

# Christmas Child

The beginnings of our annual Christmas Child project started with PDT's annual Christmas Party. The leadership of PDT felt all of the funds used to put on a Christmas Party could be used more significantly.

The first year that PDT did our Christmas Child project, we partnered with Children's Development Services Agency (CDSA) to adopt a needy family. Instead of having a Christmas party, the PDT team gathered to go shopping for this family, ate a meal, and then wrapped the presents. The presents were delivered anonymously to the family by a CDSA coordinator. The first year started with less than 10 children.

The impact of the project has continued to grow to reach 100's of children and families. The project has now extended beyond just the CDSA to many other developmental day centers. The project has also extended to families that we do outreach therapy with as well as children in our contract schools.

Since its start, the geographic reach of the program has extended from just reaching Cumberland County, North Carolina to now reaching children and families in 7 North Carolina counties.

The Christmas Child project is also an opportunity for our team to bond and create new relationships since our team serves a wide geographic area. It allows them to meet fellow team members from other service areas and create relationships in a very positive context. All of the PDT employees are split into separate teams that focus on a particular child or family. Each team is comprised of at least 1 speech therapist, 1 occupational therapist, and 1 physical therapist so they can make informed purchases of toys and items based on the child's developmental deficit.

The Christmas Child project takes place on a Saturday every year, and the team gathers to go shopping at Target for their assigned children. All of our team members wear matching Christmas Child t-shirts, and this can be quite a spectacle on Saturday morning at Target...especially during check out!

Because PDT has a very extensive toy inventory, PDT purchases toys throughout the year that can supplement the gifts that are purchased the day of the event.

The Christmas Child project usually begins in September when Alyson Nance, PDT Project Manager, begins planning for the event. One of the first things that takes place is sending a Christmas Child letter to all of the case coordinators to let them know to the deadline for submitting children / families for the project. Alyson then coordinates with the case workers so she can have the specifics of the child's needs so our team members can purchase exactly what the child needs. Once the needs of the child are clearly known, the PDT team starts sorting the toys that we already have in inventory to see what we have that can be given to the child.

Before the event takes place, our conference room is transformed to a mini-warehouse of toys and paper grocery bags. Each paper bag represents a child, and the bags are organized by child, family, case coordinator, and geographic area. Team members volunteer their after-hours time for sorting toys per the needs and age of each child.

In previous years, all of the wrapping of gifts would take place on the day of the Christmas Child event. In order to control the pandemonium of trying to wrap over 1000 Christmas presents in a short amount of time, PDT team members now volunteer some of their after-hours time to come and help wrap all of the presents that have been sorted for the children in order to cut down on the amount of wrapping that takes place on the day of the event itself.

We now host each Christmas Child project at the Cliffdale Recreation Center. This facility is more central for all of our team members, accommodates more efficient wrapping, as well as more fellowship-centered program items.

Once all of the gifts have been purchased by the shopping teams, we reconvene at the Cliffdale Recreation Center to wrap all of the newly purchased items. All of the newly wrapped gifts and gifts wrapped ahead of time are combined into big black "Santa" bags and transported to our Westgate clinic. The following Monday, all of the case coordinators come to pick up their "Santa" bags to deliver to the children.

The case workers know where the gifts are going, but PDT does not. The PDT team stays anonymous to the families. This is done purposefully to empower the families to have gifts that they themselves can give to their children.

The theme scripture for our Christmas Child project is Deuteronomy 16:17 (NKJV).

*"Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you."*

Each gift that is wrapped has a sticker on it that has this theme scripture on it to remind families of our focus.

The environment and energy that is created from the Christmas Child project is incredible, and much more rewarding than any company Christmas party that we could ever put on.

Because of the growth of families represented by our Christmas Child project, PDT would have never been able to meet the entirety of the need represented each year without the help from supporting companies that have donated financial gifts, as well as helped provide the gifts themselves. Some companies that have partnered with us in the past are The ReStore Warehouse, Valley Motors, Gill Security, as well as Target.

We are challenging other businesses to take the “NO CHRISTMAS PARTY” challenge to forego an expensive Christmas Party in order to give back to their community and build positive synergy within their teams.