

Growing Need in the Community for Adopt-A-Family Donors; Can You Help Making the Holidays Special for Delaware's Children and Seniors?

NEW CASTLE (Nov. 30, 2012) – Their stories will touch your heart. A grandmother taking in her two grandchildren after her daughter was diagnosed with colon cancer. A single mother with three children who are homeless after the mother lost her job because of health problems. A single mom who left a domestic violence situation and now lives place to place with her two children.

With even more people seeking help from the state's Holiday Adopt-A-Family program in just the past few weeks, additional donors are needed to share their kindness – and holiday gifts – for hundreds of Delaware children and seniors living in poverty or in low-income households.

Each holiday season, donors are anonymously matched to a senior or family of one or more children through the Holiday Adopt-A-Family program. Adopt-A-Family provides the donor with the age and gender of each child in the family and a brief description of the circumstances that led to their need for assistance. The donor then provides gift cards or certificates for the head-of-household to use in buying holiday gifts. The recommended gift is \$100 to \$125 per child, with a gift certificate for the parent optional but thoughtful. The deadline to “adopt” a family is Dec. 10. The program is coordinated by the Human Services Council, Inc., in

partnership with the Department of Health and Social Services.

“When the need is greatest, Delawareans always step forward to help,” Gov. Jack Markell said. “This is an opportunity to join with others at work, at school, at church, or at home to help those who are at risk of doing with very little this holiday season. Adopt-A-Family showcases the best of our community and the best of the holiday spirit.”

In Delaware, 363 families, including 243 in New Castle County and 120 in Kent and Sussex counties are awaiting adoption. Those families represent 679 children and 44 seniors.

The reasons why many families need the help of Adopt-A-Family are often heart-breaking. “My daughter has been diagnosed with colon cancer and cannot take care of her two children,” said one woman who is seeking help. “Even though I am almost 72 years old, I felt the need to step up and take them in. But, I need some help to give them a Christmas this year. I would like to provide them with some happy memories of this year since they may not have their mother much longer.”

For families who have benefited in the past from Holiday Adopt-A-Family, the words of thanks are just as poignant:

- “Because of your generosity, my children will have a Christmas.”
- “There are no words to express my gratitude for all of you’ve done for my grandchildren and me.”
- “Thank you so very, very much for sharing your love and kindness at this special hour of need. It has truly made Christmas for my family and me one of my smiles and happiness from ear to ear.”

“Across the state, we know the generous spirit of Delawareans,” said Rita Landgraf, secretary of the Department of Health and Social Services. “During these challenging economic times, please consider donating a gift card or gift certificate to help children, families or seniors experience a

happier holiday season. For those who give, Adopt-A-Family is often a more rewarding experience than it is for the recipients.”

“The beauty of this program is that it is built on the ethic of reciprocity,” said Dr. Anne Farley, director of the Division of State Service Centers, which oversees the Adopt-A-Family program. “Adopt-A-Family pairs individuals who are facing difficult times with someone else in the community who is able to share and willing to give. The program cultivates the ethic of giving back and of sharing, which at its core is the strength of us as a people and as a community.”

In 2011, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 16 percent of Delawareans lived below the poverty line. In January 2012, more than 152,000 Delawareans qualified for food stamps and more than 210,000 people are on Medicaid. Delaware’s unemployment rate was 6.8 percent in September.

“As the economy continues to recover, we find the need is still great for our Holiday Adopt-A-Family program,” Farley said. “That’s why we rely on the generosity of individuals, businesses and organizations to volunteer or to donate by adopting a family or an elderly person.”

To “adopt” an individual or family in:

- New Castle County: Contact the New Castle County Adopt-A-Family at (302) 792-9538 or email: adoptafamilync2@delaware.gov. Hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday.
- Kent and Sussex counties: Contact the Kent and Sussex Adopt-A-Family at (302) 424-7260 or email: adopt-a-family-ks@delaware.gov. Hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The deadline to “adopt” a family is Dec. 10, and all gift cards and gifts must be delivered to the Adopt-A-Family Office by Dec. 17. Families who are adopted come to each location to

receive their gifts.

In 2011, the Holiday Adopt-A-Family program, through the leadership of the Human Services Councils of New Castle County and Kent/Sussex counties, helped 1,974 Delawareans. Most of the beneficiaries are single-parent households, children and senior citizens. They are referred to Adopt-A-Family by a social worker or case manager through state agencies and human service nonprofit organizations.

Year-round, the Adopt-A-Family program aids families in crisis – those struggling with illness, homelessness, domestic violence, poverty or unemployment. The program, begun in 1973, is coordinated by the Division of State Service Centers in all three counties.

For more information about Adopt-A-Family, go to <http://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dssc/adoptfam.html>