

Social Services Division
Heather MacVicar, General ManagerMetro Hall
12th Floor, 55 John Street
Station 1123
Toronto, ON M5V 3C6

BRIEFING NOTE

DATE: October 22, 2007

TO: Community Development and Recreation Committee

FROM: Heather MacVicar, General Manager, Social Services

RE: Christmas Bureau

Purpose:

The purpose of this briefing note is to describe the activities and accomplishments of the City's 2006 Christmas Bureau Program administered by Toronto Social Services (TSS) as well as to introduce and launch the Program in 2007.

Background:

The Christmas Bureau was initially established in 1956 under the supervision of a central volunteer staff complement. In 1971, operation of the Christmas Bureau was assumed by the Social Services Division on behalf of the Metropolitan Toronto Community Services Department. Since amalgamation in 1999, the City has continued its commitment to the Christmas Bureau Program.

Over time the Christmas Bureau has evolved into the core coordinating organization responsible for ensuring that as many low income children and families as possible in Toronto receive gifts during the holiday season. The current range of services provided by the Bureau includes coordinating donations, referrals to agencies, information sharing, and monitoring for duplication of assistance. In essence, the Christmas Bureau helps to connect donors with recipients and communicates necessary information to distributors. This work is undertaken across the City on behalf of a wide variety of organizations, including community agencies, major corporations such as the Toronto Star and CHUM/City Christmas Wish (renamed in 2007 – CHUM Christmas Wish), the Fire Fighters Association and the Province.

Through its achievements, the Christmas Bureau has assumed a leadership role in the coordination of Christmas gifts and donations to Toronto families and individuals in need, many of whom are on social assistance. The Bureau is committed to building service relationships with its community partners in order to provide an effective service to assist those in need. Furthermore, the Bureau provides reassurance to those who make donations during the holidays that their contributions will be most appropriately matched to families.

The accomplishments highlighted in this report further build upon the Bureau's tradition of success.

Gift Distribution

The City of Toronto's 2006 Christmas Bureau coordinated the distribution of gifts and donations to 108,598 children, under the age of thirteen, of low income families in Toronto. The distribution consisted of:

- (1) 79,308 children who received assistance through the CHUM/City Christmas Wish;
- (2) 25,598 children who received Toronto Star Gift Boxes; and
- (3) 9,283 children who received toys from the Toronto Firefighters Association

Furthermore, CHUM/City Christmas Wish donated \$250,225.00 in the form of Hudson Bay Company (HBC) gift certificates and grocery store gift certificates. HBC gift certificates valued at \$25.00 each were distributed to 4,043 children aged thirteen to eighteen while 4,562 families of four or more, on Ontario Works (OW) received grocery store gift certificates.

In the three days before Christmas, four different agencies throughout the city offered to assist with toy distribution to families with children who were not previously registered with an agency. Through the joint efforts of the bureau and the agencies the "Last Minute Emergency Referral Program" was established. Through this program, toys were provided by the Toronto Firefighters Association and CHUM to Community Centre 55, Dixon Hall, Toronto Council Fire and Yonge Street Mission. Thanks to this collective effort between TSS' Christmas Bureau, the donating organizations and community partners, an additional 6,042 children received last minute assistance.

Agency Registration

Coordinating the distribution of gifts to families and children in need depends on successfully linking charitable organizations that have been registered with the Christmas Bureau with families. This process helps to minimize the potential for duplication of assistance.

During the 2006 holiday season, a total of 412 organizations/agencies were registered with the Bureau, including 18 that had newly registered this past year. These agencies made use of the Bureau's services to help connect them to low income families with children who would otherwise have not received a gift on Christmas. A total of 46,336 families registered with the Bureau in 2006.

Continuous Improvement

The success of the City's Christmas Bureau in delivering gifts to more children is attributable to the efforts of the bureau staff and its community partners. Together, steps have been taken to continually improve the efficiency of the program. Over the past years a communication strategy has been developed to facilitate improved information exchanges between the bureau, the community agencies and its partners. The Bureau has partnered with CHUM to distribute key information to the community agencies via the

CHUM centralized mail out. Continual enhancements are beneficial to the service provided to Toronto families and their children.

Summary:

The City's 2006 Christmas Bureau once again successfully coordinated the distribution of gifts to tens of thousands of low income children in Toronto over this past holiday season. In all, 108, 598 children under the age of thirteen received gifts provided by the Chum/City Christmas Wish, Toronto Star and Toronto Firefighters' Association.

Contact:

Colleen Thompson
Manager, Program Support OW
Client Services & Information Unit
Social Services Division
(416) 392-3465