

Vernonia "Toy and Joy" Examines How to Meet Needs of Community

Over the years in Vernonia, many families have been able to celebrate a Merry Christmas due to the generosity and volunteer efforts of the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection Volunteer Association, its members and families, and other community volunteers. Through the nationwide "Toy and Joy" program, local volunteers have purchased, wrapped and delivered presents to local children who may not have received presents at Christmas time. But a number of factors are causing the Vernonia Fire Volunteers to re-evaluate their participation in the "Toy and Joy" program.

In December of 2007, after the flood almost ruined Christmas for numerous Vernonia families, donations poured in from around the region and the Vernonia Fire Volunteers were able to make Christmas especially joyous for local families. An abundance of gifts from 2007 were carried over to the Christmas of 2008, and many Vernonia families again experienced assistance from "Toy and Joy," making for a very happy holiday.

This year, the Vernonia Fire Volunteers are facing a bit of a dilemma. Not only is the excess of gifts gone, but Vernonia Toy and Joy is also facing increased expectations about what, and for whom they will be providing gifts this season. "As always, we will be doing our best to take care of our community," says Vernonia Rural Fire Deputy Chief Dean Smith. "But we don't have the same resources we've had the last few years. It's not that we aren't in the spirit of the holidays, there's just only so much we can do."

In addition to high expectations and reduced resources, the Vernonia "Toy and Joy" program faces an additional issue-- the name "Toy and Joy" itself. After doing some research as they prepared for this holiday season, this year's Program Coordinator Kathy Wolfe learned

that the nationwide "Toy and Joy" program has a set of standardized rules they expect communities who use the name to follow. One of those rules limits gift-giving to children aged twelve and under. "In the past, we've always taken care of our families," says Smith. "Which in the past has meant gifts for any families that requested them, often for children as old as twenty."

This year, due a shortage of resources and a difficult economy, Vernonia "Toy and Joy" has said they will provide gifts for children up to fourteen, which is pushing the limits the national program prescribes. "We've already said we would give gifts to children up to fourteen years old and we intend to honor that," said Smith. "It's too late to do something different this year."

But in the future, the Vernonia Fire Volunteers may have to make some tough choices.

"If we choose to participate and call what we do 'Toy and Joy,' then we are bound by their restrictions," said Smith. "Whether or not it was done this way in the past, if we are going to be 'Toy and Joy,' we need to follow their guidelines."

One option may be to create a new program. "We may decide to not be part of the 'Toy and Joy' program and restructure with something that will fit what our community needs," says Smith. The other option would be for Vernonia to continue to use the "Toy and Joy" name-- which helps with fundraising and donations for the program, and then strictly follow the national program guidelines.

Whatever the Vernonia Fire Volunteer Association decides to do in the future, this year they are gearing up to help make the holidays happy for Vernonia families. "We will be out there again," says Smith. "Because it's all about putting smiles on our kids' faces."

What's' An "Attitude of Gratitude?"

By Sonia Spackman

Before we can teach our kids gratitude, we must teach them to respect loving caregivers.

Dr. Foster Cline, a child psychiatrist, stated that an important thing parents need to understand is that a child cannot be allowed to consistently treat a loving caregiver disrespectfully. He went on to say that something damaging happens in a child's thinking. This damage will hinder future relationships, because kids develop the opposite of gratitude or appreciation-- they develop destructive entitlement, where they believe they can treat people any way they choose and still get what they want.

Respectfully teach your children how to respect you. You will be more able to teach them about gratitude.

A young mother shared a story of a special treat she planned in advance for her young children. She took them to town for lunch, then to a real theater for a movie they really wanted to see. The children were excited to be at the movies. When the lights came on, one of them said, "Mommy, can we go to one more place before we go home?" This mother was angered because there was no "thank you," or any appreciation shown for her time, effort or the money she just spent on them. But she pushed her feelings aside when she realized that she had raised her kids to live in the moment. She didn't teach them about how to be grateful.

Research studies on children document the happiest kids feel an appreciation for life-- regardless of health, wealth, or circumstances. Researchers found that grateful kids are more joyful, determined, optimistic, less stressed, more adaptable and even healthier. As parents, we need to establish routines where our kids count their blessings. **Here are 12 suggestions you might try:**

1. Talk about Gifts. Before Christmas and birthdays, talk about the gifts that will be there.

Discuss the possible thoughts behind each of the gift givers. Talk about the money and energy spent to buy and wrap and bring the gift. Chat about the importance of gratefulness and sensitivity for the giver. Plan the thank you note.

2. Practice for the Moment. Speak to your children about facial expressions when we get socks and not the toy expected. Discuss getting duplicate gifts. Practice for the moment, saying: "This is nice, now I have two!" Practice facial expression and joy in the voice, etc.

3. Thank you ABC's. You can do this one anytime, better for the younger children at the table while eating. Say the alphabet together-- but for each letter to include something you are grateful for. Examples might be: A, Aunt Sara; B, my brother Brian; C, my cat. Take it up a notch by asking them to say *why* they are grateful. The point is, you are having fun together and learning to be appreciative.

4. Be Grateful for Challenging Times. Share with your kids challenging times you have gone through that you are grateful for-- like when they were born or when they over-

came an illness. Share ways you grew stronger and the good that came out of it. Maybe you went through the Vernonia flood. You can describe the bad and good, how the town's people supported and helped each other, the houses got fixed and that there will be new schools.

5. Gratitude Letters. You write one and share it with your kids as an example for their letters. One of the sad things in life is that we often think about people that mean a lot to us, yet we do not share these feelings with them. Encourage your children to write a grateful letter to a neighbor, friend, teacher or family member. If possible, make it special by having them read it face to face.

6. Express Gratitude Openly. While the family is eating dinner or hanging out together, go around the table and share one or two things that you are grateful for. Who knows, your kids may inspire you to see new things to appreciate and feel better about. Research has shown that expressing gratitude has a lasting effect on the well-being and happiness of the person sharing.

7. Gratitude Journal. Another way to promote gratitude is having your kids write in a "gratitude journal"-- four days a week, for a month. Maybe this can be done during the month of November for Thanksgiving each year. Younger children can draw or dictate things that they are most grateful for. Older kids can write or use a computer. Try a "family gratefulness journal" you fill out together. These cherished memories can be shared through the years and handed down to family members.

8. Thanksgiving Blessings. Say a prayer of thanks together before meals. Some families take turns so that a different member leads each time. Or do this at bedtime when children exchange appreciation followed by a goodnight hug and kiss.

9. Set Limits. Our giving too much destroys appreciation. So fight the tendency to indulge your child with too many things. When we constantly give our kids what they want, we do not help our kids learn to be grateful and appreciate what they have.

10. Thank Your Kids. Try to notice your kids' daily thoughtful behaviors. Be sure to describe *what* they did that you appreciate. When you do this, they are more likely to repeat the behavior. Your kids are more likely to take up your example and give "appreciation descriptions" to others.

11. Expose Your Kids to the Less Fortunate. Face-to-face experiences go a long way in helping kids appreciate their blessings. Find ways for you and your child to volunteer at a homeless shelter, read to little children, deliver meals to shut-ins or visit a children's hospital.

12. Remember, give it plenty of time, keep your commitment to find simple ways to help your children practice gratitude. Continue to encourage your kids and compliment their efforts. Most of all, stay grateful yourself.

Resources: Dr. F. Cline, E. Corcoran, Dr. M. Borba.

Give a special gift this season!

Recognize your loved one this holiday season and help feed those who are hungry in our community.

Donations made to Vernonia Cares this Holiday season "In Honor" or "In Memory" of a special individual will be represented by an ornament on the "Caring Tree"

The "Caring Tree" will be displayed at VCLC throughout the month of December.

Send your special gift to:
Vernonia Cares Food Bank
P.O. Box 126
Vernonia, OR 97064

ANONYMOUS DONOR
In support of Vernonia's Voice!