serves children in foster homes, therapeutic foster care, group homes, inpatient facilities and some that have returned to their own homes, but that are still in OKDHS custody.

“Donors gave money, miscellaneous toys or took specific wish lists for specific children,” Hill said. “We estimate the collaborative effort with CSAB members, OKDHS employees and the Tulsa community netted more than \$10,000 that was used to purchase gift cards and fulfill specific wishes for children without a specific donor. We also provide for many chil-

dren who live in other counties, but are in the jurisdiction of Tulsa County.

“A small number of children not in OKDHS custody who did not have Christmas gifts were provided for by an OKDHS investigator that is currently helping the family.”

Hill said an added bonus came this year when KJRH-TV Channel 2 in Tulsa chose Christmas For Kids as the recipient for its “2 For The Holidays” toy drive.

“Channel 2 partnered with Albertson's stores to provide drop off spots and publicity for the toy drive,” she said. “Toy drive participants gave 5,232 toys. They also collected food for the Northeastern Oklahoma Food Bank.”

Hill said CSAB has some toys left over that will be used to fill its birthday closet and for other occasions this year.

“Twelve families also received gifts, food and needed household items,” she said. “The families were either kinship foster care or children returned to their own home to low-income situations. Tulsa County donors were very generous this year.” – KGP



(L-R) Tulsa County OKDHS' Gianna Cato and Tami Manz pose before the Lego-bucket Christmas tree they built prior to sorting toys to be given to children in need in Tulsa County.



Tulsa County OKDHS' Jennifer Tippett (seated) looks through toys while co-worker Gianna Cato (right) sorts toys and Mary Brooks fills a bag for children in need.

'Santa's Workshop' Provides Christmas Gifts For 604 Families

For more than two decades, Grady County OKDHS employees have been as busy as Santa's elves in their efforts to provide toys and other gifts for families in need. This year, their efforts resulted in gifts for 604 families in Area II.

Diana Charlson, administrative assistant II, Field Operations Division, Grady OKDHS, said Mary Gassaway, a retired Child Welfare supervisor, Grady County OKDHS, started gathering toys from her co-workers approximately 25 years ago in an effort to provide gifts for foster children.

"We needed toys for our foster children and she asked for donations," Charlson said. "Our employees started by bringing old toys that we had from home and repairing and revamping them when we took our breaks."

Charlson said Grady County OKDHS workers soon outgrew the conference room they used to repair the toys. They also developed a further desire to help the children and families not always served by OKDHS. Their ongoing efforts were eventually transformed over the years into a nonprofit volunteer organization now known as "Santa's Workshop."

Today, a Grady County OKDHS employee sits on the Santa's Workshop board of directors and assists the organization. Local corporations and commu-

nity leaders are solicited for funding so the organization can buy gifts. All gifts are bought locally and once they are gathered, they are transported to a donated building that is renamed Santa's Workshop. OKDHS clients and other needy families who meet specific criteria are invited to shop for free for toys and other household items.

"Our economy has been affected by the downturn in manufacturing in Grady County," Charlson said. "As OKDHS employees, we know that sometimes we can't help with everything a family might need, but we want to help as much as we can. We believe every child deserves a Christmas."

She asked that special recognition be given to Sherri Streber, social work aide, Child Welfare, Grady County OKDHS, for her outstanding contribution to ensuring that 175 foster children were provided with gifts during the holiday season.

"Every foster child writes a letter to Santa requesting what they need and Sherri gets community people and corporations to adopt a foster child and fulfill their requests," Charlson said. "She really beats the bushes and does an excellent job. We especially wish to recognize Hop & Sack in Rush Springs for raising \$2,400 and providing for 18 children." – KGP

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we know that sometimes
we can't help with
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as much as we can.
We believe every child
deserves a Christmas."*

– Diana Charlson
Administrative Assistant II



'Toy Day' Fills Comanche County Office

Comanche County OKDHS' Chasity Johnson recently sent Inside OKDHS this photo of their annual "Toy Day" held on Dec. 11, 2003. She said foster parents in Comanche County were able pick out a toy for their foster child. They also received a goody bag filled with coupons for each child. The remaining gifts were given to children who had recently been placed in a home or to needy families. "Comanche County's hard work and dedication to make the day a success paid off as the room filled with toys and decorations," Johnson said. "We are very appreciative of all the donations we received, but especially appreciative of the support that we received from our county office in helping with the fund-raiser." – KGP

Area III Highlights

Associated Wholesale Grocers Donate A Sweet Deal



(L-R) OKDHS Communications Director George Earl Johnson Jr. and OKDHS Volunteer Coordinator Karen Jacobs receive \$2,000 in grocery gift certificates to help needy families from Steve Arnold, president and chief executive officer for the Oklahoma Division of Associated Wholesale Grocers. They later donated 11 cases of candy to OKDHS for distribution to area group homes. – KGP

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