

NEWS

VOLUNTEER CENTER OF BERGEN COUNTY, INC.

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Volunteer Center Seeks Donors to Fill Gift Requests; Need is Dire

North Jersey: As the economy continues to falter, demand for myriad social services increases as more people lose jobs, homes and sources of income.

The holidays may be dismal for over 3,000 needy children and parents, lonely seniors and disabled adults in Bergen and Passaic Counties this year.

Donations of toys, clothing, gift certificates and cash are urgently needed to help bring holiday cheer to people with no families at all, or those who might otherwise be forgotten.

Through the Volunteer Center of Bergen County's **All Wrapped Up Holiday Giving Program**, low income families and single parent households, as well as elderly, homeless and physically or mentally disabled adults and teens are matched with people from the community who are willing to donate needed items like clothing, toys and gift cards at food stores.

Local non-profit agencies have submitted gift "wish lists" to the Volunteer Center, which in turn matches generous donors with these less fortunate families and individuals, thus "adopting" them for the holidays. At the present time the Volunteer Center has received many more requests for assistance than there are donors willing to help. So far only 216 donors have registered to provide basic necessities like warm sweaters or blankets, and simple toys, to over 3,300 children and adults.

Individual donors or members of community or employee groups may help a family through the **Adopt-a-Family** program. "We have received gift requests for 773

families, ranging in size from two to seven people, but over 550 families (approximately 1,749 individual family members) are still waiting to be ‘adopted’,” says Janet Sharma, executive director of the Volunteer Center.

“Through the **Heart-to-Heart** program, the agencies have also sent us gift requests for 800 individuals-- elderly, homeless and disabled persons, children and teens--and less than one quarter of these people have been matched. Imagine a child with no present to open during this time of year, or a lonely person not being remembered by anyone.” says Ms. Sharma

All requests for assistance are submitted to the Volunteer Center by non-profit organizations that have screened and prioritized the requests based on need. Donors will have no direct contact with individuals or families; all gifts will be delivered to and distributed by the non-profit organization.

Companies, religious and service groups, families and individual donors who wish to help should call (201) 489-9454, Ext. 118, or visit the Volunteer Center’s website at www.bergenvolunteers.org and click on Holiday Programs to download a registration form. All registrations must be submitted to the Volunteer Center by December 4, so that all gifts can be delivered and distributed by the holidays.

“The economy has taken a toll on all of us. But there are still many people less fortunate. Our message to our neighbors is to ‘give something’”, continues Ms Sharma. “Even if a monetary contribution is less than in previous years, we encourage people to come forward to send cash or gift cards, in any amount to ensure that those hit hard by the economy aren’t left out this holiday season.”

Gift cards from Shop Rite, Pathmark and Stop and Shop, and from Target, K-Mart and Sears are especially needed, as are donations of cash. Send to the Volunteer Center of Bergen County, 64 Passaic St, Hackensack, NJ 07601, by December 4th.

Founded by the Junior League in 1966, the Volunteer Center of Bergen County strengthens the community by connecting people with opportunities to serve, operating model volunteer programs, building capacity for effective volunteering and participating in strategic partnerships that meet community needs.

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