

MEMORANDUM

MENDING Poverty

JANUARY 2008 MEMO: Christmas Program Touches and Transforms Lives

• **Record Numbers:** The Annual Christmas Program at MEND, an all volunteer-run program, seeks to enhance the holiday season for those in need. This year, almost 1100 low-income families were assisted, of which 267 of MEND's most needy families were 'adopted' by community groups and other families. A total of 2,670 children under the age of 15 benefited from this year's program. The families were provided holiday food, blankets, and toys specifically chosen for each child based on age and Christmas wishes. The program was run by 350 volunteers who gave approximately 6000 hours of service; over 125 organizations and individuals donated food, toys, and blankets; and 120



community groups and families adopted needy families, with some groups assisting multiple families. Those who were adopted received new clothing, a household item, toys and food, all of which was personally delivered by their adopting group.

• **Immediate and Long-Term Impact on Recipients:** TV reporter **Cecilia Gonzalez** came to cover the program this year because when she was a child, her family received Christmas baskets from MEND. "Coming from a family with 11 siblings, it was difficult for my parents to provide gifts for us for Christmas. For many years, the MEND gifts were all we received as children, but it was through these charitable acts of selfless giving that I learned first hand about the great community I am part of. It taught me to care about my community and to value people. MEND's contribution during my childhood significantly contributed to who I am and the work I do today."

• **Volunteer MENDING Poverty:** A volunteer who adopted two families this year shared his story, but requested we do so anonymously because, "We do not adopt a family for personal praise or to be publicly acknowledged -- we do it to help those in need." He continued, "The family I adopted lived in a small garage in Pacoima. It was well kept and clean, but so small that when we entered with their Christmas gifts, the items literally took up the entire space." He paused and took a deep breath, then emotionally continued, "The family's four-year old son was so overjoyed seeing the presents, that he climbed onto a chair and grabbed me, giving a long hug. He didn't want to let go of me. There is not a day that goes by that I do not think about that little boy."

• **Continuing Services to Most Needy Families:** Executive Director **Marianne Haver Hill** explains, "Christmas adoptees will be re-visited in early 2008 by trained MEND Home Visiting Volunteers who will provide follow-up assistance, referrals to MEND programs that could benefit the families, as well as other community agencies that could offer additional services. Home Visitors can expedite medical and dental appointments in MEND clinics, as well as arrange for extra food and clothing provisions, and recommend enrollment in MEND's job training and other empowerment programs. Our commitment to our most needy families does not end with the holidays."

If you would like more information on becoming a Home Visitor, please contact MEND's Client Intake Manager Maria Salmeron, at 818-686-7325 or "maria@mendpoverty.org". And remember, your financial support to MEND throughout the year allows vital services to continue to the growing number of families who are falling into poverty.

Special thanks to volunteers Christina Lemon and David Jimenez for their work on this Program Update!

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