

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 the 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 Penny Adams. "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."

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

- Discount-based collections offering discounts or free services for a toy donation
- Employee-based drives for smaller companies that would 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 also be supplied by the agency.

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

Anyone interested in collecting toys through their office or sponsoring a tree at their retail location, can contact the office at 816-364-1131.



Agency ends Thank You postcard mailing

Because of unresolvable expense issues associated with printing and postage, it has been determined that agency-facilitated "Thank You" postcards will no longer be sent to adopters from the families they select through the program.

We have considered many replacement options for the "Thank You" postcard system we had been using, however, the anonymity that many adopters chose has made many options non-feasible including online cards, or e-cards, and direct adopter/adoptee communications.

Many adopters will still receive cards and "Thank You" letters from the families they choose to have direct contact with. However, those who remain anonymous or do not share contact information with adoptees, will no longer receive agency-facilitated postcards from the gift recipients.

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 loss 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.

In discontinuing this small part of the program, it allows the agency to better focus its funding on ensuring that all applicants are provided for and that we are able to help as many as possible for the holiday season.

Small change can make big impact

A long-standing addition to the program, the Adopt-A-Family 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, boutiques, banks, restaurants, convenient stores, gas stations, auto repair shops, specialty shops, and even break rooms.

Over the years, more than 200 locations have hosted boxes and directly contributed to the program's success. The agency is currently looking for new collection box locations for the 2020 holiday season.

"We do not ask the businesses to solicit customers for change, but to leave the box in an area that makes it highly visible and encourages donations," said Executive Director Penny Adams. "It is a no-maintenance investment for businesses, as the agency maintains the boxes and assumes all financial responsibilities."

The agency created the Master Elves traveling trophy in 2012 as a way 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 in three separate years," Adams said. "Now the trophy is awarded to the business that raises the most funds each year."

Currently, Sav-On Furniture Mart holds the trophy for their efforts during 2019, with a whopping \$2,009 collected.

These top 14 locations raised nearly 70 percent of the total funds collected in 2019:
1st) Sav-On Furniture Mart, N Belt Hwy;
2nd) Casey's General Store, 22nd & Walnut;
3rd) Green Hills, King Hill Ave;
4th) City Star, 22nd & Frederick;
tied for 5th) Imperial Gas, S 6th St;
Brothers Market, Savannah, MO;
6th) Casey's General Store, E Hyde Park;
7th) Jesse's Last Stop, I29 and 71 Hwy;
tied for 8th) Casey's General Store, Wathena, KS;
Little Caesar's Pizza, Ashland Ave.;
9th) Waste Management, St. Joseph Ave;
10th) City Star, Edmond St;
11th) The MarkIt, N Belt Hwy;
12th) Casey's General Store, N Woodbine.

"We thank these businesses for their continued support and exceptional efforts," Adams said.

Anyone interested in hosting a collection box in their location(s) can call 816-364-1131 for more information.

AFL-CIO Community Services
1203 N. Sixth St.
Saint Joseph, MO 64501

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AFL-CIO Community Services

Fall 2020

Important Adopt-A-Family Dates to Remember

NOVEMBER

Nov 2 — Adopt-A-Family applications available to adoptees
Nov 18 — Adoption applications ready for review for adopters
Nov 26 - 27 — Thanksgiving Holiday, offices closed

DECEMBER

Dec 1 — Last day adoption applications accepted
Dec 9 — Radio Telethon with Q-Country 92.7
Dec 10 — Last day to deliver gifts to AAF offices
Dec 10 - 11 — Gift Room set-up, 1 pm V
Dec 14 — Gift Room opens V
Dec 16 — Shopping Day for nursing home residents & disabled adults V
Dec 18 — Deliver gifts to nursing home residents & disabled adults V
Dec 23, 5 pm — Conclusion of AAF program (tentative)
Dec 25 - 28 — 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 864-1131 and ask for Becky. Volunteers are needed daily from December 11 through noon on Christmas Eve.

Help Me Headlines

AFL-CIO Community Services

Fall 2020

1203 N. 6th St.

St. Joseph, MO 64501

816-364-1131

www.helpmenow.org

Preparing for a COVID Christmas

Dear Friends,

I never should have said that I had seen it all in the 37 years we have been doing Adopt-A-Family – because we had never had to plan around a plague before! But as they say, where there is a will, there's a way and by the Grace of God, good planning, and a great staff, we are figuring it out.

Unfortunately, this year's Adopt-A-Family program is going to be pretty different from the one we have all come to expect. Hopefully, it will still bring just as much joy and fulfillment to those who can help and the families they choose to assist. If you are wanting to help this year, we have compiled a list of some definite changes and a few that might happen whether we want them to or not.

Application process - rather than an in-person format, applications will be filled out off-site; paperwork returned; and the process will be completed by phone.

Types of donations - While the program has always stressed the need for AT LEAST one new gift per person in the household, because of potential contamination issues, ALL ITEMS donated to the families MUST BE NEW.

Donations - For those who want to donate but prefer to avoid public shopping, gift cards can be donated to the agency, and would be equally appreciated. Gift room donations and adopter drop-offs may be done in a contactless, drive-up format based on volunteer availability. Monetary donations can be made online, by mail, or by phone for those who would prefer to avoid coming into the agency.

Food baskets - this is being moved to a voucher format, see related article at right.

Gift room - There are two potential scenarios for the gift room: The first keeps the format the same, with one family member shopping for the household. However, they will be required to wear masks and gloves during the process. Rather than the normal 10 to 12, only four individual parents will go through the gift room each hour, requiring it to be operational for eight instead of four days. The second option is volunteers would 'shop' for the family based on the items listed on their application, with the family being called to pick items up; however, this will only be done if COVID numbers increase or volunteer numbers prevent the extended hours for normal operations.

Delivery of gifts - In polling a group of former adopters who are concerned with COVID issues, we anticipate many more agency-arranged deliveries. If so, there will be an increased need for volunteers to help complete these contactless deliveries.

Over the years we have managed to successfully serve everyone who has signed up for the program in one format or another; many times we have had to get pretty creative to get that done. We are hoping this year is no different. Because we know we have this wonderful community on our side, we are confident it will be another successful year.

Penny B. Adams
Penny B. Adams, Director

Food baskets move to voucher-based format

The food basket program has been a part of the Adopt-A-Family program for more than 25 years. Many families have come to rely on the items they receive in the food baskets for Christmas dinner; others use the items for daily meals. Beginning this year, to avoid potential COVID-related issues with processing and receiving of the baskets, the program will be moving to a voucher-based distribution process.

Rather than have the food baskets at the agency, recipients will be given a voucher to collect food items at Brothers Market, 1004 5th Ave, (former Green Hills) in St. Joseph.

This process will drastically reduce the number of individuals who would come in contact with the food items. An unexpected benefit is recipients will have a bit of variety in their options for some of the available items for the food basket. Also, if recipients need other groceries items, they will be able to purchase those items conveniently at the same location. The biggest benefit is the price of baskets will not increase at all.

Vouchers will still be purchased through the agency, either in person or by phone, in two sizes – small, \$60 and large, \$80. Vouchers can then be given to the adopter to deliver to the family; or adopters can fill the voucher before delivery if they choose to do so. Finally, the families have until Dec 30th to fill the voucher, so they can use the food for Christmas dinner, wait until New Years, or use it to stock their pantry after the holidays.

Agency staff believes this change will be beneficial to all parties and hope to continue this format in the future to save on scarce storage capacity within the agency during the program.

Getting involved with Adopt-A-Family as easy as 1 — 2 — 3

Adoption — If you choose to adopt a family or individual through the program, you will be able to experience firsthand the excitement of shopping for each family member and meeting the adults when delivering their gifts. (Or we can make the deliveries for you if you'd rather be anonymous and have Santa take the credit.) Gift cards can also be given as gifts if preferred.

Monetary Donation — If holiday time is at a premium or funds are limited, another option is making a monetary donation. This donation will be used to purchase gift cards and provide gifts for those who are not adopted by an outside adopter. Donations can be made on our website at helpmenow.org or by calling 364-1131. We accept debit and all major credit cards.

Donation Items — Donations of NEW clothing, toys, stocking stuffers, hygiene products and household items are placed in our gift room for applicants to shop for family members. NEW items can be dropped off at our offices after Nov. 1. Items may also be dropped off at participating businesses and later collected by an agency representative. (See article on pg. 2 for additional details.)

Don't forget Christmas Dinner

In addition to holiday gifts, food basket vouchers make a wonderful gift for the families that apply for adoption during the holiday season. The agency has food basket vouchers available for purchase throughout the 2020 program. A large basket 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.

Basket size varies, but will include the following: a turkey or ham, potatoes, canned vegetables, stuffing, butter, rolls, fruit, and some type of dessert, which may be cookies, pie or candies. For additional information about food voucher options, please contact the office at 364-1131.



Are you a thrifty shopper?

Put your bargain-hunting skills to good use by buying much-needed, teen-related items for our gift room. The gift room gets a large number of gifts for young children, but struggles with providing enough for teens age 13 to 18. Cologne, DVDs, earbuds, gift cards, phone cards, video games, throw blankets, hair products, jewelry, hygiene sets, purses, wallets, sports items or tennis shoes are all good items to purchase for this under-provided age group.

ADOPT-A-FAMILY FAQs

Q How does the family selection process work?
There are several steps. First, you should determine the number and type of family(ies) you are interested in — elderly, single-parent, large family, disabled — characteristics important to you. Secondly, come to or contact our office by fax, phone, website or email, and we will provide a variety of applicants who meet your criteria. Step three is selecting family(ies) and getting your choices back to us as soon as possible. Please keep in mind each family under your review will not be shown to other adopters. Your quick response makes it possible for us to get all the families adopted. Once your decision is made, we will need to know a few basic details, such as delivery information and type of assistance you're providing.

Q How much does it typically cost to adopt a family?
The amount spent on each individual is completely up to you. 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 What type of gifts should be given?
Due to quality issues, the agency has recently changed its policy regarding gifts. Beginning with the 2020 season, ONLY NEW ITEMS can be given to families. Any family given used items by adopters will be asked to return them 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 Do I buy for everyone on the list?
There are no requirements on buying for the entire family, however we ask that every child is given items. Many parents will indicate they do not want gifts for themselves.

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 Can I meet the family I adopt?
After you chose your family, you are welcome to contact them directly to make arrangements. If they are willing to meet (and most are), you can work with them on a date and time.

Q What if I have questions about the family's gift list?
You can call the family directly or call our agency if you'd rather be anonymous and we will contact them. (Please be sure to talk to an adult as some do not tell their children they are being adopted.)

Q What if I can't reach my family?
Many times families do not have a phone or they may lose service. If you cannot contact them through the message

Former adoptee experiences

There tends to be four types of applicants: seniors and disabled adults; working families who constantly struggle with poverty; households barely getting by, but cannot afford the additional holidays costs; and families or individuals who find themselves in a disaster situation (fire, loss of job, illness). Yet each also carry their own, unique story and situation.

Working family in disaster situation:

Kimberly is a personal care aide with two boys, age 11 and 12. She keeps up with bills most months but money is always tight and when something does go wrong it can put her behind on everything. Her car broke down in October 2019; she was able to find another vehicle, but its also on its last leg. The cost of changing cars put her a little behind on her utilities, but it wasn't too bad. She was starting to worry about Christmas but figured she would come up with holiday money and avoid shut offs.

Then the week before Thanksgiving, she lost one of her home care clients. The loss in wages was completely unexpected and cut her income nearly in half. Kimberly was able to find another client, but she wouldn't start until December 22nd. Shut-offs were now inevitable and Christmas for the boys impossible. She swallowed her pride and applied for the Adopt-A-Family program.

Q Do I have to wrap all the gifts?
We find wrapping the gifts should be determined on a case by case basis. If the parents are planning on using the gifts as something from Santa, many times they like them unwrapped. On the other hand, some parents enjoy surprise gifts they might be given. Generally, elderly recipients like unwrapping gifts. We suggest talking to your adoptee to help you decide.

Q How do I know they aren't getting help somewhere else?
All regional organizations that sponsor a holiday program report to our agency; we have a database that tracks all adoptions. If we find a family applied with more than one agency, they have to select one program

making due for their small family of three. They were expecting their second child in September, and just three days before she arrived, Jon was laid off for the season. Then the baby had to be delivered via C-section; Amy was suddenly off work as well.

Senior/Disabled Adults: Martha is 78 years old; she became a widow 14 years ago. She lives alone and has no family to spend time with during the holidays. Seeing old friends or making new ones is nearly impossible since she is disabled and has no transportation. A pastor when she was younger, Martha sees the program as a blessing and is so grateful she can apply by phone.

She gets by on her meager Social Security, but money is always tight and she never has enough to cover her basic needs. What she gets for the holidays helps her save money, especially when they give her some of the basic staples that she includes on her wish list. The best part, and the thing she is always sure to include, are the little "surprises" that might be included because she just loves surprises.

Barely getting by:
When Amy and Jon are both working, things are fine. Even knowing Jon's work is mostly seasonal and some winters there is little work, they manage to

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.

Q Can I participate anonymously?
Yes. You can select a family, shop for them and bring the items to our office to be delivered. Families will not be given

information about anonymous adopters.

Q If I don't have enough time to shop can I still help a family?
You can shop for general items and bring them to our agency, where we will try to match them with a family or add the items to our gift room inventory. You can also make a monetary donation to help purchase gift cards and food basket vouchers. Food baskets include items for a Christmas dinner and can be purchased for \$60-\$80, based on size.

make due for their small family of three. They were expecting their second child in September, and just three days before she arrived, Jon was laid off for the season. Then the baby had to be delivered via C-section; Amy was suddenly off work as well.

Her short maternity leave was extended to two months and there was no money coming in; they were getting behind on bills. Jon was looking for work, but prospects were low and the family was in fear of losing their home. Luckily Jon found work at the beginning of November, just about the time Amy was able to return to work. Knowing the bills were the priority, but their 7-year-old son would be devastated if Santa didn't visit, they applied for the program.

Early the next year, Amy sent a note to the agency to express her appreciation for the help they were given; the couple were both working — Jon had even gotten a better paying job. They had caught up with bills and were saving to buy their own home. She wrote that the experience had been very humbling but she considered it to be "lifesaving."

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 18**. 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 2020 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 choose to remain anonymous. If adopters choose anonymity, gifts should be delivered to our agency no later than **Thursday, December 10**. 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 18**. (If you intend to make your selection in person, **DO NOT COMPLETE 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?

AFL-CIO Community Services
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