

CONNECT-ing local families to Christmas

As Christmas approached, Dinah Menvey was uncertain if there were going to be any gifts under the tree for her three grandchildren.

Dinah fell on ice the day her youngest grandson Ezeliah was born Jan. 15, 2018, suffering a concussion and idling her from work.

Dinah received temporary custody of her three grandchildren Janicolis, 8, of Se'ana, 6, and Ezekiel, providing care for them since her daughter entered treatment last May.

But their Christmas was made brighter when SPHS Connect teamed up with St. Sebastian Regional Catholic School in a mission to collect Christmas gifts for needy children in the Connect housing and emergency shelter programs.

St. Sebastian Regional Catholic School and SPHS Connect along with the Belle Vernon Area Ministerium Association, created a list containing more than 150 names of children in need at Christmas. The list included clients of all SPHS Connect housing programs and the Washington Family Center, and other programs suggested by the Belle Vernon Area Ministerium.

SPHS Connect provides a full range of services for the homeless, near-homeless and low-income individuals, children and families in Washington, Westmoreland and Greene Counties.

The list was published on the school's website and residents from throughout the three-county area donated items specific to each child.



Jenelle Sawicky, supervisor of the Washington Family Center, is pictured with gifts that she delivered to the center.

“We had quite a year, so this was amazing,” Dinah said. “I’ve never seen so much generosity; I was shocked.”

Dinah said the family received the gifts a few days before Christmas.

“They opened them Christmas eve,” Dinah said. “They had fun. It was such a blessing.”

“The kids were thrilled and excited,” she said.

Janicolis received science and art items, a portable DVD player, an outdoor fort and tunnel, toy soldiers and clothing.

Se’ana received a Barbie, a baby doll with crib and stroller, and clothing.

Ezekiel received trucks, toys that talk and teach, an alphabet train and shoes.

“They’re so happy,” Dinah said. “I don’t think I’ve seen them so happy. I didn’t realize how difficult it has been for them. The items from the bus made a big difference.”

Christina, another Connect participant said the gifts received by her children - Kallee, 11, Mason, 5 and Lettie, 2 - “made Christmas possible” for her family after she got sick and missed time from work.

“My biggest worry was, how I was going to make Christmas possible,” Christina said.

“My children were definitely thrilled,” Christina said. “It was a two-for-one - not only did they receive gifts for Christmas, but clothes for school too.”

The children opened their gifts Christmas morning.

Kallee received art supplies, make-up and hair products, a DVD and a bed spread and pillow.

Mason received toy trains and fire trucks, race cars, shoes and a bed spread and pillow.

Lettie received a baby doll and clothes, a crib and stroller, shoes and a bed spread and pillow.

Christina wrote thank you cards for those who donated to the cause.

“We wouldn’t have been able to have Christmas without them,” Christina said. “Without their help, I’m not sure Christmas would have happened. But this definitely made Christmas possible for us.

“Thank you to all who helped and for the support. It means a lot for us. We don’t take it for granted.”

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