



Mutual Housing residents help other families this year

Because she had been given so much over the years, Crystal Irwin, a Mutual Housing California resident who had been homeless herself, knew she wanted to help another family this year.

"I felt we had to give back for all the blessings we received," said the event and fundraising coordinator for Mutual Housing at the Highlands' resident association,.

Before choosing the Operation Santa program from the U.S. Postal Service (USPS), Irwin surveyed residents at the Highlands to see what kind of project they would like.

"In talking to the residents, I found a lot of the families had been adopted for the holidays through various organizations," said Irwin whose own family had help buying basics for up their apartment after moving to the Highlands this past year. "They felt strongly that we should do this."

While there were a number of ideas, the Highlands Community Group residents decided to forego their annual holiday dinner for a dessert-only celebration. That way, most of the money from their community recreation fund could go to a family.

The U.S. Postal Service has been receiving letters to Santa for more than a hundred years. Not until 1912 did the postmaster general allow postal employees and the public to respond to the letters for the first time.

Located in the Downtown Mall, the Sacramento district office already has received "a couple thousand" letters, according to Ralph Petty, Customer Relations Coordinator for the district.

Of those, many are from children. This year, 450 families need help. So far, 160 have been adopted.

"People are in desperate need of food, clothing, blankets—things we take for granted," said Petty. "Children still ask for toys, but they ask for food and clothes first."

Although the Highlands residents had decided to find a family from their own zip code, when Irwin went to the Dear Santa office, a call came in from a woman checking to see if her family had been adopted yet. She and her children had had to leave her husband when he became violent and were staying with relatives.



Mutual Housing resident Crystal Irwin with the family's Dear Santa letter the nonprofit's residents are helping this year. *Photo by K.C. Irwin*

Sacramento Mutual Housing Association develops housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development. For more information, call (916) 453-8400 or visit our website at mutualhousing.com.

continued on back

Since many of the Highlands residents had been homeless, Irwin felt that the woman's story would be easy for everyone to relate to. "When I read her letter, I realized 'This is the one,'" said Irwin.

Although the woman runs a small business, she did not make enough money this year to spend on the holidays.

With the money from recreation fund, the Highlands residents were able to purchase clothing and gifts for all the children as well as gift cards for the mother and the one teenager.

This week, the residents celebrated the holidays with a potluck put on by the Highlands community group that the family was able to attend.

Individuals who want to adopt a family still can do. However, they must bring wrapped gifts or gift certificates to the Dear Santa station, 545 Downtown Plaza, Suite 1031, Sacramento by Friday, December 21, 7 p.m. The station also is open today until 7 p.m.

Founded in 1988, Mutual Housing California develops and operates well-designed rental housing for modest-income households. The communities have 2,750 residents, half of whom are children.

Through its focus on leadership, the Sacramento-based nonprofit provides training and mentoring as well as educational programs, community-building activities and services for residents and neighbors.

For more information, visit <http://www.mutualhousing.com>.