

The Center for Great Expectations Center Stage

Volume Eighteen - Winter 2010



Please Help Santa

The children at the Center are waiting for Santa. They are hoping he will bring them a toy, some warm clothes and cozy pajamas. Santa and his elves need some help though, and we are hoping that you might be able to provide a few dollars to help. If you can, please put your gift into the envelope that is enclosed in this newsletter. Santa and his elves will do the rest. Wishing you the merriest of Christmases, and the most wonderful New Year.



JASMINE'S *little* KITCHEN

Jasmine has just turned 4 years old. She is waiting to experience her first real Christmas ever. She is so excited that she can't concentrate on anything else. Occasionally, she runs to the window to look out to see if Santa is in the air flying to bring good children the toy they dearly hope to receive. For two years, Jasmine has asked Santa to bring her a little kitchen. The fact that Santa hasn't been able to bring Jasmine a little kitchen hasn't diminished her hope and faith that he will bring it this year. She wants to cook her dolly dinner, and if you ask her, she will tell you all about it.

"I am going to cook for Zellie", she announces. Zellie is Jasmine's rag doll whom she adores. "She is going to have chicken and pizza and lots of jelly beans, and I am going to use all the pots and pans that will come with my kitchen." She turns to everyone in the room and says, "You are all invited to the party. We will jump up and dance after we cook. Will you come?"

Jasmine is going to get her little kitchen. And we, the staff, will be at her party. We know this is going to happen for her, because our donors have always helped us provide a Christmas for the children of the Center. For Jasmine, the kitchen represents her



hopes and dreams and is an expression of her faith in the future. Jasmine believes, though she has experienced bitter disappointment, that this will be the year. We are wondering how Jasmine will contain herself when she receives her kitchen. If there is such a thing of exploding from joy, we believe Jasmine would qualify. We are emotional at the very thought of the moment when she sees her little kitchen.

Jasmine's faith is remarkable because her past has been so dreadful. Abused and witness to drug use and alcoholism, Jasmine has somehow been able to hold on to her dream of a little kitchen. Jasmine's mother knows that this is her only chance to make life better for Jasmine. She is doing everything she can to graduate from the Center to begin her new life. When Jasmine and her mom finally have a place to live and are no

longer homeless, Jasmine will bring her little kitchen with her. We know that this Christmas at the Center holds the promise of some overwhelming moments, and we hope that you will have a secret smile on Christmas morning when you think of Jasmine and her little kitchen.

Tessa's Story

Tessa was a 23 year old woman who was pregnant at Christmastime. She had a 6 year old son who she hadn't seen in 3 years. She couldn't care for her son, Bret, because at 16 she was lost in a haze of alcohol. She was swept away from home and family for several years. She came to the Center to change her life, to provide a good life for her new baby, and to try to reestablish a relationship with her son Bret.

Part of the Center's 12-step program for drug and alcohol abuse is step 3 where each participant has to reach out to the person who they have hurt the most, and to tell that person that they are sorry for the pain they have caused. For Tessa, that person was 6 year old Bret. She tried to gather the courage to call her son. She knew that it was the most important thing that she could do for her recovery and for her son, but she was terrified. She came to Sister Sheila for help. "I never saw anyone in such a state", Sister revealed, "she was overwhelmed by what she was about to do, because she was convinced her son had forgotten that she existed."

Sister took matters into her own hands. She called the house to speak to Bret's dad and asked him if he would help Tessa by putting Bret on the phone. He was happy to assist, and for the first time in years Tessa was about to hear her son's voice. Shaking uncontrollably, she took the phone. She said, "Bret, this is your

mommy. Do you remember who I am?" The sweet little voice at the end of the phone said "Yes, mommy, I remember you. I pray for

**"Bret, this is your mommy.
Do you remember who I am?"**

you every night, and I have your picture by my bed and kiss you every night." Tessa put the phone down and collapsed into a succession of sobs so deep and so filled with pain that Sister Sheila broke down with her and cried and cried.

Tessa's life changed forever that night. She continued her recovery and moved to a point where she was allowed to visit family. It was Christmas and for the first time ever, Tessa was going to visit with her son sober and as a new person. Sister helped her to pick out just the right presents for Bret. The visit, filled with joy and laughter, was the beginning of a reconciliation and new relationship between mother and son. Sister never forgot the event, because it was so profound. It was the perfect example of what the program at the Center can do for someone on the journey back from the black hole of addiction, and how changing the life of one mother changed not only her son's life but everyone along her journey.

Last year in our Christmas edition of Center Stage we printed the following article. So many people commented to us that they were deeply moved to read of the reality our residents face and the lives they live. They said that they took for granted the small events in life that are so important, but that our residents have never done or have ever experienced. Some people said they read the article to their children so that they would understand that other lives are not like theirs. Because of the feedback, we decided to run it again for those of you who missed it.

A Memory of Christmas Past

Last Christmas, the staff had the opportunity to take the residents out for a nice dinner, thanks to a special donation from a single donor. It was a simple meal at an inexpensive chain restaurant, but to our women it was a huge treat. While the most expensive dinner on the menu was inexpensive by common standards, it was thrilling to tell them they could order what they would like to have, instead of only a few items on the menu. Their faces lit up, and they immediately started to chatter about what they would have. Giddy at the thought, several suggested that they would order dessert for an appetizer, main meal and dessert! Of course that was only a fantasy as the staff made sure that they ordered a very healthy meal. It was during the meal that the staff happily suggested they all share their favorite holiday memory. There was dead silence. Nothing. No response. Stares and blank faces...Finally, as the silence became overwhelming, one girl spoke up to say, "We have no Christmas memories. Holidays were terrible times, and we have nothing nice to remember." Again, silence. This time the blank

looks and stares were on the faces of the staff. Trying to imagine what that was like, the staff could not find the right thoughts to process the information. So, they began to ask questions. "You mean you never went with your family to see the Christmas lights?" "You mean you never had Christmas dinner?" "You mean you never decorated a tree, sang songs, and hung your stocking?" One by one, the residents answered no – they had never done that. Right then and there Sister Sheila said, "Well, we are going to fix that right now! Come on girls, we are going out to make some memories!" It was Christmas Eve, and everyone became excited to see what would happen next. They all piled into the van and off they went. Sister took them to neighborhoods that she knew had spectacular holiday decorations and lights. They sang songs, and when they arrived at some especially beautiful displays, the residents jumped out of the van and stood in awe at how beautiful they were. This went on house after house until everyone was tired and cold. Sister Sheila next brought them to Christmas Mass at St. Matthias Church. The beautiful

songs, candles, and so many people moved them, and they asked question after question. Father Doug spoke of unity and being one under God, and each of Sister Sheila's residents felt he was speaking just to them. Their hearts were touched, and when the collection was taken, these young girls who had nothing, took the single dollar bill that they were allowed to have as emergency money, and put it into the collection. Sister Sheila was deeply touched and will never forget that magical night, especially when they all wanted to go up to the altar to receive Communion! After church, and back at the Center, they sat in the kitchen with hot chocolate, and while they sipped their chocolate and reflected on the night they had just experienced, one of the residents said, "Sister, I will never forget this night. This was the night when we started our first Christmas memories; and Sister, next year when someone asks me what my favorite Christmas memory is, I won't ever have to say 'I don't have one'."

Around the Center in 2010





The Center for Great Expectations
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Residential treatment for homeless, pregnant adolescents and their children;
and homeless, pregnant women with substance use disorders and their children.

Zane's Letter to Santa

A Christmas letter to Santa dictated by 4 year old Zane to one of our staff members

Dear Santa,

Hi, my name is Zane. I live with my mommy at the Center and I am good. I don't throw stuff at the kids and I don't put my gum under my chair anymore. My mom says I'm improved. I think that is really good, but I'm not sure. If you can remember (my mom says you are old) I am asking for a really cool toy. It is a space ship and toy people ride in it. My mom said it was a good choice because it is made by Fisher and Price, whoever they are. I'm hoping you can remember cause I really really want to see that cool toy under the tree. I am going into space when I am big. I hope I see you there.

Bye
Zane

MATCHING FUNDS MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE A MATCHING GIFT IS LIKE CHRISTMAS TWICE!

When you donate a gift to the Center, imagine the ability to match that gift and double the impact! That is what happens if you work for a company that has a matching gift program. The best part is that we will do it all for you. The staff at the Center fills out the form and then sends it to your company. Before long, we receive a gift that is the exact duplicate of your gift. If your company has a matching gift program, they have most likely made sure that you know about it, but if you are not sure, just ask your Human Relations Department. They will provide you with the form. Please include it when you send us your gift, and that is all you have to do.

Matching funds can add up. Last year, matching funds made it possible for us to provide food, medicine and shoes for two children for 8 months. Please check with your company to see if they match your gifts to organizations like ours. Thank you and our sincere appreciation to all our donors who make sure they send us matching gift forms when they donate...you make a difference!

Thank you for remembering the Center in your planned giving.

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