

Partners needed to collect toys

The agency is once again looking for partners in the community that are willing to collect toys and other gift items for the Adopt-A-Family gift room. The gift room is utilized by those families who are not publicly adopted; those adoptees are able to pick two to three new items per family member.

Previously, the agency worked with local department stores to host trees for collecting gifts but the number of partnerships dwindled over the years. "We have found it is difficult for local management of a lot of the bigger chains to get approval from corporate offices to do fundraisers for small, local non-profits," said Executive Director Nichi Seckinger. "So we are adapting by working with more local businesses, building on some relationships we already have that have proven to be successful, and expanding outside of retail-only businesses."

Collection suggestions

There are several ways for a business or organization to be involved in the gift collection program, including:

- ▶ Discount-based drives offering discounts for a toy donation
- ▶ Employee-based drives for smaller companies that might struggle with adopting entire families
- ▶ Customer-based drives allowing customers to purchase items that can be collected by agency staff

Agency staff will work with businesses to tailor-fit to their individual needs and goals. In addition to picking up donated items, other materials, such as trees, collection containers, and printed materials, can be supplied by the agency.

"Without community support, the gift room would have nothing to offer families who are not publicly adopted," Seckinger said. "So building these relationships and ensuring gift room inventory is essential to the program."

To become a toy collection location, please contact the office at 816.364.1131



Food vouchers replace baskets

A COVID-created remedy to avoid physical contact, food "vouchers" that were used at a local grocery store to directly pick up food items, proved so successful it was decided they would permanently replace the baskets of food formerly distributed to families directly through the agency.

The voucher process proved beneficial in many ways: 1) it ensures food is as fresh as possible; 2) adopters and recipients do not have to haul heavy boxes of food; and 3) recipients are now able to choose from a variety of options for some food items.

The vouchers also provide a much longer sale period; before, food bas-

kets orders had to be placed approximately two weeks before the holiday. Now, vouchers can be purchased until program conclusion on Christmas Eve. Families then have until Dec. 30th to fill the voucher, so food can be used for Christmas dinner, New Years, or be used to stock pantries into 2023.

For adopters wanting to provide food, vouchers can be purchased either in person or by phone, in two sizes -- small, \$60 and large, \$80. Vouchers can be delivered to the family by adopters; kept with gifts delivered to the agency; or filled by adopters before delivery.

For more details or to place an order, call 816.364.1131.

Collection partners help make change

A long-standing program asset, collection boxes allow individuals to donate a little at a time as they visit local businesses. They can be found in a variety of places, including grocery stores, banks, restaurants, convenience stores, auto repair shops, and specialty boutiques. Over the years, more than 200 locations have hosted boxes and contributed to the program's success.

Businesses are not asked to solicit customers for change; instead, we ask participants to leave boxes in a highly-visible area to encourage donations. It is a no-maintenance 'donation' for businesses, as the agency maintains the boxes and assumes all financial responsibilities. The agency is currently looking for new collection box locations for the 2022 holiday season. To host a box, please call 816.364.1131

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AFL-CIO Community Services
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Master Elf Traveling Trophy

The agency created the Master Elves traveling trophy in 2012 to honor those who embrace the program and to encourage friendly competition. The staff at Casey's General Store (22nd & Walnut) raised a record-setting \$2,500 for the program three separate years. Now, the trophy is awarded yearly to the business that raises the most funds. Currently, Brothers Market, on St. Joseph Ave, holds the title for their 2021 efforts, collecting \$370.

Top Collectors for 2021

These top 15 locations raised more than 60 percent of the total funds collected in 2021:

- 1st) Brother's Market, St. Joseph Ave;
- 2nd) Green Hills, King Hill Ave;
- 3rd) City Star, Frederick Ave;
- 4th) Brothers Market, Savannah, MO;
- tied for 5th) Equity Bank, Lake Ave; City Star, Edmond St;
- 6th) Jesse's Last Stop, I-29 & 71 Hwy;
- 7th) Interstate Batteries, N Belt Hwy;
- 8th) Commerce Bank, Frederick Ave;
- 9th) Casey's General Store, Wathena, KS;
- tied for 10th) UMB Bank, N Belt Hwy; Casey's General Store, N Woodbine;
- 11th) Imperial Gas, Sixth St;
- 12th) Zip Thru, SE US Hwy 169;
- 13th) US Smoke Shop, Lake Ave.

UPCOMING events

NOVEMBER

- Nov 1 — Adopt-A-Family applications available to adoptees
- Nov 16 — Adoption applications ready for review for adopters
- Nov 24 - 25 — Thanksgiving Holiday, offices closed

DECEMBER

- Dec 2 — Last day adoption applications accepted
- Dec 7 — Radio Telethon with Q-Country 92.7
- Dec 9 — Last day to deliver family gifts to AAF offices
- Dec 14 — Gift Room set-up V
- Dec 16 — Shopping Day for nursing home residents & disabled adults V
- Last day to deliver family gifts to AAF offices
- Dec 19 — Gift Room opens V
- Dec 20 - 21 — Deliver gifts to elderly & disabled adults V
- Nursing home staff pick up gifts from agency
- Dec 24, 12 pm — Conclusion of AAF program (tentative)
- Dec 25 - 30 — Christmas Holiday, offices closed
- Dec 31 — New Year's Eve Holiday, offices closed
- Jan 1 — New Year's Day Holiday, offices closed

V — volunteers needed If you would like to volunteer for any of these projects, please call 816.364.1131 and ask for Becky. Volunteers are needed daily from December 14 through noon on Christmas Eve (except Sundays).

FALL 2022

HelpMe Headlines

AFL-CIO COMMUNITY SERVICES

1203 N. 6th St., St. Joseph, MO 64501

www.helpmenow.org

Agency preps for 39th Adopt-A-Family season

Dear Friends,

This time last year, as Adopt-A-Family and the holiday season were growing closer, I was just getting my personal items arranged in my "new" desk. Having shared an office with my predecessor, Penny Adams, for more than a decade, it felt very strange moving into a space that had always belonged to her. Both hesitancy and hecticness had kept me from getting much done in the six weeks I had worn my new executive director title; I was reeling from both the thought of my first Adopt-A-Family without her leadership, and the regular insanity of preparing for a program that serves more than 2,600 people in less than 10 weeks each year. Sometimes new changes can be a little overwhelming, even when we are ready for them.

A lot of what we were prepping last year were still new pieces to the long-standing program. For all of the upheaval, unrest and heartache caused by COVID and all its fallout, our program managed to find some silver lining out of it all: a new food voucher system for our Christmas dinners that improved efficiencies and insured freshness for the recipients; a quicker application process that allows for verification without forcing applicants to spend hours going through an in-person interview process; and a simplified format for getting gifts to our residential care facilities. Overall, the 2021 season was very successful and cemented many temporary fixes into permanent upgrades. Sometimes new changes can end up being long-term improvements.

As the agency moves into its 39th Adopt-A-Family season, and I move into my second in the "big desk," I can't help but wonder what this year will bring. We have a several new staff members for the program and I wonder what new processes and improvements they will discover? What unique applicant needs will challenge our mettle and push us to discover solutions to unexpected problems? Which adoptee will show a grace that brings us to tears? Which adopter will show us the next unbelievable example of generosity that makes us love being a part of this program? Which volunteer will make us wish we could keep them for the entire year? Sometimes new changes can be exciting, even when it seems like old habit.

In the 12 years I've been here, every one has been unique. We've had many years that made us nervous messes to the end; but we've never had a year where an applicant was not served. Staff has always been home in time for family celebrations, but there have been last-minute deliveries to adoptees at midnight on Christmas Eve and early Christmas morning, too. The program has always succeeded, and it's because the most-essential part has not changed: Adopt-A-Family has always had the support of people like you. Sometimes it's what doesn't change that matters most of all.

Nichi Seckinger, Director



Be an Adopter

There are several ways to participate as an adopter through the agency's holiday program, including direct and anonymous adoption, donating items to the gift room, or purchasing gift cards for families.

More information, including an FAQ on common adoption topics and terms, and an adopter form, can be found in the center of this newsletter, beginning on Pg 3.

Feed Families

As holiday dinners and basic pantry staples are common needs for households during the Adopt-A-Family season, providing food purchasing options to adopters has been a program priority for more than 25 years.

For information on food vouchers, which are available for purchase through the agency, please see Pg 2.

Upcoming Events

The agency relies heavily on volunteers to ensure the success of the Adopt-A-Family program. There are many volunteer opportunities, from stocking the agency gift room to shopping for seniors and shut-ins, throughout the season for those who would like to participate.

More information on upcoming events can be found on Pg 6.

1 Adoption — Those who choose to adopt a family or individual will be able to experience firsthand the excitement of shopping for each family member and meeting the adults when delivering their gifts. (Or the agency can delivery if adopters choose to be anonymous and have Santa take the credit.) Gift cards can also be purchased from the agency and given to the families to purchase family gifts, if preferred.

2 Monetary — If holiday time is at a premium or funds are limited, another option is making a monetary donation. These donations are used to purchase gift cards, food vouchers and gifts for those who are not adopted by an outside adopter. Donations can be made at helpmenow.org or by calling 816.364.1131. The agency accepts checks, debit and all major credit cards.

3 Gift Items — Donations of NEW toys, games, clothing, household items, stocking stuffers, and hygiene products are placed in the gift room for applicants to shop for family members. NEW items can be dropped off at the agency after November 1. Gift items may also be left with participating businesses and collected later by agency representatives. Watch for Adopt-A-Family toy boxes at your local retailer. (See article on Pg. 2 for additional details on toy collection locations.)

Adopting: as easy as 1-2-3

Adopt-A-Family terms to know

Adoptee/Applicant — Local residents who cannot afford to buy holiday gifts for their family members due to circumstances outside of their control including low income, job loss, illness, financial setbacks or other unforeseen events.

Adopter — Those who provide gifts for applicants to the program. Adopters consist of individuals, families, businesses and social groups.

Collection Boxes — Located at 90+ area vendors, including service stations, retail, dining and banking institutions; funds supplement the program.

Food Vouchers — Filled with the supplies needed for Christmas dinner, vouchers can be purchased from our agency for \$60- \$80, based on size, and will be available for pick up on November 10.

Gift Room — A “store” located in the building used to provide gifts for families not selected by adopters. Gifts are collected at sponsoring stores and through walk-in donations made by community members.

Helpers/Elves — Volunteers who work during the program by taking applications, manning the gift room, delivering gifts to families, and assisting adopters.

Santa Claus — Someone who embodies the concept of providing happiness to those around them through acts of selflessness and giving. Also has strong attraction to the color red, reindeer, chimneys, snow, and cookies and milk.

ADOPT-A-FAMILY FAQs

Q What type of gifts should be given?
The agency has changed its policy regarding gifts. Due to quality issues, ONLY NEW ITEMS can be given to families. Any family given used items by adopters will be asked to return items to the agency and will be allowed to shop in the gift room. The only exception to this rule is a prior understanding/conversation between adopter and adoptee.

Q How does the family selection process work?
There are several steps. First, determine the number and type of family(ies) you are interested in — elderly, single-parent, large family, disabled — characteristics important to you. Second, come to or contact the office by phone, website or email, and staff will provide a variety of applicants who meet your selected criteria. Step three is selecting family(ies) and getting choices back to agency staff as soon as possible. Please keep in mind each family under review will not be shown to other adopters. Quick adopter responses make it possible for staff to get all the families adopted. Once a decision is made, staff will need a few basic details, such as delivery information and type of assistance being provided.

Q What does it cost to adopt a family?
The amount spent on each individual is completely up to the adopter. A good estimate is \$50 for children under 5; \$75 to \$80 for children from 5 to 12; and \$75 to \$100 is common for teens.

Q Do I buy for everyone on the list?
There are no buying requirements for the entire family, however it is essential for every child to be given items. Many parents will indicate they do not want/need gifts.

Q Do I have to buy all items on the list?
Not at all. Some items on the list are included strictly to offer additional gift ideas, such as kitchen or bathroom items, that might be needed by the family. There is no requirement to buy those.

Q Do I have to wrap all the gifts?
Wrapping gifts should be determined on a case by case basis. If parents are planning on using the gifts as something from Santa, many times they like them unwrapped. However, some parents enjoy any “surprise” gifts they might be given, and most elderly recipients enjoy unwrapping gifts.

Are you a thrifty shopper?

Put your bargain-hunting skills to use by buying much-needed, teen-related items for our gift room. The gift room gets a large number of items for young children, but struggles to provide enough for teens age 13 and up. Cologne, DVDs, earbuds, gift cards, phone cards, video games, throw blankets, jewelry, hair products, hygiene sets, purses, wallets, sports items or tennis shoes are all good gifts to purchase for this under-provided group.

Don't forget Christmas dinner

In addition to holiday gifts, food vouchers make a wonderful gift for families that apply for adoption during the holiday season. The agency has food vouchers available for purchase throughout the 2022 program. A large voucher can be purchased for \$80 (up to 6-8 people) and a smaller version (up to 4-6 people) will be available for \$60.

Amounts vary based on voucher size, but include the following: a turkey or ham, potatoes, canned vegetables, stuffing, butter, rolls, fruit, and dessert. For more on voucher options, please see Pg. 2, or contact the office at 816.364.1131.



Q What if I have questions about the gift list?
Adopters can call the family directly, or call the agency if the adoption is anonymous; the family will be contacted by staff, who will act as a go-between. (Please be sure to speak with an adult, as some do not tell children about the program.)

Q What if I can't reach my family?
Many times families do not have a phone or they may lose service. If adopters cannot contact families through the message number on the information sheet, they should contact the agency at 816.364.1131.

Q Can I meet the family I adopt?
After choosing a family, adopters are welcome to contact them directly to make arrangements for an agreed-upon delivery. If adoptees are willing to meet (and most are), the parties can schedule a date and time.

Q Can I participate anonymously?
Yes. Adopters can select a family, shop for them and bring items to our office

to be delivered. Families are not given information about anonymous adopters.

Q How do I know they aren't getting help somewhere else?
All area organizations that sponsor a holiday program report to our agency; staff uses a database that tracks all adoptions. If it is discovered a family applied with more than one agency, they are asked to select one program or it is determined for them. Any fraudulent actions result in immediate removal from the program.

Q What if my budget doesn't cover the family I'm interested in?
You are welcome to find someone to partner with to provide for the family, or we can do it for you. We may be able to find a separate party to provide food or additional household items that are remaining.

Agency offers gratitude

In an effort to better utilize program funds, thank you postcards sent from families to adopters by the agency were discontinued three years ago. In discontinuing this small part of the program, it allows the agency to better focus funding on ensuring all applicants are provided for and the agency is able to help as many applicants as possible.

The agency will continue to mail its annual “Thank You” letters to all program participants; please do not mistake the lack of a postcard “Thank You” for a lack of appreciation. Our adoptees would not be able to celebrate the holidays without your generosity and we believe they sincerely appreciate all that is done for them.

THANK YOU!

ADOPT-A-FAMILY CHRISTMAS PROGRAM HOW TO ADOPT A FAMILY OR INDIVIDUAL

Adopters have a variety of options. Families with children, adult individuals, senior citizens or multi-generation families are available and adopters can select as many families as they would like. Once the type of family has been determined, adopters review info sheets for several families fitting the criteria. Info sheets include clothing, shoe sizes and other items on each family member's wish list. Reviews can be done by email, fax, at our office or by mail. Families will be available for review starting **Wednesday, November 16**. After reviewing, adopters should notify the agency which family(ies) they would like to adopt.

If adopting a family with children, we ask adopters to provide NEW gifts for each child. If adopting a young child, preferably one gift would be a toy. Gifts for the parents are at the adopter's discretion. Family holiday food basket vouchers are also available. **(Please note on the application if the family requested food.)** If adopting an individual or a senior citizen, we ask the adopter to provide either a gift or food. Adopters determine how much more they would like to provide.

Adopters have the option of giving gifts, gift certificates and/or holiday food basket vouchers. If gifts — adopters shop for the gifts. (Wrapping gifts is optional.) If giving gift certificates or holiday food vouchers — they can be purchased privately by you or through our agency. Our agency will have holiday food basket vouchers available throughout the 2022 program for **\$60-\$80 each**. A food basket consists of the traditional Christmas dinner food items.

You are welcome to make contact with the family to let them know of the adoption. They should be able to provide any additional information needed. It is also good to set a time and date for delivering gifts. Adopters can also chose to remain anonymous. If adopters choose anonymity, gifts should be delivered to our agency no later than **Friday, December 9**. Our staff will contact the family to make delivery arrangements.

If you would like to make your selection in person, please visit our office from 9 am to 5 pm beginning **Wednesday, November 16**. (If you intend to make your selection in person, **DO NOT SEND IN THIS FORM**.) If you prefer to make your selection digitally, please provide the following information. Upon completion, please email, fax or mail the form to our agency. We will then send you a variety of information sheets to review.

Today's date _____ Date info needed by _____
Send info to me by: Email Fax Mail
Name: _____
Organization/Department: _____
Address: _____ Box # _____
City & Zip: _____
Phone: Work _____ Ext _____ Cell _____ Home _____
Email Address _____ Fax: _____ Work or Home _____
I plan to adopt a total of # _____ families.

I want to review the following types of families:
 Family - # of children- _____ Ages - _____ (ex: 5-15 yrs; infant; any)
With the following Parents - One Parent Both parents
 Adults - # of individuals - _____ Male Female Both Veteran
 Seniors - # of seniors - _____ Male Female Both Disabled

Upon reviewing the info sheets and selecting a family(ies), please have the following information:

- What is being provided for the family: toys, clothing, food, gift certificates, etc.
- If supplying food, will it be purchased from agency? Will the food be delivered to family or through agency?
- If supplying gift certificates, will they be purchased through the agency? What is the dollar amount?
- Will gifts be delivered to the family or agency?

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